

**The World of Epilepsy:  
A Caregiver's Perspective**

by

Peyton Welch

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Cast of Characters

JASON.....Husband of Candace, Late 30's  
 CANDACE.....Wife of Jason, Late 30's  
 KIRK.....Husband of Miranda, Late 40's  
 MANDY.....Single, Late 30's  
 RICKI.....Mother of Danny, Late 60's  
 DAVID.....Husband of Leeann/Good Ole' Boy, Late 50's  
 LEEANN.....Wife of David/Good Ole' Gal, Early 50's

**TIME:** Present Day

**PLACE:** Small Auditorium

**SETTING:** SL reveals a total of eight chairs and one table with various snacks, sodas/waters, paper plates and a sign-in sheet on a clipboard with pen. Seven chairs are placed side by side and one chair is placed next to the table.

**NOTES:**

- Although technical elements are intended for the production, the play may be modified for touring/venue purposes. These adaptations are available upon request.
- There is a requirement to provide guests with the following information for any production of this play: a list of epilepsy facts that comes included with the script (your group may provide additional information and/or modified epilepsy statistics/information upon approval from the author); although donations are not required, it is required to offer a donation opportunity, either at the beginning or the end of each performance, to an epilepsy fund (a suggested list of epilepsy funds are available upon request; community funds are also allowed, as long as they are epilepsy related and approved by the author).
- Caregiver's testimonies throughout the U.S. are to be displayed/rotated before each show begins. These testimonies will be provided in a slide format.
- For additional information/questions and/or to produce this play, please contact the author directly: Peyton Welch at [peytonwelch@hotmail.com](mailto:peytonwelch@hotmail.com)

## Thank You

First and foremost, I want to thank God for His many blessings and the healing of my seizures.

I also want to thank my wife, Regina. She is a blessing from God and contributes daily to my well-being as a person, both medically and emotionally. I'm also very grateful to my mom and dad for their support, as well as the many family members/friends that have helped with my healing. I love you all very much!

There have been many people that have contributed to the contents of this play. The following are individuals that have shared his/her personal stories, as well as an epilepsy support group based in Little Rock, AR, that has positively affected many lives and continues to do so.

**Epilepsy Education and Group Support (E.E.G.S) of Arkansas**  
**Jason and Candace Baltz**  
**Kirk and Miranda Wilkes**  
**Mandy Crow**  
**Ricki Distin**

Many Caregivers throughout the U.S. have also shared their testimonies with me online and have greatly contributed to the contents of this play. Due to privacy, only their first names are mentioned: **Charles, Kendra, Mike, Jon, Leslie, Mary and Darlena.**

Also, thanks to all of those who specialize in epilepsy on the medical field. A special thanks to Dr. Towbin, who has personally contributed to my healing, and many others. Without Dr. Towbin, there's a great chance I wouldn't be writing this play.

Finally, I want to thank Gabby Harris, as she contributed greatly to the transcribing of interviews, as well as my professor, Sally Bailey, of Kansas State University. Basically, Sally worked as the Editor - for FREE! Thanks Sally!

There are many ways to learn more about epilepsy. The following are simply suggestions:

**Epilepsy Foundation:** <http://www.epilepsy.com/>

**Center for Disease Control and Prevention**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/epilepsy/index.html>

**American Epilepsy Society:** <https://www.aesnet.org/>

**Facebook:** Team Epilepsy, Epilepsy Foundation of America, Epilepsy Support, Epilepsy Advocate, and Epilepsy Society of Arkansas.

## The World of Epilepsy: A Caregiver's Perspective

### SCENE 1

(DARK STAGE. A photo of the brain is displayed via screen CS. Only the photo can be seen as the definition of epilepsy is read in unison by JASON, KIRK, MANDY, and RICKI. All actors are standing under the photo of the brain. They are wearing jeans and purple shirts, standing still and reading the following definition.)

JASON, KIRK, MANDY & RICKI

Epilepsy: When nerve cells in the brain fire electrical impulses at a rate of up to four times higher than normal. This causes a sort of electrical storm in the brain, known as a seizure. A pattern of repeated seizures is referred to as epilepsy.

(Lights fade up on CS.)

JASON (steps forward)

Known causes of epilepsy include: head injuries.

KIRK (steps forward)

Brain tumors.

MANDY (steps forward)

Lead poisoning.

RICKI (steps forward)

Mal-development of the brain.

EVERYONE

Genetic and infectious illnesses. Select causes of epilepsy include...

JASON

Strokes and brain tumors.

KIRK

Brain infection.

MANDY

Traumatic brain injury or head injury.

