

I try and have a life outside of my job. It's not easy, with wages being the way they are, but I still try. I have a guy I'm crazy about, and a little five year old girl who can make me smile no matter how bad things get. And they can get bad.

My little girl was born with a bad heart. Doesn't mean she's abnormal or retarded or handicapped, mind you. Just that she can't go and do everything the kids her age do. She's still a crazy bundle of energy, though. Most toddlers are, I think. She's a real sweetheart, that one.

In the beginning, when she was just a baby, I worried nonstop about her. Neither me or my husband had much time for baby-watching, and my job refused to give me more than a month and a half of maternity leave. So she got left with relatives a bunch.

One time about a year back, when John and I were away at work, my girl was running around with her cousins in the backyard and she stopped breathing. Stopped running, staggered a bit, and fell down. Well, at the time she was a mighty silly joker, so they didn't get it at first. Didn't get that something was really wrong with her. They poked at her with sticks a bit, told her to get up, stop playing around, that she was blocking their running track. "Get up, Mary! Get up!"

I think it took them a whole minute staring at my kid to realize that she wasn't in a joking mood.

I got to the hospital with John a few minutes after she'd been taken into the ER. Her oldest cousin was sitting there along with my sister, waiting for us. John went over to my sister and started harassing her for the details, wanting to know every single thing that happened. Me, I was certainly worried for my little girl, but the doctors had her now and would do the best they could on her. I knew that for a fact.

The only main worry in my mind at that moment when my little niece came up to me and apologized was if they had called an ambulance. Because neither John or I have anything better than Medicaid as health care. And ironies of ironies, the ambulance company I work for doesn't even cover their own workers' ambulance rides.