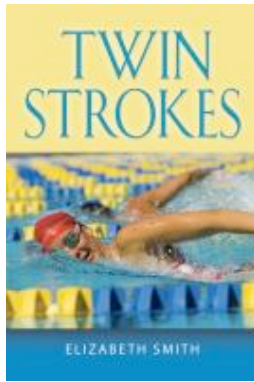


TWIN STROKES



ELIZABETH SMITH



Lynn, a swimmer, and Lisa, a golfer, are devastated when their friend Hope becomes paralyzed due to Guillain-Barre Syndrome. Lying in her hospital bed, Hope agonizes over her sudden condition. "What is wrong with me? Why can't I move my legs? Why do my arms and hands feel strange? Am I going to die?" The twins witness Hope's struggles and fears and they are determined to support her every step of the way.

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Chapter 1

The whistle blew, causing a shrilling sound! The girls took off like a school of guppies. It was the third meet of the season—the freestyle. It was also Lynn Quigley’s favorite stroke, the one she felt she could master. Even with the water splashing fiercely in her face, she remained calm and controlled. The sun radiating through a side window, shed a blinding light in her lane. She was able to ignore the loud chatter that penetrated throughout the area of the indoor pool. At first, the contestants were only centimeters behind one another, and then Lynn juttled ahead, with just six yards to go.

Twelve minutes away from the swim meet at the Misty Dale Golf Course, Lisa Quigley, Lynn’s twin sister, was practicing her swing for the millionth time. She seemed determined to perfect her stroke no matter what it took.

Clare Bruns, the golf coach, was forever telling Lisa to be more patient with herself. “Lisa, you need to relax so your swing can be smooth. Don’t be so darn rigid.”

Lisa had LOTS of trouble with that. Her face was unflinching. She looked upward for a moment to allow herself to breath in the fresh early April air, then she gazed at the stretched fairways ahead. She shook her head as to refocus on her practice as her mouth automatically formed a stern look.

Meanwhile, as Lynn swam and Lisa swung, the twins best friend, Hope, was at St. Theresa’s Hospital. She cried silently in her bed and thought: *What is wrong with me? I am so scared! Why can’t I move my legs? Why do my hands and arms feel strange? Am I going to die?* Her parents were standing on either side of her looking more anxious than ever. Mrs. Wicklein stroked her daughter’s honey wavy hair and wiped away the tears from her cinnamon eyes. Mr. Wicklein was holding Hope’s hand. Hope wished with all her heart that she could participate in her scheduled swim meet. Only three days ago she was practicing for the third competition side by side with Lynn and Emma, her long

time swim buddies. She was recalling the fun they had at the pool when the nurse came in to check on her.

“How is your pain level, honey?” the nurse asked. “On a scale of one to ten, what would you say?”

“It was about a four earlier, but now it’s about eight or nine,” answered Hope quietly. “I feel so afraid. I’m twelve years old and I’ve never been in the hospital before, and never been so sick. I feel panicky. What’s happening to me?”

“Maybe you would feel better if we can move you to a room closer to the nurses’ station. I think room 212 will be empty tomorrow, so we can move you in there and you won’t feel so isolated back here at the end of the hall. Sweetheart, about your pain medicine, we can increase it as needed. The doctor will be in shortly to explain everything to you.”

Hope mustered up all the energy she could to thank her nurse.

Back at the pool, Lynn had wowed her audience with a spectacular performance. She not only won the freestyle by an arm’s length, but she also took first place in the backstroke. Faye, the oldest swim team member, won the butterfly. Lynn secretly felt Hope would have won that race if she’d been there. Emma took second place in the breaststroke.

Exhausted but exhilarated, Lynn removed her swim cap, revealing her thick, chin length, dark hair. She accepted congratulations from all her teammates for winning two races while her crystal blue eyes shone. “Way to go!” she heard someone yell. The girls huddled around her, giving their best swimmer cheers and hugs.

“Good going,” Coach Mary Conlon said, as she patted Lynn on the back. “You did an awesome job! Keep up the good work for the rest of the season, kiddo.”

The girls walked back to the locker room. As they drained their water bottles, Coach Mary explained to each girl individually how she could improve her stroke. When she addressed Emma, Mary said, “Em, your breathing is perfect. Just work on improving your kick, then you could take first place in our next competition.”

Lynn felt bad for her friend Emma. She heard her sigh of disappointment and wistful answer, "Yeah."

When the swim team was ready to leave the locker room, Lynn phoned her sister.

"How did you place?" asked Lisa leaning against her driver and breathing heavily.

"I did pretty well," replied Lynn.

