

Murphy's Law: Modeled After Me?

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Murphy's Law Part I: an application to my life of entropy

Entropy: lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.

Murphy's Law states that anything that can go wrong will go wrong. It's an old adage that contains a universal truth, modeled after the second law of thermodynamics.

"What did the doctor say?" I ask.

My sister watches Disney Channel in the living room, and the house fills with melodies of the show's high-pitched voices, its muffled laughter, its comedic relief. A silly show with mature motifs.

"Your tests came back positive for Celiac's," Mother says, looking down at her hands as they dig through her purse. She avoids my gaze. I know she wishes things were different. "Your sister and I are going to go grocery shopping if you wanted to come."

I stand there, understanding the weight of this verdict and what it means for my future. I open my mouth to reply. Then, realizing I have nothing to say, I stop and simply shake my head no. My mother tells me to call her if there's anything I want her to pick up for Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving. In six days.

I can't think of anything at all. *What could I even eat for Thanksgiving?* My mother and sister leave the house without another word, and I pick up Bella, nuzzling my face into her furry neck. I take her into my bedroom and sit on my bed, holding her to my chest.

The past three months, I've tried to avoid gluten

for the most part, the possibility of this diagnosis looming far in the back of my mind, but it hasn't been easy, and I often fell short. Eventually I call Madeline, who only has a minor gluten intolerance. The past three months I've been like her, careful and cautious, reading food labels, bringing granola bars to events just in case, taking the bun off sandwiches when we go out to eat, something she's done naturally for years without a second thought. Now, she's the lucky one.

"I have Celiac's," I say to her, but I still don't believe it.

Celiac Disease, also known as coeliac disease, celiac sprue, non-tropical sprue, and gluten sensitive enteropathy—I can't even pronounce that correctly, but it's all the same. If I eat anything made with gluten, which is found in wheat, barley, and rye, this autoimmune disease will damage my stomach and destroy the inner lining of my intestines, stripping it of any ability to absorb nutrients. Untreated, Celiac's can also lead to anemia, osteoporosis, lactose intolerance, infertility, cancers like lymphoma, seizures, peripheral neuropathy, and stomach aches—but that one's a given.

"Hey, Squirt," my dad says after I answer the phone.

"Hi, Papa." I listen as my dad speaks, which isn't a very long time, and I find myself gazing up at the bookshelf spanning the entire length of my room, cluttered with stories of every kind. He built it for me; he does everything for me.

"And right before Thanksgiving, too. That stinks," he chuckles, then grows silent. I don't laugh, but I resist the urge to roll my eyes, even though he wouldn't be able to tell anyway.

"Yeah, well..." He tells me that Mom was

wondering if popcorn had gluten; I laugh and give in to the eye roll still. It's cute, annoying, and sad; luckily popcorn is still an option for me. We don't say much else.

I never mow the grass—always my dad. We never let the house go too long without a dusting. My old dog, Molly, went to live with a family friend while we rented a place and never moved back with us after we bought our house. In the house we rented, we found a bit of mold in my closet, so I moved into my parents' bedroom, indefinitely. We give Bella haircuts and bathe her regularly and I'm never the one to do it. My parents love gardening but are always cautious when bringing flowers into the house. When we can pickles, I never help—too much dill. I'm allergic to everything under the sun, sun included, except for food. I can eat anything I like.

I am lucky.

Or so I thought.

Murphy's Law Part II: where adversity is a given

Adversity: difficulties; misfortune

"The second law of thermodynamics states that the entropy of any isolated system always increases."

When I told my friend Mallory that I had Celiac's, she said she wasn't all that surprised. "Another thing to add to the list," she told me, and I laughed it off. The list. Last spring, I nearly died from a *they-still-haven't-figured-it-out* disease and missed nearly a month of school—*that* is on the list. My long catalogue of allergies belongs on the list. My anemia, asthma, and anxiety disorders are on the list. I also have a ridiculous deathly fear of bugs, and that goes on the list, too. Everyone knows about the list, and Celiac disease just landed on it—always one thing after another with me.

