

Humans are, biologically, meant to be in groups. Whereas many a species live autonomously and in separation, human beings not only *crave* each other, but, when together, possess untold power and ability. Whether it be mere acquaintances, friends, or, even family, we all desire to be with one another. This unique desire and group-mentality is, in my opinion, one of the two things that make our species unique. The other? It's simple: our brains. Our frontal lobes allow us to think hypothetically, to reason, to effectively communicate, and to not only survive, but advance. Without them, our physical characteristics would render us useless in the wild.

I lost my sister, Lila Levine, to Tay Sachs. Just as her name indicates in Hebrew (“night”), so did her passing. Though I was only four when she died, my parents were devastated. My father always wanted a girl, and to have her ripped away after a mere two years was both horrific and jarring. Even I can vaguely remember the frequent passing of home-care nurses, the hum of tubes, and sheer amount of stress inflicted on my parents throughout the duration of her illness. Seeing pictures now, it is all but impossible to empathize with Lila; nobody should have to endure the pain she did for so long at such a young age. However, though I certainly do recall flashes of her short life, as previously stated, I have but a mere memory of her *presence*. In direct opposition to what I am sure constitutes as the majority of the other applicants for the Gottlieb scholarship fund, I barely knew my sister. So, then, how did her illness affect my life?

The answer to this question is fundamental and dates back to my opening thoughts. Our species' two defining traits—our ornate necessity for interaction and the brains that power them, among other things—are why I am so affected by the loss of my sister. While I still have a brother of whom I love and care for deeply, I still feel the aching *lack* of Lila's presence. Her pictures hang around the house; her name dots various shirts, plaques, and photo albums; her captor hangs like a cloud almost daily. She, however, is nowhere to be found. My mother now sleeps in what used to be her room, and every time I enter I am blasted with the idea that its original inhabitant is no longer around. The passing of Lila deprived me of the chance to have a sister, something of which I have always craved—I am a “momma's boy” after all.

The above paragraph mentions reasons steeped in selfishness pertaining to why I miss Lila and how her absence affects me even today. Her lack of presence is only part of what makes life harder without her today, however. By far, the most prodigious effect Lila's passing inflicted on me is the sheer plethora of possibilities it left behind. Lila was only two years younger than me at the time of her death, meaning that she would be nineteen this year. It breaks my heart that she and I could never experience college together. It breaks my heart that we never shared friends, meals, thoughts, and more. It breaks my heart that she could not get equal access to all of the incredible opportunities that I have been granted. What kind of person would she be today? Though I am all but assured that she would be as incredible as I had hoped, the fact that I will never *know* leaves me at a loss. I am a “momma's boy,” certainly, but if Lila had been spared from her suffering years ago, maybe I would not need to be, or even care to be. Life was not nearly as fair to Lila as it is to me, and that, combined with the endless hypothetical situations of alternate routes, leaves me with nothing but guilt and sorrow. To this day, I wish nothing but for Lila to be alive so that she could explore those alternate routes with my family and I. Sadly, that is not the case. I sincerely hope that an eventual cure for both Tay Sachs and all terminal illnesses is found. Until then, however, all we are left with is a lack of presence, but a breadth of dreams.