"Sweet!" She heard Lisa say. "You're going to be another Ethelda Bleibtrey. Remember the lady we just read about in Language Arts class last week?"

"Sure, right," chuckled Lynn. "Anyway, are you ready for Mom to pick us up?"

"Yes, I'm starving and have piles of homework," answered Lisa.

"Ok, you call her. She can pick you up first while I hang out with Emma for a few minutes." After she hung up, Lynn slowly walked over to the bench where Emma waited for her Mom. "Em, I think Hope would have won a ribbon today, don't you?"

"Definitely. She's the best we have for the butterfly."

"I miss her super much. She must be terrified, especially with not even knowing what's wrong. All we know so far is that she's in lots of pain and can't walk."

"Yeah, it's horrible. I feel like it's a dream."

"Let's call her Mom in a day or two and see what she can tell us," replied Emma.

"Yeah, she should know something by then," answered Lynn.

"Here comes my mother. Bye Lynn. See you tomorrow," Emma called out as she ran toward a blue SUV.

When Lynn and Lisa arrived home, the smell of spaghetti sauce enveloped them. Their two dogs jumped and barked. The Sheltie, Noel, wagged her tail happily. Puddin, the Yorkshire terrier, danced around their legs. Their brother Glenn chilled on the sofa, legs draped over the side. The girls played with the dogs for a while then went upstairs to do their homework.

At dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Quigley told Lynn how sorry they were that they had to miss the meet. Work seemed to always interfere.

“That’s cool,” said Lynn. “There are two more meets this season, so don’t worry about it.”

Lisa spoke up. “You know guys, I’m not sure I want to continue with golf.” She pulled her chair back from the table and crossed her legs.

“What do you mean?” Dad looked surprised.

“Well, I just don’t know if I can be “in the zone” like Coach Bruns expects. She tells us golf is a mental game as well as physical. It’s hard for me to concentrate like she wants. She’s so darn strict!”

“Sure you can,” Mom said. “You’re able to focus as well as any of us, Lisa. You just need to discipline yourself.”

“Are you drinking too much Mountain Dew?” Glenn interjected laughingly.

“Glenn, be serious,” said Dad. “Honey, tomorrow at practice, just keep your eye on the ball and do your best. Don’t be so hard on yourself. You enjoy the game, so just try to relax.”

“Well, whatever; I’ll see,” Lisa answered with despondency.

After supper the girls went to their room. Lynn said, “Don’t worry Lisa. We all know you’re the best putter in the group, and you scored the most birdies last season, remember?”

Lisa yawned, “Yeah, sure,” but not feeling at all convinced.

That night Lynn had trouble sleeping. She tossed and turned for over an hour, thinking about Hope. She missed her so much. *When will she be able to return to school and the swim club? When will she feel better? What is wrong with her?* Warm tears dropped slowly onto Lynn’s pillow as she fell asleep.

Chapter 2

The next day at practice, Coach Bruns told the girls' "Do what's right for you. Even though most people handle a certain hole one way, if it's not comfortable for you, do it your own way. Don't worry about what other people think. The point is to make that par."

Lisa congratulated Crista, her favorite golf friend from day one, on her great chipping.

"Yeah," Crista answered, "but now comes the hard part for me, putting. That little ball has a mind of its own and just doesn't want to cooperate with me when I'm only an inch from the hole." She shook her head and smacked her lips together. "Lisa, did you happen to see Shannon's drive yesterday?"

"No." She shifted her weight and remarked, "I was too busy trying not to spaz out with my own swings. She was good, huh?"

"Sure was. I bet she'll get chosen for a college scholarship one day." Crista stretched out her arms then bent down to the ground.

"Well she deserves it. She's a natural. Her swing is good and she always looks so confident." Lisa said, smacking a fly off her leg.

"Girls, stop chatting and FOCUS," yelled Bruns. "Flex those knees and keep elbows straight. Try tapping it when you're close to the hole."

"Tell the trees to move out of the way," whispered Lisa. Crista overheard and laughed so hard she doubled over and snorted.

"You're hilarious," Crista said trying to regain her poise. "Oh no! There goes Amy's ball across the walkway," she added.

"That won't bother her like it would me," said Lisa. "She told me once that golf relieves her stress and relaxes her. I soooooo need to get to that point. Hopefully one day."

"Girls, concentrate!" ordered Bruns again. "Practice your drive and remember your upper body rotation is one of the keys to a good swing."

"Yes ma'am," they answered in unison. A few moments later, Crista's eyes bulged when she witnessed Lisa's birdie.

