

# A "pacemaker" in her brain helped make Kristan a mom

After a terrible car accident, Kristan Clemens suffered seizures so severe, she needed powerful drugs just to function. There was no way she could get pregnant and be a mom on those pills—but no way she could stop taking them either . . .

**H**earing the doctor's words, Kristan Clemens closed her eyes, as if blocking out the light could make the truth disappear too. It felt like the cruelest Catch-22 ever: with her seizure medication, she couldn't have a baby. But without it, she couldn't function—not for herself and certainly not as a mother.

Several years earlier, Kristan was on her way home from teaching an aerobics class at the Mt. Washington, Kentucky, YMCA. Suddenly, she was blinded by the lights of an oncoming car—and, swerving to avoid it, she spun off the road. After nine days in the trauma unit and procedures to rebuild the left side of her face, Kristan, then 18, went home.

"However, because of your brain injury," doctors warned, "you may suffer recurrent seizures."

Up to five times a day, a strange sensation would come over Kristan and her eyes would go blank, her body would convulse. "Help!" her mom screamed to her dad, who would restrain Kristan's arms and legs. But there was nothing they could do to prevent what seemed like Kristan's soul being stolen, leaving an obscenity-shouting alien in its place, sometimes for as long as 20 minutes.

"What happened?" Kristan wondered as she came to.

"You had another seizure," her mom said. But Kristan could read her like a book. "It's more than that," she pressed.

"Well," her dad admitted, "you said some things—hurtful things."

"I know you didn't mean them,"

her mom added.

"I'm so sorry," Kristan said, and though she knew the outbursts were beyond her control, she still felt guilty.

And the sad realization came over her: the accident, the seizures . . . they had changed her—and Kristan wasn't sure she liked who she'd become.

So when Kristan's boyfriend broke up with her, she couldn't blame him. Who would want to be with a freak?

Neurologists put Kristan on a "cocktail" of medications, but it only made her feel like a zombie. She couldn't drive, couldn't work, could barely fix herself a meal. I hate the pity in my parents' eyes, she sobbed. I hate that I might never know what it's like to fall in love! Lord, why didn't You just let me die? she wailed.

Then at church, a young man with blue eyes introduced himself.

"I'm Daniel. I teach at the high school. Wanna go to Dairy Queen?"

What would this guy want with someone like me? Kristan narrowed her eyes.

"I—I have a brain injury," she blurted.

"So . . ." Daniel smiled. "You can't eat ice cream?"

Touché, Kristan smiled. And though she was still skeptical, her heart did a flip. "I can't be sure I'll even remember you tomorrow," she said, trying to be lighthearted, but completely serious.

But she couldn't get Daniel off her



"We could adopt," Daniel suggested. But . . . is it even fair to the child? Kristan agonized as fears of having a seizure while bathing or rocking a baby haunted her.

Then a visit to neurologist Hal Corwin, M.D., changed everything.

"You're a perfect candidate for the vagus nerve stimulator," he explained. "It's like a pacemaker, sending pulses to the brain to block electrical impulses that cause seizures." Best of all, Kristan would be weaned off her medications—making pregnancy possible.

After the procedure, a day passed, then another. This is beginning to feel like . . . a miracle, Kristan thought, free of seizures!

Six months later, Kristan ducked into the bathroom—and shrieked so loudly Daniel came running, thinking she was having a seizure!

"It's positive!" Kristan bubbled, holding up a pregnancy test. "We're having a baby!"

With every twinge, Kristan was terrified. But ultrasounds showed the baby was healthy. And when her little girl was born, Kristan breathed, "She's perfect in every way."

"Your name is Grace," she whispered, "because it was the grace of God that brought you to me."

Today, Kristan is still seizure-free, and she and Daniel live near her parents—who endlessly fuss over Gracie.

"There were times I wondered if life was worth living," she says. "But Daniel's love and our baby girl—they were worth everything."

—Elizabeth Holzemer

mind. And Daniel felt the same way. A year after their first date, Daniel led Kristan back to the same Dairy Queen booth. "Will you be my wife?" he asked.

"Yes!" Kristan beamed.

After marriage, the next natural step was having a baby. But Kristan's neurologist said, "We'd have to dramatically reduce your medications, or a baby would suffer severe birth defects."

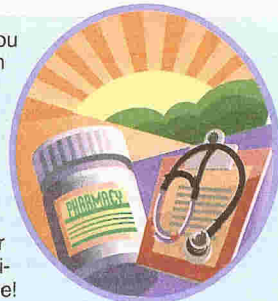
With so many seizures, reducing her medication wasn't an option. I'll never have a baby! Kristan mourned.

**"It was God's grace that brought you to me," Kristan whispered**

## Could medication be draining your energy?

**A**ny new medication can leave you feeling less energetic, says Jason Greene, Pharm.D., of the American Pharmacists Association. Though fatigue often persists for people taking anti-seizure drugs like Kristan, it's usually only temporary for those taking common medications, like antidepressants.

If drowsiness persists beyond two weeks, see your doctor. Be sure to tell her if you're taking supplements or other medications—the combination may be to blame!



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