RICKI

Loss of oxygen to the brain.

EVERYONE

(*Beat.*) Welcome to the world of epilepsy.

(Lights fade CS. Actors exit  
and lights rise SL.)

*SCENE 2*

(As the lights fade up SL,  
seven chairs are revealed. A  
table is placed left of the  
seven chairs. CANDACE, a  
woman in her late 30's, is  
wearing a solid white shirt  
and jeans. She is placing  
various snacks on the table.  
One chair is placed behind  
the table, as well as a sign  
that reads, "Welcome to the  
Monthly Meeting of Purple  
With A Purpose." LEEANN, a  
woman in her late 50's, and  
DAVID, a man in his late 50's  
enter. Both are wearing  
casual clothing.)

DAVID

Excuse me. Are we in the right place?

CANDACE

Depends on what you're looking for.

DAVID

Oh, I'm sorry. We're looking for a seizure group meeting.

CANDACE

You are indeed. Welcome to our monthly group support  
meeting.

LEEANN

This is our first time to attend, so we just wanted to make sure.

CANDACE

You didn't look familiar to me. It's a pleasure meeting you. I'm Candace. I'm in charge here, or as my husband says, I'm in charge of everything.

(DAVID and LEEANN laugh.)

DAVID

I can already tell I'm gonna love this group! I'm David, and this is my wife, Leeann.

CANDACE (points to snacks)

Help yourself.

LEEANN

You shouldn't tell him that. There won't be no snacks left for nobody. (*Laughs.*)

(MANDY enters SL and approaches table, grabs some snacks/drink and signs in on clipboard.)

MANDY

Thanks so much for bringing food, Candace. I'm always hungry when I get here. Tuesdays are always busy for me at work, never time to eat. I'm starving!

CANDACE

You know the routine. Dig in.

(RICKI enters SL and approaches table, grabs some snacks/drink and signs in on clipboard.)

RICKI (to CANDACE)

Hey, young lady.

CANDACE

Hey, Ricki. Glad you could make it.

RICKI

Me, too.

(RICKI sits, as JASON and KIRK enter SL. They both head directly to the chairs and sit. They're obviously tired.)

JASON

Hey, baby. Will you bring me a soda?

CANDACE

Just because I'm your wife, doesn't mean I'm your slave!

JASON

Sorry. It's been a long day at work.

DAVID

Now that's funny!

(EVERYONE looks at DAVID, as LEEANN gives him a "dirty" look.)

CANDACE

Everyone, this is David and his wife, Leeann. This is their first time attending.

(EVERYONE replies: "Glad you could make it/Glad you're here," etc. CANDACE looks at her watch.)

All right, it's 6pm. It's time to get started.

JASON

Yeah. Don't mess with her schedule. I almost got shot once!

CANDACE (sarcastically)

Ha ha. Very funny. (*Beat.*) Welcome to our monthly group support meeting of "Purple With A Purpose."

DAVID

Love the name!

(LEEANN gives him another  
"dirty" look.)

CANDACE

Thanks, David. Since purple is the national color for Epilepsy Awareness, I had to use it. And by the way, since ya'll are new to this group, I'll give you and your wife an update on this meeting. We normally have Caregivers AND those with epilepsy - such as myself - on the last Tuesdays of each month. However, this month we decided to only meet as Caregivers.

DAVID

I never heard of just a Caregivers meeting. God knows that's exactly what we need.

LEEANN

Amen! We drove almost two hours just to attend this meeting.

DAVID

Our daughter, Stefanie, couldn't make it. She has seizures and gets tired real easy. Hopefully, she can make the next meeting.

CANDACE

We understand. Thanks so much for coming. We're a family here, so welcome aboard.

CANDACE

(*Referring to DAVID and LEEANN.*) Since it's their first meeting, let's briefly go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please tell them your name, relationship to loved one with epilepsy and their official diagnosis.

KIRK

But you have epilepsy.

CANDACE

Yes, but I've also been leading this group for nine years and will continue to do so. Thank you very much!

JASON

See what I mean? (*EVERYONE laughs.*)

I guess I'll start. My name is Jason and my beautiful wife, Candace, has what the doctor refers to as generalized



JASON (Cont'd)

epilepsy. Basically, she has seizures everywhere in her brain. No specific location. She was diagnosed when she was fifteen.

RICKI

My name is Ricki and my son, Danny, has complex partial seizures. He was diagnosed in '91.

KIRK

Hey. I'm Kirk. I'm married to Miranda. If she has a seizure, it's guaranteed to be a grand mal. She was sixteen when her parents first saw one, but she coulda had one before then. We just don't know.