I'd always been somewhat of a picky eater. In all honestly, I wasn't even the biggest fan of Thanksgiving food, and there would be dozens and dozens of dishes to choose from at my grandmother's house. Once, a few years back, the only meat I would eat was hamburger; that lasted for three years. I remember when I was younger, my parents tried to force me to eat something I didn't want to—a reoccurring event in our house.

"Look, Gary, she's a chipmunk!" Mom said. Eleven-year-old me sat with arms crossed at the table while my sister, Autum, licked her plate clean. Disgusting. I didn't respond to my mother... *couldn't* respond to my mother because the meatloaf filled up my cheeks. Papa gave an exasperated laugh, clearly fed up with my stubbornness.

"You're not leaving this table until you swallow," he said.

Forty minutes later my cheeks were numb, Papa and I just staring at each other while Autum played and Mom read on the couch. Eventually I got bored and ate the horrid thing.

"Seriously?" my dad asked. "You're in middle school. That didn't have to be so hard."

I sauntered into the bathroom to rinse my mouth. "I don't like meatloaf."

"You used to eat it all the time," I heard them call after me.

"I've always hated it," I replied.

"You don't like anything," said Mom.

"Not true," said Papa, "She likes sweets."

Before my diagnosis, the holidays were all about the desserts for me. Pie. More pie. Every kind of pie. Peanut cake, pumpkin bread, cookies, Kit-Kat bars, muffins, and every kind of chocolate fudge. Then there was Grandma's famous ice cream cake. She bakes it in a bread pan, three layers of

chocolate and ice cream that's then served by drizzling homemade fudge otop. It's what everybody waits for on the holidays, and what I'd be hard-pressed to live without. *Before.*

I was overdramatic before – at Thanksgiving, that is. It's now nearly Christmas, and I shake my head and try to smile. Sure, Thanksgiving left me frustrated, and the day consisted of me eating only corn, gluten free crackers my mother bought, and chocolate M&M's, but tonight's Christmas Eve, and it will be much better. Earlier today, while my mom immersed herself in her own kitchen endeavors, I tried my hand at gluten free cheesy biscuits. My dad used to joke that "bread" was my favorite food group; if I want to fit in and enjoy myself at the table, I'd have to make my own.

I've never been good at cooking, ever. I lose about 30 IQ points every time I set foot in the kitchen, and for whatever reason, my specialty is finding new ways to mess up a recipe, even if it's only a 4-step bake from a box. But I swore I followed this biscuit recipe to a T, and as the four of us family members say grace, I can't help but get excited for the meal. Maybe I could get by, learn to bake my favorites as gluten-free versions. A few moments later, however, as I'm taking my first bites, I realize everything on my plate is simple yet delicious – that is, except for my own creation.

It is a failure – *I* am a failure in this.

The biscuit feels like wet sand in my mouth, crumbling yet somehow sticking to my teeth and gums. Did I even put *any* cheese in here? I can't taste anything! I chew it slowly and gawk at myself, taking bite after bite without ever swallowing, a chipmunk. I can't help but look down at my plate, a wave of sadness washing over me.

"How's your bread?" my dad asks.

I shake my head and take a huge drink of water

to wash down my disaster before I answer.

"It's awful!" At least I tried. *Merry Christmas to me.* I sigh, realizing things aren't going to get better overnight... that thought gets to be a lot sometimes. I wonder if I can even sustain this lifestyle – it's hard and expensive. Flours, mixes, and gluten-free alternatives are always cost more, not to mention that a loaf of gluten-free bread is also smaller and tastes worse than regular bread. The year is 2017...in what year will this get easier? Does it ever get easier?

