

This last July marked five years since my baby brother, Charles Lee, became an angel. From the day that he was born, to the day he took his last breath, and every day since, he has had a profound impact on my life that no one else will ever come close to matching.

I have finally reached my senior year of college, and my final semesters of nursing school. With that has come the opportunity to work with so many amazing nurses in my clinical rotations. With each clinical day and each new preceptor I meet, I am asked about my nursing experience, why I chose to become a nurse, and what field I am interested in working in. For the most part, those questions can be answered in one short sentence, "My little brother, Charles Lee." And with that I am given another opportunity to share Charles' story, my story.

I have worked with patients of all ages, genders, and diagnoses, but nothing has compared to the time that I was able to spend in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). I strongly believe that it takes a special person to be a NICU nurse, just as it takes a special person to do oncology nursing, hospice nursing, or any work in a specialty area. Having Charles in my life, experiencing Tay-Sachs disease, and experiencing the loss of my baby brother have all helped me to become one of those special people. I have a very special place in my heart for babies, especially those who are fighting the hardest fights. Most of the 28 months that Charles spent here on Earth with us were spent fighting. Seeing someone so young have so much strength to fight through each sickness that Tay-Sachs brought him made me admire him that much more. Knowing that someone so young and innocent can fight that hard is a daily reminder that I can make it through anything. At 20 years old, I've had many difficult experiences, but nothing compares to what I went through when I was 15. Knowing that I had the strength to make it through those difficult years ensures me that I will be able to help families with babies fighting for their lives. I had the opportunity to witness first hand how strong someone can be

even if they cannot walk or talk, and I look forward to sharing my experience with parents that need reassuring that their child is fighting hard. I wish that I could tell them that Charles fought through his disease and won the fight, but as we all know, that is not currently an option for children with Tay-Sachs disease. When I go to bed each night, Charles is one of my last thoughts, and I rest easy knowing that he fought as hard as he possibly could and stayed with us as long as possible.

Charles gave me such a different outlook on life than I ever had before. I miss my handsome little brother more and more each day, and I would do anything to have him back in my life, but I could never be selfish enough to want him back in the body he had when I know that he is in Heaven running and playing like he always should have been able to. I know there is a better place than where we are now, and I know that someday I will see Charles again, but until then I plan on spending my days honoring him and sharing his story. If I can help just one family avoid the experience of Tay-Sachs disease, or help them through their child's fight against any disease or disorder, or help them through the loss of their child then I will feel accomplished and know that I am making my baby brother proud.