MANDY

Hi. I'm Mandy. Ethan, my son, had complex partial seizures, but now they're generalized. He was diagnosed when he was seven months old. He's now nine and the light of my life. (*Starts to tear up.*)

(CANDACE acknowledges DAVID and LEEANN.)

CANDACE

How about you guys?

DAVID

Well, like I said, my daughter Stefanie has epilepsy. I'm a loved one, but this lady right here (*Points to LEEANN.*) is the real Caregiver.

LEEANN (to DAVID)

You help, too. (*Back to EVERYONE.*) Stefanie had Hydrocephalus, and due to that - that's what made her have somethin' like a stroke - that's what causes her epilepsy. She's 'bout 2 ½ years old when she had her first seizure.

RICKI

That's young.

LEEANN

I know. And at the time, I didn't know nothin' 'bout epilepsy. I didn't know epilepsy and seizures was the same. I learned they was, 'cause I knew they used to call 'em "fits," and now they call 'em epilepsy and seizures.

CANDACE

Fits? I've never heard that term.

KIRK

Me neither.

LEEANN

When I's growin' up, my Grandma took in one of her friends who was havin' "fits." This friend would get down on the floor, flop around like a fish outta water, and I'm like, "Grandma, what's wrong with her?" and she said, "She's just havin' a fit."

KIRK

Now ain't that crazy!

CANDACE

You learn somethin' new every day. (*Grabs a bowl with various pieces of paper and shakes it up.*) All right, let's talk about some questions you Caregivers emailed me since our last meeting.

(CANDACE acknowledges LEEANN, and DAVID. She points to the CAREGIVERS in the room.)

I asked them to send me questions about some struggles they face as a Caregiver. The questions are anonymous, so no judgments are passed.

DAVID

Great!

CANDACE

Let's begin.

(She draws from the bowl and reads the following question.)

*What was your reaction to your loved one's first seizure, and how did it change your life?*

(The room is quiet. RICKI then raises her hand.)

RICKI

I'll start.

CANDACE

Thanks, Ricki! I always love your honesty.

RICKI

You're welcome.

(EVERYONE but RICKI freezes, as she heads SR. The lights fade out SL, as RICKI begins her monologue.)

I must begin by saying God is good. Of course, I'll never forget my son's first seizure, but I also know without God's grace, Danny wouldn't be alive today. As for when my life was changed - my family's life - I remember it like yesterday. Danny was out with some of his friends, swirling around country roads, just enjoying the beautiful day. He was almost eighteen and loving life. Next thing I know, my husband and I received a phone call and were told to come to the hospital immediately. We didn't know what was wrong, but we knew it was serious.

When we arrived at the hospital, we were rushed to the ER and there he was, my son, always smiling, making me and his dad laugh constantly, was motionless in a hospital bed, quadriplegic and brain-damaged. The medical staff flooded the room, as they worked diligently trying one drug after another, running tests, drawing blood. Eventually, the doctors said he wouldn't live 24 hours. I thought I was dreaming. My husband thought he was dreaming. It was the worst day of our lives.

My husband is a pastor, so loving and understanding. He hugged me and comforted me. All the while, I know he was terrified. He said, "God has blessed us this far and He'll continue to do so. It's in His hands now." Yeah, right! Maybe He'll use His feet, 'cause His hands aren't working! Needless to say, I was scared, desperate and angry, all at the same time.

As we continued to storm Heaven with our prayers, we felt overwhelmed by the storm raging in Danny's brain. To stand by helplessly as Danny's body and brain convulsed

RICKI (Cont'd)

continually was anguishing. They finally transferred our son to a larger hospital.

The seizures continued to assault Danny even under heavy medication as hours turned into days. Initially, the seizures went undiagnosed and overlooked because they were focal, limited to twitches on one side of his face and one arm. On the third day, after almost continual convulsions, our prayers broke through. The doctors found the "trigger" - hypothyroidism, and the right meds to sedate him. As soon as treatment began, the seizures became manageable.

I now realize my husband is right - God is in control. I hang on to one of my favorite scriptures, Psalms 139:16, "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

(The lights fade up SL, as RICKI walks back to her chair and sits. EVERYONE becomes "unfrozen." DAVID stands and throws up his hands.)

DAVID

Preach it, girlfriend!

LEEANE

(*Shocked. Pulls DAVID back to seat.*) Sit down, David!

(EVERYONE laughs.)

LEEANN

I'm so sorry. Sometimes - most times - he don't know when to be quiet.

JASON

Wow, Ricki! That's unbelievable. I never knew your full story. You always look so happy in our meetings.