Murphy's Law Part III: where vigilance is needed

Vigilance: great care that is taken to notice any signs of danger or trouble

Synonyms for entropy include deterioration, degeneration, crumbling, decline, degradation, decomposition, breaking down, collapse, disorder, chaos.

Not only is gluten in the obvious things like bread, pizza, pasta, cookies, and anything else delicious, but it is also found in wine coolers, licorice, Pringles potato chips, soy sauce, gravy, and Kellogg's Rice Krispies. Rice Krispies bars don't actually need gluten – homemade bars are typically safe – and the Kellogg's version used to be gluten free, that is, until Kellogg's said it was "too inconvenient" for them to manufacture them that way. I can think of a few other things that are *inconvenient*. Play-Doh and certain shampoos also contain gluten, but I have no intention of eating them.

Evidently, there are a number of foods that don't have gluten that I'm still told to avoid, like fast food french fries. Since restaurants might fry them in the same oil they do breaded things, I could still ingest gluten. I read that a person with Celiac's is supposed to have their own toaster, even, to avoid

cross-contamination with other bread. There are a lot of rules and regulations with this disease, but I've always been one to make my own authority.

January through March is show choir season — my favorite season, — but it was a lot easier when I didn't have to be careful with what I ate. They had closed the concessions before the competition ended, so none of us have eaten a meal since before 3pm, and it is now 11:30. I internally kick myself for not packing more granola bars. "My stomach is literally trying to devour itself," I say to no one in particular as we crowd in the lobby of our hotel.

"I have some chocolate-covered sunflower seeds in my bag," says Rawley. I turn my head to my favorite freshman, eyes wide with excitement.

"Really? Can I have some?"

"Sure," he smiles. "I'll get them as soon as we get to our rooms." *Thank you, Rawley.*

I set the little baggie of sunflower seed on the counter and grab a handful, sitting on the hotel bed to scroll on my phone; the sunflower seeds are delicious. They're actually little clusters, each about the size of a dime. But after my third one I pause...I feel something, slowly lowering my phone. I look at Mallory and Emily, who sit on the other bed.

"What?" they ask when they see my face. Without saying anything I get up and turn the bag over in my hands to read the labels. *Contains wheat.*

Yikes. I stumble into the bathroom and slide down onto the floor, my stomach retching but nothing comes out.

Mallory and Emily stand just outside the bathroom when I open the door, obviously concerned. I see their brows furrowed with worry, so I say, "They had gluten, apparently," and laugh it off. Truthfully, though, those three bites have me decapitated. But that's only the story of 1 in 10. I don't always show symptoms, and I don't want

to think what would happen if someone finds out about when I do...because in truth, I don't want to avoid it. I say it's a 1 in 10 chance that my body reacts to eating gluten. *1 in 10.*

I think gluten is stupid. It's everywhere, and hard to avoid. I stopped telling people I have Celiac's. Sometimes I will say I just can't eat gluten, that *yes, there can be cross-contamination, no it's not a big deal, and oh, it's just a sensitivity.* Often times I say nothing. I feel as though saying I have this disease and ignoring it comes across as hypocritical, as if I'm invalidating others with the disease who *do* do things correctly. I should hate to do such a thing; so instead, I become a liar. Who can tell the difference between reckless and brave, anyway?

Murphy's Law Part IV: where resistance is found

Resistance: the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argue.

Bravery means showing mental or moral strength to face danger, fear, or difficulty, whereas the word recklessness means a lack of regard for the danger or consequences of one's actions.

I eat gluten — sometimes, on occasion. Sometimes the pain is worth it, and sometimes there is no pain. I'm a sucker for blueberry muffins, and I will never turn one down. I once try to bake my own, excitingly throw together the ingredients along with an entire box of gluten-free flour, only I forget I can't cook; they come out awful. So much wasted — time, money, flour — that I can't let them go to complete waste. By slathering each muffin in peanut butter, I can just manage to eat one — and *only one* — each day, washing it down with water, juice, anything to get rid of the taste.

