



First Person

Living with Brittle Bone Disease – and how you can help

by CESAR LUCERO

Editor's Note: Do you have a "First Person" story to share? A triumph, an interesting experience, a plea to the community, or anything else that you think may be of interest to our readership? E-mail your idea to jlblaut@gmail.com for consideration.

My name is Cesar Lucero and I was born with a disease called *Osteogenesis Imperfecta*, brittle bone disease, which is a genetic disorder. This disease caused my bones to be more prone to fractures

and as a result, I have suffered through more than 150 broken bones. I also have eight steel rods implanted in my body.

As you can imagine, growing up never came easy. At the age of three I had to have several surgeries. The surgeries would eventually help my body grow and make me stronger. I really do not remember much at that age other than always being in pain. I was in a full body cast for approximately three months until my bones could heal. Doctors implanted steel rods in my legs.

I got my first wheelchair shortly after. When I moved to Davie in 1995, I received my first power chair. This gave me the freedom I had been waiting for. I grew up trying the best I could to lead a normal life. Unfortunately, I had to go through this all over again at age nine. I would endure eight more surgeries and one major back surgery. This was probably one of the toughest times of my life

because I had just gotten into school and was beginning to feel as normal as I could. The result of this was that I would not be going to school anymore and would be home schooled, and it just killed me inside. Again, I would end up confined to a little red wagon because I could not sit upright with a body cast going from my waist down. I was nine years old and wondered why I had to go through this pain. I would pray and pray that a miracle would happen.

I eventually found the medicine that helped me get through those two years – football and my love for the Dallas Cowboys. Yes, America's team helped me get through the tough times.

Then when I turned twelve, I was starting to feel great again. I made it! But my next doctor visit would change my life again, and I remember it like it was yesterday. The doctor said I would need one more surgery. I became numb and cold. I cried and cried and would tell him, "I'll do anything but go through surgery again!" But it had to be done. My back was curving inwards, and if not for the surgery my spine could have crushed my heart and lungs. I would end up staying in bed for 6 months with a back brace. During this time I was lost. I would keep asking myself, why me?

One day I came across a Vince Lombardi quote that would change my life forever: "Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence." I knew then that I would have to change my attitude and become more confident in myself. From that day on, I never questioned "why" again. I would end up living a somewhat normal teen life and eventually get to do something I never thought I could do, coach football. This was the best time of my life. Though I knew I would never get to play the sport I love, I got to be part of the team. I was living the dream.

I am now 27 years old and have graduated from Broward College with an Associate's Degree. I have found a full time job as a teacher's assistant. I rely on my power chair to go wherever I need to go. My chair weighs a little over 250 pounds and it is difficult traveling from place to place in a car. I must use the city bus to get to and from work. This works great if the bus that comes by has a wheelchair lift, is actually on time and if it is not raining or cold outside. I'm never one to ask for much, but getting a vehicle would help me get the independence I need to live a full and meaningful life. So I'm asking for your help with raising the funds to my freedom. Please help me make my dream come true. I have been blessed to have good people help me in my life and I pray every day that this continues. God Bless.

To learn more about Cesar's story, including how you help him raise money for a car, visit www.cesarlucero.com. For more on Osteogenesis Imperfecta, visit www.oif.org.

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