RICKI

I don't call it happy. I called it blessed. Despite the many challenges I've experienced on this earth, I now have peace. Through many prayers and many tears, I feel - I know - I've been given an opportunity to view every day through both a microscope and a telescope.

MANDY

How so?

RICKI

With my "Life *Microscope*" I've become more aware of my tiny, daily, often overlooked blessings and achievements. I now have a really low "thrill threshold." I remember the day, years ago, when Danny had "goose pimples" for the first time since the accident, an autonomic response we take for granted.

My "Life *Telescope*" gives me a glimpse of a vast created expanse far above me...far beyond my limited understanding and control. That glimpse has given me the audacity to believe for much more than my finite existence. Danny has survived against all medical predictions! He has even outlived several of the physicians who "knew" he couldn't possibly survive. (*Laughs.*)

DAVID

I don't know nothin' 'bout telescopes, but I do know without God's help, we probably wouldn't be here today. None of us. (*To EVERYONE.*) As for our daughter, Stefanie, she's also a miracle.

LEEANN

Yeah. She's 33 years old and she's had 38 surgeries.

JASON

38 surgeries?!

LEEANN

Yep. That's why we say she's a miracle.

CANDACE

I'm sure you remember the first seizure she ever had.

LEEANN

You bet I do. I was workin', but David was home when Stefanie showed up. She was comin' in from the center where she now gets physical therapy. She's throwin' up. Quit breathin'. Her lips was turnin' blue. David grabbed her and headed out the door. My step-dad happened to pull up. He got in the truck, said, "We got to take her to the doctor!"

DAVID

All the time we's performin' CPR.

LEEANN

David just barged in, said, "Sorry Doc, I gotta have your help now, 'cause she's not breathin'." So my step-dad come down to where I was workin' and said, "Your daughter just had her a grand mal seizure and she's at the doctor's office. She's not breathin'." And when he said she wasn't breathin', I just went to cryin'. When I got to the doctor's office, she was as white as I could see. They had somethin' in her mouth to keep her from chokin'. She had blood runnin' down, and I almost passed out.

CANDACE

I'm surprised the doctors put something in her mouth. That's not a good thing to do if somebody's having a seizure.

LEEANN

I don't remember exactly what they was doin'. I just know it was somethin' medical.

JASON

That just drives me crazy! Just because somebody's havin' a seizure, doesn't mean to put something in their mouth. That's almost more dangerous than a seizure itself.

CANDACE

Just for the record, we all need to make sure our family and friends know what to do.

DAVID

I've heard a lot of different things. What do ya'll suggest?

CANDACE

There's a lot that can be done. One of the most important is to not hold down or move the person. Don't force anything, especially your fingers, into the person's mouth.

JASON

Remember when Olive's son had a seizure?

CANDACE

Oh, yeah. That was crazy! She tried to hold him down. As a result, it chipped his teeth and fractured his jaw. Plus, she almost got bit!

KIRK

I tried to hold Miranda down once and she cold-cocked me. I had to go to the ER afterwards.

CANDACE

Did you learn your lesson?

KIRK

What do you think?

*(EVERYONE laughs.)*

DAVID

Makes sense to me. There's no doubt seizures can be tough. *(To LEEANN.)* Do you remember the one at the creek?

LEEANN

Oh yea. When Stefanie was 'bout four, we was at the creek swimmin', and she started goin' into one. And so I had my husband and another guy - 'cause she was pretty big - get 'er up and outta the water the best we could. And I had to sit behind her, straddle my legs over her, hold her arms and hold my head back like this. She just wanted to claw her legs with her hands. Anything she could reach, she wanted to claw like a cat.

DAVID

Be harmful to herself, ya know.

LEEANN

When we got 'er home, she woke up and said, "What happened Mom?" She said, "I can remember us swimming and that's it."

DAVID

Now that was scary. *(Beat.)* Sorry to take up so much time, but I got another question.

CANDACE

Ask away.

DAVID

Now, I know this seems like a simple question, but I think it's important. How do ya'll define epilepsy?

LEEANN

That's not a question from that jar.

CANDACE

All questions are important. Let's go around the room. Kirk, how do you define epilepsy?

KIRK

Most people think it's contagious. They just stand around and stare. It just scares 'em. I can remember the first time I saw a seizure. I was in junior high, and everybody was around this girl, and she was just floppin', ya know, like that. I had never seen anything like it. It really freaked me out. Then the principal explained to everybody in school the next day, 'cuz she had to stay out a couple of days. Fortunately, before I saw Miranda have her first seizure, I read up on it, so I was kinda prepared when it happened.

CANDACE

What about you, Jason?

