

## P.O.T.S

I have many precious memories of my glitter-filled childhood: The jingle of bells tied to a plastic fairy wand, itchy pink tutus that left red marks across your stomach. . However, the list of what made my childhood so magical would not be complete without my cousin, my partner in crime, and “therapist”, Amanda.

Perhaps the reason we’re cousins and not biological twins would be because a single household would not be able to handle the double-trouble package named “*us*.” We both grew up with long brown hair and a Disney princess obsession, then moved on to deciding that short hair is more of our thing and punk rock was an excellent replacement for a Disney soundtrack... at least when you're out in public. However, it isn't always easy for two kids to practically share the same heart. Like when you were told that your cousin, your friend, had been diagnosed with a life altering condition, things don't always go well.

It seems like it was so long ago, when in reality, Amanda was diagnosed with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) only two years ago. When she was first identified to have this disorder, we knew things would change, but I never thought it would have an impact on our relationship. Amanda and I had begun seeing each other less and less. No matter how many times I received a phone call from her mom about a last minute cancel, I couldn't stop that feeling of disappointment from creeping up behind me. Yet I knew she wasn't the one to blame. POTS caused a wide range of things like dizziness, nausea, lightheadedness, and anxiety just on a regular basis and I understood that she was having a rough time. I wanted to encourage her, but it was hard to find the right words. At that point in my life, I didn't have anything to compare it to, so for the first time in what seemed like forever, I couldn't relate to my best friend.

Our first attempts to ignore the whole “situation” only resulted in awkward silence and long pauses. We spent years with each other fangirling over Tv shows and books, not

discussing nervous system disorders. Conversations felt more distant and fell quicker than they could start. While I still loved the moments we got to talk to each other, I couldn't shake the feeling that we were just going through the motions. Like the embers of an old flame, we were afraid of going out.

The first of our many lessons was learning what the fear of change can do. It took us a while to admit something was wrong because that might change how we interacted, but ignoring what was going on affected us more than when we finally addressed it.

It brought us closer together, a feat I didn't think was possible. The next major step was no longer for us, it was for me. Amanda was going through so many things. Even after we called out the elephant in the room, the air still felt stuffy. I didn't know what I was going to say. I listened to her, but how was I supposed to respond? This was the part of the movie where a dramatic speech occurs and everything turns out alright. The only thing was, I didn't have a director writing my lines for me. This was real life. We took one step forward while I took two steps back.

"We're ready to talk!"

"Great! Now what are my lines?"

These thoughts would echo in my head for hours. Although, I think echo is the wrong word for it. Echo implies that it was bouncing off of something, but there was nothing there to bounce off of. My brain had been fresh out of ideas. Things became so that it was okay to talk about what she was going through, but I just never did. Then Amanda's mother, Aunt Mickey, came over. She drove by on her own after having to stop and deliver a package to a friend. We started out with light conversation before moving into more pressing matters. I sat uncomfortably in my seat and put an excessive amount of effort into putting cream cheese on my bagel. As I

began nibbling on the edges, I heard my name and looked up with caution. Those next two sentences were all it took for the light bulb to go off.

“Lilly, thank you so much for talking with Amanda. It’s helped so much.”

I spent months ignoring what was happening with my cousin because I was afraid of things changing that I had no control over. Was I really going to do the same just because my words weren’t perfect? This was the girl I shared three different pair of bff necklaces with, plus a bracelet. I knew her better than my concerns said I did. What she said, hit me hard, not because it was a brand new idea, but because I already knew it and just hadn’t remembered it. Talking with her was enough. Hanging out with her, awkward silence and all, was enough. She didn’t need a motivational speaker. She needed her cousin.

I remembered something that day, you don’t need to find the right, the most inspiring, most life changing words. Sometimes, you just need to be there.