I jump for joy and clap my hands two and a half weeks later when my dad tells me the final muffins have gone moldy.

It's just easier when I lie and eat *normal* muffins when I'm in public. Besides, one day I could eat an entire slice of pizza and feel nothing. I'm not going to give up the things I love just because I might get sick – why would I want to live like that? I've survived the past year and a half since my diagnosis doing things my own way; no need to change.

It's hit or miss, so I'll sometimes take the risk. It's only 1 in 10 after all...

It's April 2019. The floor is cold. The tiles, I know, are dirty, and I try not to think about just unsanitary it is to sit beside a dormitory toilette as the tears stream down my face. Even the effort of crying hurts. I hate myself for being here, for being unable to rid myself of the mistakes I made. I want the memory gone as well as the feeling – I want to throw up. But I can't.

I should have never eaten that s'more at the bonfire tonight. But it's America, and it's summer, and I was with my friends – how could I not eat one? As the photographer, I took photos to capture everyone else's memories; I didn't want to miss out on some of my own. So, I lit a marshmallow up in flames and sandwiched it between chocolate and graham and gluten and gluten and took a silly photo smiling with friends, and I hate myself for that memory.

The memory tastes good; the present leaves a sour taste in my mouth. For the past 4 hours I've been back and forth between my room and this floor, only able to force the tears out and nothing else. My roommate keeps coming to check on me. I even resorted to watching "tutorial" videos and shoving my index finger down my throat just to be rid of the pain. It all *hurts*, and nothing helps.

In another two hours I will finally get a shred of relief. An hour later I won't make it back to this floor, I and will have to clean my room at four in the morning. When I wash down my regret and take out the trash can I'll keep beside my bed, I will promise myself to never do that again.

That will be a lie. I'm good at lying to myself.

I think I'm crying now because I know I will continue to lie.

Murphy's Law Part V: where resilience is a victory

Resilience: the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness; tending to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change

"The entropy of the universe only increases and never decreases."

The odds are stacked against me, 1 in 10 deteriorating in entropy, becoming 5 in 10, 9 in 10. *10 in 10*. The more I fight, the worse I lose, but sometimes surrender is its own victory. This past summer, I really started to work on my health – exercise, eat right – but I still gave into gluten. My allergies got worse, as did my anxiety, and I started taking allergy shots and doing therapy to work on my crippling fear of bugs. Slowly, I began to imagine a life where there weren't so many things wrong with me, where my list of issues was much shorter, and I wasn't sure how to take it.

I asked my dad, "What am I supposed to do if I fix all my problems? That's what I'm known for."

He answered, "You will be known for you, not your problems."

Maybe gluten wasn't the problem. Maybe I'm more than the sum of my issues. Maybe self-love means taking care of myself and knowing I'm worth it, that hating – fighting against – and ignoring what's wrong won't make me any better.

It's late September now in 2019, the second time I've come home this semester. Earlier today we ate pasta, and my mom made me gluten free primavera. Last time I came home she made muffins; they turned out much better than mine ever would, and that's okay. Tonight, the four of us decided to watch a movie together, one about change and sacrifice and love. I'm in charge of snacks.

I take three bowls – one large for my parents and two little ones for Autum and I – and pour the popcorn in along with a bit of coconut oil and salt. I carry them back to the living room where the blinds are drawn, blankets strewn. I smile, sitting down on the couch, Bella jumping up to lay beside me. Moments later, my favorite movie begins: *Interstellar*. Immediately, I'm struck by the words spoken between father and daughter in the first part of the film:

Young Murphy: "Why did you and mom name me after something that's bad?"

Cooper: "Well, we didn't."

Murph: "Murphy's law?"

"Murphy's law doesn't mean that something bad will happen. It means that whatever can happen, will happen. And that sounded just fine to us."

Modeled after a universal truth. Things can get better. Whatever *can* happen, will happen, and that sounds just fine to me.