JASON

Umm...just people that have seizures, I guess.

CANDACE

Fair enough. How about you, Mandy?

MANDY

It would be a...umm...basically, I call it a disorder of the brain. Something is causing a misfire in the brain.

RICKI

I agree. I like to call it a brain storm.

CANDACE

I know Donna's not here tonight, but I love her definition. She says it means, "You're wired defectively at the factory."

(EVERYONE laughs. CANDACE acknowledges DAVID and LEEANN.)

How about ya'll?

DAVID

I say it's when the body don't function normally. It goes into a spastic condition.



LEEANN

Yeah, spastic. You have no control.

CANDACE

Thanks. Those are great definitions. Alright, let's draw from the bowl again.

(She reaches into the bowl and grabs another question.)

*I've heard some epilepsy patients have tried new diets that helped their seizures. Has anybody tried one of these diets, and if so, did it work?*

MANDY (raises hand quickly)

I've got a funny story...well, it's a bit sad, too.

(EVERYONE but MANDY freezes, as she heads SR. The lights fade out SL, as MANDY begins her monologue.)

At first my son, Ethan, tried the Modified Atkins Diet, also called MAD. Basically, it's a very low carb, high protein and high fat diet. It's been pretty successful with a lot of kids, but not with Ethan. He was only allowed sixteen carbs a day. And that's hardly nothin'.

Let's see, he was about five or six, and he loved those Cheetos cheese puffs, but, because of his carb allowance, he could only have two or three puffs a day. I would try to eat very similar to him, because I thought that's only fair, you know, that Mom eats similar to what Ethan's eating.

Well, I was sitting on the couch, and he was sitting next to me, and we were having our little cheese puffs. We're watching TV, and I'm really not payin' attention. Anyway, I had been eating my puffs and didn't wanna touch anything, 'cause I didn't want the orange on the couch. So, I kinda had my hand out like this and I was waiting for a commercial, so I could get up and wash my hands. And all of sudden, I felt something sucking on my fingers, and he was sucking the orange! He was so hungry. He was sucking the orange, little Cheetos crumbs off my fingers. And that just broke my heart. Well, needless to say, the diet didn't work. I caught him one time digging in the trash, because

MANDY (Cont'd)

he was so hungry. So I ended up taking him off the diet. It just didn't work for us.

(The lights fade up SL, as MANDY walks back to her chair and sits. EVERYONE becomes "unfrozen.")

DAVID (teary-eyed)

I'll never eat cheese puffs again.

MANDY

I know, right? (*Laughs.*) Actually, I'm a big pro on the diet. It just didn't work for us. I've personally seen it work for a child before. This kid was taking a ton of meds daily, so much meds that he was practically a zombie. But, he went on that diet and ended up being so successful they were able to get him off all his seizure meds. And he has not had a seizure since.

DAVID

I know this ain't no diet or medicine, but what about a Vagus Nerve Stimulator. Anybody heard of that?

JASON

Candace had a VNS installed.

CANDACE

Installed? Really? That sounds like we just got a new washing machine - "installed."

(*EVERYONE laughs.*)

JASON

But first, she had to have a couple of heart surgeries done.

RICKI

I never knew she had heart surgeries.

JASON

Most people don't. She actually had a heart cath done to check out the "plumbin' part." (*Laughs.*) They went in and started lookin' at the electrical part and had to do a couple of abrasions.

RICKI

So, has that helped?

JASON

Big time! It's been a huge blessing.

DAVID

Amen! You know I'm all about those blessings.

CANDACE

Thanks, Jason. (*Blows kiss his way.*) Let's draw another question.

(*She reaches into the bowl and grabs another question.*)

*Is there anything you want the general public to know about epilepsy?*

KIRK

Education, education, education!

(*EVERYONE but KIRK freezes, as he heads SR. The lights fade out SL, as KIRK begins his monologue.*)

Well, I've mentioned this before, but it's all about education. Everyone needs to be educated, but especially the police forces. Let's just say they see somebody comin' out of a seizure. Well, the first thing they think, "They're on drugs. They're on meth." I remember one time me and Miranda was gettin' ready to vote. We's walkin' outta...I think it was a church...anyway, she had a seizure right there. Next thing I know, there's some cop sayin', "Well, I'm gonna call 911." And I said, "Well, ya call 'em, you pay the bill. 'Cuz I'm tellin' ya, don't call 'em. She's havin' a seizure. I know what to do." He tried to argue with me, and I got a little mouthy with him. Fortunately, it didn't turn into a bad situation for me. But, ya know, it's really pretty bad he didn't know. I remember another seizure she had once at the state fair. We was goin' to see a country concert. I went to get us a drink, like lemonade. And then I saw a big crowd gatherin' around her. Automatic. I knew what it was. Then the ambulance people, ya know, they were there. The paramedics. They said, "We're gonna have to rush her to the hospital." I said, "No you're not.

