

The Art of Getting Up

Name: Annalee Beram

Grade: Junior

Number of Hours Beram Sleeps after a Seizure: 16

Lesson: Pity does not have to be the answer.

STORY BY DYLAN INGRAM & GABE RODRIGUEZ
PHOTO BY GABE RODRIGUEZ

“Everything skips,” 7-year-old Annalee Beram said to her mother. Neither her mother nor Beram knew what this meant. As it turned out, Beram had been experiencing petit mal seizures, during which she would pause mid-thought and then resume her train of thought after a few moments.

As she grew older, entering Arapahoe High School, Beram began to experience grand mal seizures, during which she would black out and lose control of her actions.

“When you have a seizure, you feel really far away,” Beram said. “You feel really, really hot, and you feel like you’re being pulled towards the ground, because your body’s wanting to fall.” Although Beram is always aware that she is about to have a grand mal seizure before going unconscious, she loses memory after the seizure ends.

“When I wake up, I don’t remember who I am, where I live, who my parents are, anything, for at least an hour,” Beram said. “It randomly will come back, piece by piece, and then I’ll even remember where I was when I had the seizure.”

Still, nobody knew what was causing these episodes.

“I actually was treated really badly, by kids and the faculty,” Beram said. Beram only knew that she had seizures. Doctors could not figure out what was causing them until May 2013.

One day in class, she had a grand mal seizure. “Kids thought I was faking it,” Beram said. “They hit me this way” — Beram demonstrated by striking herself on the right shoulder — “and I fell down, and I hit my head on the side of where I was having a seizure, and that made damage on the other side. That’s partially why I have problems in my right side.”

During the summer of 2013 Beram confided to her best friend, Mountain Vista junior Analeece McAllister, that she no longer wanted to go to Arapahoe. McAllister jokingly offered the idea of coming to Vista, and that idea soon became reality.

That summer, Beram, now a junior with McAllister at Vista, was finally diagnosed with epilepsy. In September 2013, Beram adopted a service dog, Shadow, as a precaution to help with her seizures in public.

Shadow, a white German Shepherd, warns Beram of her seizures several minutes in advance. Nobody entirely understands how Shadow recognizes the seizures, but Beram said that he probably detects chemicals her brain releases.

The first time Shadow detected a seizure, Beram’s family did not understand what he was doing.

“Shadow was running around our house just howling. We thought he was just being a dog,” Beram said. “I went up in my room and had a seizure, and he was scratching at my door, so he was trying to notify my parents, but we didn’t really understand what he would actually do to notify us, and now we know.”

“It’s kind of scary [to see her have a seizure]. It’s really dramatic when it happens,” junior Caulder Wasmuth, one of Beram’s new friends, said. “I mean, you know she’s going to be all right and everything, but it’s still pretty scary.”

To warn Beram and others of seizures, Shadow stays with Beram in all public places.

“Having a dog walking around in the school is definitely weird,” Beram said. “I literally have to explain [Shadow] three to four times a day. It’s ridiculous.”

As much as Shadow helps Beram, she still deals with many issues on a daily basis.

Beram takes daily medication, constantly practices moving her right hand, cannot drive alone, wears a seizure-detecting watch at night and sleeps with a video monitor in her room.

“When I’m trying to do homework, math literally looks like a different language to me, and I can’t even read for like three days [after a seizure],” Beram said.

Beram’s seizures have also caused damage to the right side of her body.

“I don’t feel temperature on the right side of my body, so my friends love to put ice on me. I can’t feel it,” Beram said. “It’s really annoying, but my friends are awesome.”

Beram’s right hand constantly shakes. At times, her right eye sees in black and white. Her right knee gives out occasionally.

“I’ll be walking and then I’ll fall for no reason, and that’s why [Shadow’s] there,” Beram said. “I hit my leg a lot to make sure if I still have reflexes, because if I don’t, I know I’m going to have a bad day because I’ll just be falling all over the place.”

Beram’s seizures come “in waves.” She can go for weeks without having a seizure, or have multiple seizures in one week. One week in September 2013, Beram had three seizures.

“I literally could not move,” Beram said. “I was in my bed for five days just not knowing where I was, lying down, and this little freak

[Shadow] was right next to me.”

Beram and her friends have begun to look past the seriousness of her condition, even finding humor in it.

“Some of [Beram’s seizures] are funny,” McAllister, who has helped Beram during two grand mal seizures, said. “She doesn’t really have them anymore, but she used to have absence

[petit mal] seizures where she would stop ... and then she would just keep going. She was fine, and we called it ‘buffering.’” Beram and her friends feel that Beram’s condition is improving.

“She’s getting a lot better, so it’s a lot better than it was a few months ago,” McAllister said. “She’s not having as many seizures.”

Beram hopes to no longer have epilepsy by the time she turns 18 years old.

“90 percent of people with childhood epilepsy, it’s gone by the time they’re 18, and I’m 17 right now,” Beram said. “So I’m just waiting for the year to go away, because then I’ll be seizure-free.”

