

Freshman with rare disease defies doctor's

expectations

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Freshman Fiona Murphey was born with three broken ribs, a broken arm, a broken collarbone, and a broken portion of her leg.

"They knew right away," she said.

Murphey was diagnosed with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, or Brittle Bone Disease. It is a congenital disease where one's bones are made very fragile due to the lack of enough collagen, or the absence of the right kind of collagen.

"Under enough pressure, mine snap like twigs," she said.

Murphey says that if the entire Bridgestone arena was filled to capacity, only one of those people would have her condition. Because of the rarity of the disease, it is difficult for doctors to rank the severity of her case.

"I have only closely known two people with my condition, and they have different types than me," she said.

Brittle Bone can be hereditary, but there is no record of it in Murphey's family. Murphey, who navigates Hume-Fogg's halls in her wheelchair, is grateful that her condition has improved over time.

"It turns out that I have a case where it was worse when I was growing really fast, so obviously when I was a baby, it was really bad," she said.

Murphey is not technically confined to her wheelchair. Although it is risky for her to walk on her own, she is capable under certain conditions. Doctors did not initially think this would be possible; they predicted she would need a power chair, but she refused.

"I think it's been really good for me," she said. "I don't think I would have ever gotten to a point where I would be able to play sports if I would have started out in a power chair."

Sports have always been Murphey's passion. Over the years, she has been involved in baseball, hockey, and basketball. She really loved the competitive aspect of wheelchair basketball.

"Wheelchair basketball is the craziest sport," she said. "It is the most insane wrestling match; they are ramming into each other and literally trying to flip each other over."

Because Murphey was born with a case of scoliosis, she had to undergo corrective spinal fusion

surgery in January. The year-long recovery period has been tough on her, mostly because it has kept her away from sports. She hopes to get back into the game next year by joining the swim team.

Murphey wasn't always as confident as she is today. She said that when she was in elementary school, she wanted to be like the kids who could run around on the playground. She quickly got over her jealousy when she discovered she loved to read and draw.

"It ended up being better for me because I ended up getting extra learning time," she said.

Murphey says although the people of Hume-Fogg have been nice to her so far, in the past she has run across people who were preju-

diced against her. She recalls one time in the seventh grade when a girl pulled a stool out from in front of her, causing her to fall on her face and black out.

Despite all of the trials in Murphey's life, she has remained optimistic. She attributes this quality to her grandmother, whom she considers a role model.

"She's always so positive about everything," she said. "That's probably part of the reason why I am."

Her other greatest influence is her mother. Murphey sees her mother as a strong willed, passionate woman who always puts her daughter's needs first.

"She gets me what I need," said Murphey. "She gets in there and

she makes demands when she has to, and that is one of the biggest blessings."

As for the future, Murphey plans to become an environmental engineer. This has been a dream of hers since she was little, and she doesn't plan to give up on it. She believes the world's biggest issue is sustainability.

"Nobody is going to matter whether it's hungry kids in Africa, homeless people, or disabled people- if we don't have a planet to live on," she said.

Her plans include trying to use inexpensive, abundant materials to improve the current sources of renewable energy.

"I think even scientists are asking the wrong questions," she said. "They are asking 'How can we make it more efficient?,' but I feel like one thing they should be asking is 'How can we make it more cost effective?'"

Some believe her aspirations to be lofty. But Murphey thinks it is important not only to help the community, but also to change the perception of the disabled.

"I feel like way too many people with disabilities are spending way too much time feeling sorry for themselves," she said.

Murphey encourages questions. She embraces curiosity and longs for people to be informed, but doesn't want pity. She doesn't see herself as disabled, and therefore expects to be treated the same as anyone else.

"I don't want to be known for being in a wheelchair," said Murphey. "I want to be known as one of the smartest people here." ■