

John Carroll senior sees life clearly now

Molly Ann Pais has it all. She is less than a month away from graduating from The John Carroll School in Bel Air, has been a star defensive player on one of Baltimore's top girls high school lacrosse teams and boasts a 3.95 grade point average.

The success almost never happened.

During the spring five years ago, she experienced crippling headaches and projectile vomiting. Doctors were baffled. Some medical professionals wondered aloud if she was faking and suffering middle child syndrome.

As it turned out, the then-seventh grader had an undiagnosed ear infection that spread to a bone there. It eventually caused blood clots to form in her brain. Pais visited three different hospitals, eventually landing at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center. There, she was operated on twice by noted neurosurgeon Dr. Benjamin Carson.

"At one point, they didn't even know if I was going to live," Pais said. "It was very scary."

She experienced post-traumatic stress and anxiety attacks upon leaving the hospital. She admits to having moments where she was ready to give up.

Pais turned to God. As a child, she was a parishioner of Bel Air's St. Margaret parish and is now a member of St. Ignatius, Hickory. She received the sacrament of the anointing of the sick during one of her hospital stays.

"My faith got me through," Pais said. "I would pray all the time. I definitely consider myself a miracle child."

The clots had caused pressure on her ocular cavities.

"She'll live, but she'll probably be blind," the doctors said, according to Pais.

After 63 days in the hospital, Pais emerged emaciated, but determined to fight the doctor's prognosis.

"I did not want to accept that I was going to be blind the rest of my life," Pais said. "I did whatever I could do to strengthen my eyes or what I could do to re-strengthen the optic nerve. I would just sit and cover up my left eye, try to read or look around."

Her eyes improved, but there are still issues with depth perception and blind spots.

Positives emerged from Pais' ordeal. Her experience with Carson has inspired her to pursue studies in neuroscience and eventually become a physician's assistant.

"I've found that that is the essential social link between the doctor and the patient," she said. "I feel so grateful to be here. I knew I had to do my best. God gave me a second chance. I think it would be a letdown to myself and others if I just slacked off."

She found a home at John Carroll, where she was a successful tennis player, a member of the National Honor Society, the Spanish Honor Society, the Service Honor Society and the Romero Club, which does group service projects. She was once a regular contributor to the newspaper staff as well.

On the lacrosse field, Pais was a John Carroll captain the last two seasons and led the Patriots to the quarterfinals of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of Maryland A Conference tournament before a 16-15 loss to Notre Dame Preparatory School.

"This year was really great," Pais said. "Everyone really got along. We were all so close."

Pais is planning on playing lacrosse at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania next year.

Even though her fortunes have changed for the better, Pais hasn't stopped talking to God.

"He's definitely there to see us through," Pais said. "He helped me through my illness and helps me every day. He's always there to guide us."