

sisterly LOVE

Kneeling in the toy kitchen, senior Eden Eckstrom listens to her little sister Lucy. “Ha- ha- ha- hot...” “Hot dog?” Eden chimes in. This is Eden and Lucy’s evening ritual as Eden tries to increase her little sister’s vocabulary each time they play together.

Lucy, who is almost 5, demands a little more attention than the average child her age. This was apparent to Eden and her parents when they first noticed that one of Lucy’s eyes was slightly crossed. As they continued to watch her grow they realized that Lucy was not crawling or walking at the same rate that other babies were.

“I wondered why she wasn’t growing like other kids were and if something was wrong with her, but we were in denial,” Eden said. “We always wanted to be positive.”

After years of monitoring, Lucy was diagnosed with dyspraxia at age 3. Dyspraxia is a developmental coordination disorder that can affect the planning of movements and coordination. In other words, the brain’s messages are not being accurately sent to the body.

“It makes her really clumsy and not able to do really agile things like climb the monkey bars,” Eden said.

When it was time for Lucy to begin making sounds, she was not able to. This was when Lucy’s doctors discovered her apraxia. Similar to dyspraxia, the messages from the brain are not obeyed by the body. While dyspraxia deals with the physical aspect of the body, apraxia is the most severe speech disorder one could have.

“[Apraxia] makes your brain not be able to connect the words to your mouth so your mouth cannot form the words,” Eden said. “She knows the words in her head, but she just can’t say them.”

Lucy has had a very unconventional childhood thus far, consisting of speech and physical therapy. She has had to work harder than other children in order to accomplish certain tasks.

“She should be speaking full sentences [like] the average 5-year-old,” Eden said. “She should be able to respond to you like a normal person would respond. She cannot tell you exactly what she is feeling or thinking.”

While Lucy’s disorders have presented challenges, they have not affected her relationship with her sister. Eden adores her little sister and loves to spend time with her.

“She is the cutest thing ever,” Eden said. “She is so funny, and even though she can’t really talk we’re super close and really connected. She is always up and doing something; she never wants to sit down. She’s my little best friend that can’t really talk. She is just a lot of fun and loves attention.”

Being her older sister, Eden has many responsibilities and holds herself accountable for being one of Lucy’s main teachers. Her responsibilities range from teaching Lucy to ride a bike to helping her form sentences.

“I try not to say a lot of bad words around her,” Eden said. “I work on her speech with her. If she goes to speech therapy and is working on something new I’ll help her say those words. It is my job to make sure that she is getting better at that. I try and help her learn new things. She is just now learning how to ride a bike, but her feet won’t touch the pedals, but she knows she is supposed to pedal. I’m supposed to help her

with potty training too but that’s not my favorite. I just take care of her and help her learn.”

Lucy is in preschool at Eanes Elementary and is placed in a class mixed with both students who have disabilities and students who do not.

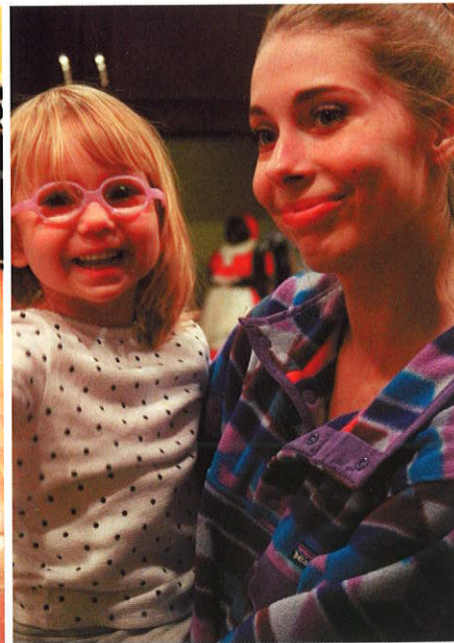
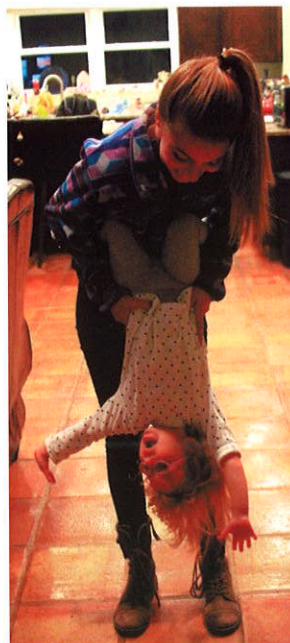
“She is a funny person,” Eden said, “She gets really excited about school buses and before that she would always watch bus videos on YouTube. When we were walking her to the bus stop for the first time she was just completely silent and in awe of it. When she got home she could not stop talking about the bus.”

Nothing about Lucy’s situation is abnormal or different to Eden or Lucy. It is how they go about life and how they depend on each other. The duo spend some time every day together and love every minute of it.

“I cannot imagine leaving for college,” Eden said. “That is going to be so hard. I can’t imagine not seeing her every day and not saying ‘good morning’ and ‘good night’ to her. I can call her and FaceTime with her but it’s not the same. It’s going to

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—senior Eden Eckstrom



Senior Eden Eckstrom plays with her 5-year-old sister Lucy. Lucy has apraxia and dyspraxia, conditions that make it very difficult for her to speak and move.

Sibling bond helps child cope with disabilities

be really hard on me, and pretty hard on her, I imagine.”

While Eden and her family have become accustomed to Lucy’s disorder, it is not always easy.

“The most challenging part is not being able to tell what’s wrong,” Eden said. “In some ways she can tell us what is wrong when she is crying or hurt but she can’t tell us what she feels specifically. I know she wants to, and it’s hard to watch her not be able to tell us. We try harder and harder every day to understand her more and more, but we can’t always understand her.”

Lucy’s disabilities have affected Eden directly. While she isn’t the one physically dealing with the hardships of the disabilities, she still cares for her sister and takes the emotional aspects of the condition very personally.

“I don’t want people to look at Lucy differently,” Eden said. “I hate the word retarded. I’ve heard it being said about Lucy and it kills me because she is not retarded. She is very smart. Even though she is disabled in some ways, she is able to do a lot of things. She can do a lot of things she just does it in her own way. I’m proud of everything she does every single day because she tries really hard to be like a normal kid. Her disorder is her normal. I just think people shouldn’t look at other people with disorders as being retarded or stupid, it’s how they were born. It’s their normal even if it’s not your normal. Don’t look at what they can’t do, look at what they can do.” ♦

—Zhouie Martinez



photos by Lucy Wimmer

To help her develop speech and movement, Eden plays with Lucy every day. The two sisters have a very strong relationship.