KIRK (Cont'd)

You cain't take her. I'm not givin' you permission to take her. I'm overridin' ya'll." So then the manager come out, ya know, of the ambulance people, and I think he was wantin' to throw down. And more or less, I told him what I'd do, so I'm just gonna leave it like that. And...uhh...he was really angry with me. But what we did, we went up to their little trailer they had set up at the fair. Let her regain herself, where she knew where she was. Then I brought my vehicle, picked her up and headed home. Everything was ok in about three or four hours. Now, don't get me wrong, if a seizure is real lengthy, she's goin' straight to the ER and having neurologists and neurosurgeons meet us there. I'm not against gettin' help. It just gets frustratin' sometimes. I mean, some people still think it's contagious, that people with seizures are possessed. It just scares 'em. Miranda even says she feels branded sometimes, even by her own family. There's all kind of education out there. Go to the library, use the internet, talk to friends that have it. Just make an effort. Every effort counts.

(The lights fade up SL, as KIRK walks back to his chair and sits. EVERYONE becomes "unfrozen.")

MANDY

You're right, Kirk. Every effort counts. I've been doin' a little research myself and found something called Charlotte's Web. Anyone heard of it?

JASON

I think I've heard that name before.

MANDY

Well, it's a very interesting idea. First of all, I am such an anti-weed person. (*Laughs.*) I can't stand pot smoking, weed smoking and all that.

JASON

That's a bit harsh.

MANDY

I'm just being honest.

RICKI

So what about this Charlotte's Web thing?

MANDY

There's a little girl named Charlotte, and she was having a ton of seizures, up to 300 grand mals per week. Her parents tried everything to help her, but nothing worked. Well, there are these brothers...they're Christian brothers...and they started a crop of marijuana in Colorado.

JASON

I bet that didn't go over well.

MANDY

There's definitely some controversy. Anyway, one of the brothers...and I'm gonna semi-quote him...said, "You can take the biggest pot head, and he can try to smoke every one of my crops, and he's not gonna get high," because they don't grow it with the THC, or whatever it's called, the stuff that makes you high. They just do it for the oil. Well, like I said, their parents at this point were desperate to try anything. So they went to Colorado, got the oil and they just swear it practically cured their daughter's epilepsy. There's a certain mixture, and I wanna say those brothers named it after her, 'cause she did so well with it, so I guess that's why they called it Charlotte's Web.

JASON

It sounds good and all, but some people just don't believe in that stuff. It's illegal most places.

MANDY

I know and I'm a bit skeptical myself. But I do believe that God has given us things that can be used properly. I also believe if it does work, and you're not getting high, and it's not damaging anything, it's worth considering. But I also don't want to do anything that will potentially get my son taken away either, you know, so I'm kinda waiting 'till he gets a little older, and more research is done. I'm not saying I agree, but it's definitely something to consider.

CANDACE

For me, I'd rather a person be educated and know first aid and know what to do, versus a loved one staring over me and

CANDACE (Cont'd)

say, "Oh dear God! Is she gonna die? I don't know what to do."

LEEANN

And if that's their first seizure they seen ya have, then they're really confused.

CANDACE

Right. And if they had just known that the person had seizures or epilepsy, they coulda just educated themselves before having someone come over.

KIRK

See what I mean? Education is a must!

RICKI

Do you remember my friend Donna?

CANDACE

You bet I do! (*Laughs.*)

JASON

I don't think I've met her.

RICKI

Well, she has a daughter named Vanessa with epilepsy. When she was growing up, Donna wanted her to have a normal life.

DAVID

Whatever "normal" means!

(Everyone laughs.)

RICKI

She wanted Vanessa to do the "spend the night" thing with her girlfriends, so she educated everybody in contact with her. She didn't want them cramming spoons down her throat. Even on Vanessa's move-in date in college, she gathered the roommates and said, "Ok. We gotta have a discussion." (*Laughs.*) I can just imagine her doing that. She'll do anything it takes to protect her daughter.

LEEANN

Well, we got our education from the fear of learning, ya know, when Stefanie had her first seizure. I'm like, what I'm gonna do? I was just panicking, ya know.

