

Sheila had just turned 26 in April 2003 when she contracted meningococccemia. She was in a coma for eight days and survived, but had to undergo amputations of both her arms and legs. This book recounts her struggle to reclaim her life.

A Life Reclaimed

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A Life Reclaimed

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HOW A QUADRUPLE AMPUTEE REGAINED CONTROL OF
HER LIFE

SHEILA MAY A. ADVENTO

As told to Cynthia Angeles

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One: Prelude to Tragedy

Thursday, July 3, 2003:

I went to a bar with some friends. There was much for me to celebrate. I liked working at Quest Diagnostics and enjoyed my night classes at the Bergen Community College. Although I still lived with my mother to save on rent, I helped her a bit by buying groceries periodically and paying the telephone bills. At twenty-six, I was finally on the way to getting my life together.

Friday, July 4, 2003:

I was feeling under the weather so my boyfriend at the time, Don, and I stayed indoors and watched television. The following day, Saturday, my sisters, Marsha and Pamela, came with their families to my mother's house for dinner. Don and I joined them but not for too long. I felt weak and had a low-grade fever. I assumed I was coming down with the flu. Hadrien, Pamela's husband, thought it was odd to develop the flu at that time of the year. I took cold/flu tablets which afforded some relief. My symptoms were on and off so no one thought anymore of it - nothing that a good bed rest wouldn't cure.



Sheila at age 6 with her mom Piedad

Two: Meningococemia

Sunday, July 6, 2003:

My body rapidly deteriorated. I developed nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. I had a plastic bag near my bed but kept running in and out of the bathroom. Later, I could no longer stand on my own and saw only shadows on the television screen. My mother, a nurse manager at the New York University Medical Center, came down to the basement to check on me. I complained to her about my difficulty of breathing and blurred vision. She thought I had a viral infection. It was dark in the basement so she turned on the lights to help me see better. Neither of us realized the gravity of my condition at that time.

I crawled back into bed, hoping that the symptoms would pass and that I would feel better in the morning. Not long after, Don called out to my mother for help. I had collapsed on the bathroom floor. She found me gasping for air, unable to move or see, and worse, my lips and fingertips had started to turn purplish-blue. She and Don rushed me to the emergency room of Hackensack University Medical Center and alerted everyone in the family.

I was breathing laboriously when we arrived at the hospital. Doctors immediately suspected an infectious disease. With developing fever and dropping blood pressure, I was given three intravenous infusions of broad-spectrum antibiotics. Because my oxygen level was in steep decline, I was hooked to the respirator, but not before getting a heavy dose of sedatives to stop me from resisting intubation. My body organs had shut down in response to the massive infection. My life was slipping away.

Marsha called my father Paquito, and stepmother Jane, who were attending a Christian Life Program (CLP) conference in Seattle. Don waited with my family in the hospital for news of my condition.

Within twenty-four hours, the doctors came up with a definite diagnosis of *meningococcemia*, an acute and potentially life-threatening infection of the bloodstream that commonly leads to *vasculitis* (inflammation of the blood vessels). This disease is caused by airborne bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. This microorganism is acquired by coming into contact with drinking glasses, plates, and utensils used by an infected person, or by breathing in air that was coughed out by infected people. One can easily inhale it from an infected person's breath. I still have no idea where and how I caught it.



Sheila at 17 with her Tita Cynthia



Sheila with her nephew Justin

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