

Full Name

Gabrielle Collier

Your Age

12

Name of Parent's

Bill and Jill Collier

Name of Your Dance Studio

Evolve Dance Studio

Your Essay

Why do my parents deserve this award? Where do I even start? I am Gabi Collier and my parents have literally saved my life, more than once.

On Labor Day weekend last year, my family went to a quiet part of the Rock River for my first time riding a Jet Ski! I had put in six (very long) hours taking the test to get my boating license to drive it alone. It was a hot, sunny, and wonderful day. The plan was my cousins would test the jet skis out to be sure they were operating well before I took my turn. Finally, I got on. My dad reminded me to stay in the middle and head north in case it quit so i could float back toward him. I tested the jet ski with a couple of short squeezes on the gas. Then I squeezed it tightly and took off full speed. As I squeezed tightly to hold on, the jet ski turned, and I accidentally headed toward shore. I tried to swerve but was too late. I hit an overhanging tree pulling me off the jet ski. I was told I landed face down passed out in the water, bleeding from my head. My cousin flipped me over and swam me 100 yards back to shore where my dad literally held my face and head together and kept me from bleeding to death as we waited for the ambulance to get there. Then we went to the hospital where I would be the next 14 days.

I learned later that I had brain surgery that day. Doctors told my parents that the tree I hit had shattered my skull, the membrane around my brain, and a piece of wood was stuck in my actual brain. The doctor warned them that he couldn't fix brain damage and couldn't see the likely infection caused from the river water. Luckily, the doctor told my family halfway through surgery that my membrane was not damaged after all! He also told them they shaved my head!! My mom was a wreck and hugged the surgeon. They sedated me for five days and my parents never left although I don't remember it. They switched off every other night to stay with me and prayed that I would be okay.

When I finally woke up, my parents brought me fuzzy blankets and socks, shopped for headbands, brought movies, got only my favorite foods because I wouldn't eat, played Yahtzee, and laid in bed with me. Mom hugged me when i cried. I was missing the start of dance season as well as cheer and school. I was so behind. It was awful! Mom also played guard when I was too tired to see people. Although I was mad about it at the time, they also kept me away from my phone until the doctor okayed it. My parents even got it approved for my puppy to visit me. When I finally got to go home, my dad made me my favorite food..... STEAK!! Because of my accident, my mom quit her job to take care of me. I went home with a PICC line for another two weeks of medicine that my mom took care of constantly. She also redecorated my room because she knew I would be home a lot. Mom has taken me to tons of doctor visits since the accident.... one for an MRI, a few for my hearing, and a few for my teeth. And there are so many more to come.

As if this weren't enough, I am also a cancer survivor. My parents learned that I had Germ Cell Cancer when I was 17 months old. I am HEALTHY AND CURED but I almost died. I had five months of chemo and surgery, all at Madison Children's Hospital in Wisconsin, some long-term issues that still affect me today have lead me and Mom to Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania as well as Chicago at least 20 times for doctor visits. I remember we always used to go to the American Girl Doll store, the mall, and eat a big lunch. I never eat before the appointments, so this is a big deal. Mom always makes the trips fun!

So, why do my parents deserve this award? Because I'm thinking I'm not the easiest kid. And I think everyone should know how great they really are. Because they have had more to handle than any other parents I know. I love them very much.