DAVID

Ya know, another thing that drives me nuts, is people thinkin' epilepsy folks have a lower IQ than a "normal" person. Anybody ever experienced that? It irritates me, 'cause I've seen lots in my lifetime. In other words, they're saying, "'Cause they have seizures, or they have epilepsy, that they're not intelligent people." I'm tellin' ya, their minds works like a clock. I mean, it's better than mine most of the time. (*Laughs.*) But sometimes they cain't relay it to us. They're sharp.

CANDACE

I'm glad we all agree on one thing - education is key! All right, let's pull out one more question before our time is up.

(She reaches into the bowl and grabs another question.)

*Use only one word to describe epilepsy.*

(CANDACE responds quickly.)

Hope!

JASON

Hey, these questions are for Caregivers.

CANDACE

I can't help it. I want everyone to know there is hope, especially the Caregivers.

(EVERYONE but CANDACE freezes, as she heads SR. The lights fade out SL, as CANDACE begins her monologue.)

Last week I was working my night shift at the coffee shop. I just served a lady a vanilla mocha...and yes, I remember most of my drinks! I noticed about thirty minutes later she was crying, or about to cry. She was trying to hide it. I wanted to make sure I didn't offend her or mess up her order, so I went to her table and said, "I'm not trying to be nosey, but I want to make sure I didn't do anything to offend you." Of course, she said, "No," and I turned to leave. Then I stopped. I could tell something was really wrong, so I asked her one more time, "Are you sure you're

CANDACE (Cont'd)

ok?" Then she really started to cry. I sat down and started listening. It turns out her daughter was recently diagnosed with epilepsy. I couldn't believe it. This was more than just a circumstance. Well, she took her daughter to her first doctor's appointment. The daughter threw a fit, showing anger to her mom, and especially the receptionist. It turns out, her older sister had seizures, as well as her aunt. Next thing you know, the daughter was blaming it all on her mom, said it was all her fault. As the mom kept blowing her nose on the napkins, I finally told her, "I have epilepsy, too." She started apologizing for crying so much, that she didn't mean to offend me. I told her, "Don't apologize. Your daughter's gonna be like that for a while, especially if she was just diagnosed." I said, "You can lock her in a closet if you want, throw away the key." Of course, I was only kidding, trying to make her laugh. Finally I said, "She's gonna be mad at you, especially if she doesn't know the full reason where it came from. She's just puttin' all the blame on you right now. But it's ok. Just love her." This lady just kept apologizing, saying how sorry she was, how it was all her fault. But then I told her, "I don't know what it's like from your perspective, but I do know there's always hope, even with having seizures." I said, "I used to not be able to drive, but now I can. I never thought I could have a child, but now I have a son who is the joy of my life. I'm on stable medication, and now I can even work full-time. Do I still have seizures? Yes. But they are so much better and so is my life." The lady wiped her eyes and said, "Thank you. I've never seen hope in something like this." And I told her, "God works in mysterious ways." She gave me a hug and even her email address if I wanted to stay in touch. I told her about our monthly meetings and said we'd love her daughter to come, too. I thought about the many obstacles I've overcome, and most importantly, it reminded me that there's always hope.

(The lights fade up SL, as CANDACE walks back to her chair and sits. EVERYONE becomes "unfrozen.")

RICKI

Thanks so much for sharing, Candace. I know this is a Caregivers meeting, but it's great for us to know your perspective too.



CANDACE

Thanks, Ricki.

RICKI

As for me, I think of "Manageable." I know there are some challenges, but my motto is, "Look them full on and fight!" Pray! Find docs with success stories. Don't be afraid to try a variety of treatments. It's not a "one size fits all" problem. Connect with other families or individuals who have been there and who offer positive, encouraging ideas and advice. You don't need "Debby Downer". You need practical, successful solutions that will assist you long term.

KIRK

I like hearing all the positive words, but I think of "Disability." I mean, having seizures is disabling someone from doing something that you and I can do. But this person can't do it, because of their disability.

CANDACE

Thanks for your honesty. (*Looks at MANDY.*) How about you?

MANDY

I kinda agree with Kirk. I think of the word "Fear." I try not to live in it, but I'm often scared about tomorrow. It's never promised, especially with my son having seizures.

JASON

I think of "Comfort." Although I do fear on occasion, God has been good to me and Candace, and that's what I want to focus on.

CANDACE

Thanks, Jason. That means a lot to me.

(*Looks at DAVID and LEEANN.*)

How about you guys? One word that describes epilepsy?

DAVID

You know me. I'm not about one word! (*Laughs.*)

LEEANN

Yeah. Every time he speaks, it's a novel.

DAVID

Well, for Stefanie, I think of the word "Chains." It's almost like she lives in depression 24/7.