Back at the pool, Coach Mary was talking to the team. "The maintenance crew informed me of a chemical problem. So for today, my little shrimp, you'll need to just practice the dolphin kick for twenty minutes on the left side of the pool, over by the scoreboards. After that, you can leave early. Our next meet will be in two weeks at Hilltop High. Your group starts at 8:30. See you tomorrow girls."

"Thanks, Coach," echoed a host of team voices.

When they left, Emma asked Lynn, "Do you want to go back to my house to have the best snack in the world, cereal with chocolate milk?"

"Sure," answered Lynn. "But one bowl will be enough for me. I don't need two or three like you." She chuckled. "Your mom should just get you a trough so you don't have to keep refilling your bowl." Both girls giggled.

Crunching cereal, Lynn said, "Hey Em, let's call Mrs. Wicklein. Maybe now she knows what's wrong with Hope."

"Okay."

"But let's call her at the hospital," Lynn added. "She's probably there, not home."

"Good idea," Emma answered.

Mrs. Wicklein answered the phone. She explained to Lynn in a shaky voice, "The doctor said Hope has something called Guillain-Barre Syndrome. It's very rare, but after a long period of treatments, medicine, and rehab, she'll be okay. She needs to stay in the hospital for about a month, and then she'll continue physical therapy at home to regain strength in her legs and arms."

The news was shocking. Lynn had to sit down to say thank you to Hope's mom. "Please tell Hope we all miss her and feel so sad about her sickness," she whispered before hanging up.

"What is it?" Emma asked, her green eyes wide.

When Lynn relayed the message to Emma, she responded, "Oh my gosh, that's so serious!" and they both started crying.

Lynn forced herself to get it together. "Let's check it out on the internet," she suggested.

"Okay." They found the Guillain-Barre Syndrome Foundation web page. Lynn read out loud while Emma followed silently.

“Guillain-Barre (Ghee-yan Bah-ray) Syndrome is an inflammatory disorder of the peripheral nerves characterized by the rapid onset of weakness and often paralysis of the legs, arms, breathing muscles and face.”

“That sounds horrible! Hope must be so terrified!” said Emma.

“Her mom said it hasn’t affected her speech, so maybe next weekend we can visit her,” Lynn said with eyes full of compassion.

“Maybe the nurses can explain it better to us. I’ll get balloons and we can take in her favorite music.”

As the girls planned their visit to the hospital to see Hope, they noticed the time. “It’s getting late, Em. Mom’s picking me up in a minute so I can get the rest of my social studies packet finished, and study for our math test. The more I go over it, the better I’ll feel about the test,” Lynn said, then biting her lip.

“I still have to read seven pages of science and answer the questions,” responded Emma.

“Oh Em, please tell Coach Mary that I can’t make it to practice tomorrow. I want to go to Lisa’s golf tournament. She’s worried about her game. I wish she’d just chill and enjoy it.”

“Sure. Tell your sister I know she’ll do great.”

Chapter 5

On Saturday morning, Lynn and Lisa woke up extra early, eager to visit Hope. Lynn called Emma and said, “Why don’t you guys come over here and Mom can take us in the van?”

“Okay,” Emma replied. She continued, “I’ll call our team and tell them. We’ll get the balloons on the way over to your house. See you later.”

Then Lisa called the golfers; Crista, Amy, and Shannon. She told Lynn, “They’ll be here in about an hour.”

After breakfast, Lynn added songs to her iPod that she knew Hope liked. The doorbell rang. When Lisa answered the door, the girls were there. “Wow, the balloons look great!” Lisa announced.

As they were driving to the hospital, Lynn mentioned that Coach Mary called and said she would meet them there.

Just as Hope was thinking of her friends, in they walked. She and her friends cried and smiled simultaneously. Lynn and Lisa were the first by her bedside with the other girls trailing behind.

“Hope, we really miss you! How are you feeling? Are you in a lot of pain?”

Hope nodded yes as she answered, “I’m so happy to see you!” Not wanting her company to be upset, she tried to mask her suffering.

Crista accidentally bumped Hope’s foot when she was standing at the bottom of the bed, then suddenly jumped back when Hope cringed and cried out, “Please don’t touch my feet. I feel like I’m being electrocuted!”

“I’m so sorry,” Crista’s face lit with alarm, then blushed with embarrassment.

“You didn’t know,” answered Hope. She paused, and then said, “I was shocked to discover all the symptoms of this sickness! It came on so suddenly too. My legs felt weak and tingly two days ago and yesterday I couldn’t walk. I was more than scared; I was terrified! Mom and Dad rushed me here. They said I have Guillain-Barre Syndrome.” She stared at her feet. “I asked if I was going to die, and they said no. I was so relieved! So that’s good, but the pain is really

bad and the recovery will take a long time.” She spoke slowly, exhaling a deep breath. “I’m sure glad I’ll live.”

