

# AMWA's Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal

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I sat there weeping. Tears uncontrollably rolling down my face, I barely moved and certainly didn't make a sound. I was in my pediatric endocrinologist's office and the test results were back. She told me that the test I did in the hospital last week where they drew my blood over and over again and gave me disgusting liquid to drink came back with bad results. I didn't pass — not even close.

She explained that my body wasn't working the way it was supposed to. She told me that normally, a young girl's body makes a protein, called human growth hormone, which encourages bones and organs to grow. But, my body didn't make enough of that hormone and that my bones and organs weren't growing enough.

My eyes swelled that day with fear but not surprise. I was small and had always been small. When my class lined up for school pictures, "in height order," as the teacher would say, "so that the tall kids don't block the short kids," I knew my place in line. When we played basketball in gym class and the team captains were choosing their players, I knew what number I would be called. As a small child, my fellow students and teachers barely noticed me. I would try to answer a question in class but my teachers didn't see my raised hand. I would have perfect behavior in music class but never received a "good behavior gold star." As a small girl, I went unnoticed. I was assumed to be quiet and weak, and, unwilling to break out of that mold, I became what others had always believed.

In the doctor's office that day, my doctor was

asking me to do something a quiet and weak person couldn't do. She was asking me to give myself a shot, everyday, for the next several years. I was terrified of needles and at the age of nine, the next several years seemed like a lifetime away.

As I looked up at her with disbelief and resolution to protect my body from needle sticks, she sat next to me on a chair. She wiped away my tears and said I could do this. She showed me the x-rays of my hands, my dots on the growth curve, and a graph of my growth hormone levels. She explained in words that I could understand what was going on in my body and how it could be fixed. Then, she brought out this book, "filled with children just like me," she said. I saw pictures of small kids, quiet and weak, standing next to a giraffe measuring tape juxtaposed to pictures of tall adolescents, bold and strong. She pointed to the adolescents and said that could be me someday.

When I went home that day, I no longer had tears in my eyes. My doctor told me that I needed to take charge of my health and that I did, injecting myself in the thigh every day for four years. Through the process, she inspired me to take charge of more than just my health. I started speaking up in school and trying out for sport teams. I started introducing myself to others and making friends. My doctor inspired me to take charge of my life. She told me that my life was in my hands, that I could do anything that I wanted to, that regardless of whether or not the growth hormone worked, my smallness was only one aspect of my being.

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Today, I might stand at 5'4, but I am still "small." In the field of medicine, often dominated by older, male physicians, others tower over me. With a young-looking face, I am often asked in the hospital if I am a high school student shadowing. But, I am no longer quiet and weak. Unlike my nine-year-old self, I speak up when I know the correct answer on rounds and I step up to perform procedures or assist in surgery. I may still be small but I no longer let that define me.

My doctor inspired me to become a pediatrician and to inspire other children to take charge of their own health, but her lasting impression has done much, much more. She encouraged me not to succumb to stereotypes, not to be the girl others expected me to be. I have since become the woman that I want to be.