LEEANN

Yeah. Always sayin', "Right now I wish I was dead, 'cause I'm crippled. I cain't use my left hand like you can. I cain't cook. I cain't do this. I cain't do that." And so she's goin' through this phase that she just wants to give up on life, 'cause she thinks she's a burden to us. She thinks she's a burden to herself, 'cause she cain't do these things for herself, but yet, she gets up in the morning. She gets dressed. She'll fix her a bowl of cereal. She'll take her medicine. She'll make a pot of coffee, and I'll say, "Now, if you cain't do nothin', how did all of this get done?"

DAVID

That's right. She can do a lot of great things and we tell 'er that every day. Ya know, she's a huge blessin'. It's just hard tryin' to convince 'er how special she is.

LEEANN

That's like this mornin'. The first thing that come outta her mouth was, "I just wish God would take me." She said, "Jesus died at 33. Why cain't I die at 33?" I said, "'Cause God don't want you right now. 'Cause God's got you here. I don't know what for, but He's the man with the blueprints, and when you get to Heaven, you'll get to ask Him what you were here for. But don't you know how many people's hearts you've touched and changed by just bein' you and bein' happy?" So she bounces back and forth from one extreme to another. Either way, it can make her have seizures, and it's hard to try to help somebody stay that happy-medium.

CANDACE

I can't speak for every person with epilepsy, but depression runs for a lot of us.

LEEANN

It's like one minute she's happy, the next minute she wants to leave this earth, be with Jesus.

DAVID (teary-eyed)

It's like she just don't understand...then she does...ya know what I mean? I'll tell 'er, there's so much love in our home for 'er.

RICKI

In all of our homes. (*Points to EVERYONE.*)

DAVID

That's right. We all got love-bonds that's unbelievable. And I think it's great. We've all been blessed. I just wish Stefanie could accept that. We love her so much.

LEEANN

Amen! We just want her to know she's not the only one with problems.

KIRK

Me and my wife don't call 'em problems. We just say it's life. We want people to understand our challenges, but we're not gonna let it get us down. Miranda's too special for that and so is Stefanie.

LEEANN

Thanks. That means so much.

DAVID

To both of us.

CANDACE

That's why we have this group. So Caregivers know they're not alone.

JASON

That's right.

CANDACE

We all have our own struggles, and some days are harder than others.

(CANDACE holds up a purple shirt.)

See this shirt right here. It says, "Epilepsy Survivor" and "Seizures. Educate Yourself. Know when to get help, and remember you're not alone."

DAVID

Amen!

CANDACE

And that's why we get together. We're here to love one another, support one another, share hope with one another. And on that note, it's time to wrap up. Next month, we'll meet as a full group. Dr. Towbin will be here and speak on the different types of seizure meds, both new and well-established.

DAVID

Before we go, I just wanna say how much me and Leeann have enjoyed this evening. We've enjoyed listening to each and every one of you givin' your testimonies, and I'd like to thank you for the time that you spent with me and Leeann, 'cause this is one of our first support groups that we've ever attended in thirty three years. We feel encouraged and look forward to sharin' this hope with Stefanie.

CANDACE (gives DAVID shirt)

Give this shirt to Stefanie and tell her she's special.

DAVID

We will for sure.

LEEANN

Ya'll just don't know how much this means to us.

CANDACE

It's our pleasure. On that note, this meeting is adjourned!

(EVERYONE freezes, as the lights fade out. The following information is displayed in a slide format via screen CS with generic music in the background.)

**Slide One:**

Is epilepsy common?

- Approximately 2.9 million people in the United States have active epilepsy.

**Slide Two:**

How can I prevent epilepsy?

- Prevent brain injuries.
- Lower the chances of stroke and heart disease.

- Be up-to-date on your vaccinations.
- Wash your hands and prepare food safely to prevent infections such as cysticercosis.
- Have a healthy pregnancy. Follow a prenatal care plan with your healthcare provider to keep you and your baby healthy.

**Slide Three:**

How to manage epilepsy:

- Take your medicine.
- Talk with your doctor or nurse when you have questions.
- Recognize seizure triggers (such as flashing or bright lights).
- Keep a record of your seizures.
- Get enough sleep.
- Lower stress.

**Slide Four:**

How do I find an epilepsy specialist?

- Contact your primary care or family provider who can tell you about types of specialists.
- Contact the American Academy of Neurology and the American Epilepsy Society, as they provide a listing of neurologists and epilepsy specialists.
- Contact the National Association of Epilepsy Centers, as they also provide a list of neurologists and epilepsy specialists by state.

**Slide Five:**

Thanks for your support as a Caregiver and always remember...

**Final Slide:**

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

(CS lights fade to black.)

**CURTAIN**