“It’s also humiliating to have other people do everything for you,” she continued with a downcast face. “Mom and the nurses have to help me when I go to the bathroom. It’s so embarrassing! They have to help me when I need to shower and clean my teeth too. They help me with everything, like eating breakfast and lunch and adjusting my covers. Dad feeds me dinner when he comes in after work.”

The door burst open and Hope stopped talking. Coach Mary walked in with a bubbly smile. “Hi kiddo. How’s my best butterfly swimmer?”

Hope smiled. “Hi, Coach.”

“Hope was just telling us about Guillain-Barre,” Lynn said.

“You’re a brave soldier,” said Coach, “a shining example for us all. Maybe the nurses can explain more about the condition and treatment so we can understand it better.”

Hope nodded. “All the nurses are wonderful, but I do have a favorite. Her name is Ann. She acts like a sister to me. She works the day shift, so you all can meet her when she comes in. We can ask her to help us understand it better.”

Coach Mary removed a large bag of candy from her purse to show Hope. “Here’s something I brought you.”

“They’re my favorite, Skittles,” said Hope. “Thanks. That’s enough for a year. You all eat some.”

“No, keep them for yourself and the nurses.”

Lynn asked, “Hope, do you want us to put the songs that we brought you on your iPod?”

“Not now,” she said. “Next week when I’m feeling better you can. Thanks.”

The girls took turns telling Hope about the swim meet and the golf competition. When Hope’s eyes started drooping, Lynn suggested they leave. Just as they began saying their good-byes, Nurse Ann walked in to check on Hope.

“Just the person we need to see,” Hope exclaimed. “I was telling my friends how awesome you are.”

“Oh really?” Chuckled Ann. “It’s easy because you are one of the sweetest patients we’ve ever had on this floor.”

“We were wondering if you could explain the cause and treatment of Guillain-Barre?” asked Hope.

Ann leaned against the windowsill. The light from the window made her blond ponytail shine. She folded her arms. “The cause of Guillain-Barre is unknown. About half of the cases occur after a viral or bacterial infection, like a bad cold or sore throat. Some suggest the patient’s immune system, which is activated to fight off the infection, is triggered into damaging the nerve coating. The nerve coating carries the signals from the brain that operate your muscles. This leads to the weakness and tingling sensations.”

Lynn sighed. “Oh. So it’s neurological?”

“What’s the best way to recover?” asked Lisa, rubbing her hands together.

Ann crossed her leg and answered in a calm voice. “The patient is given a blood cleansing procedure called a Plasma exchange, or a treatment called IVIG. Besides that, the patient needs support measures to monitor body functions. Once Hope is able to move some on her own, and is medically stable, we’ll begin a rehab program in the hospital, and then continue at home with a therapist. At that point, she might be in a wheelchair or even a walker. In time, her muscle strength will return.”

“About how many people get GBS?” Hope asked.

“Approximately one in one hundred thousand.”

“Shooooee!” Hope uttered almost inaudibly.

Lisa’s mouth dropped open upon hearing that news. Coach Mary gave Hope a kiss on her forehead. “You are a living saint,” she said. “Now get better quickly so we can have you back on the swim team.”

Ann unfolded her arms and said, “I have to go check on some other patients. It was nice to meet your friends, Hope.”

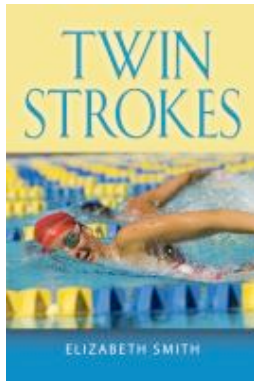
Lynn gave Hope another sip of her drink before they all said their good-byes. It was difficult to leave, but they promised to call her each day. After everyone left, Hope started crying buckets. *I feel like such a baby crying so much, but it hurts, and I’m scared, and I don’t know how long it will be before I feel well again.*

A few minutes later, Nurse Ann stood by Hope's bed. "Honey, let me dry your eyes," she said as she grabbed a Kleenex.

"My eyes are two running rivers," Hope muttered.

"Sweetie, it's rough now, but as time goes on, you'll feel better and better. I promise." She gave Hope another sip of her drink and adjusted her covers. "Now, try to get some sleep. You need your rest."

As Hope dozed off, her heart was comforted by the kind people in her life.



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