

Sun

and

Sei

If it there was a prize for giving your child the weirdest & super-embarrassing name ever, it should go to my mom.

I guess after I was born, my mom looked at me and said, “She looks like a Amasunsuki Cicoa Lavender Taleaki!”

Yep, my name is Amasunsuki Cicoa Lavender Taleaki.

My mom could have picked any name for me. She could have picked one from those baby name websites. But she picked Amasunsuki Cicoa Lavender Taleaki.

When my mom was in college, she read a book about a girl named Amasunsuki who moved to the city and became a model and fell in love with the designer she was modeling for. After she read that book, she became obsessed with the name Amasunsuki. She named everything she could Amasunsuki, even her houseplants.

Well, when I started preschool, we had to learn to write our names. Imagine little me trying to write Amasunsuki. So my mom and my Aunt Elly came up with a nickname for me. That nickname was Sun. It suited me, because I was so smiley back then. I loved my name.

Well, My name isn't the only abnormal thing about me.

One thing is that my dad left when I was 2. Just packed his bags and drove away, leaving mom and I behind.

I got a letter from him last year for my birthday. He now works as a bartender at a place called *Casio*. He met someone named Cassidy and now lives with her in an apartment facing the Golden Gate Bridge. I felt sort of weird after reading that letter. I framed it with washi tape and hung it up over my bed.

The other thing is that I was in a car accident last year, and suffered a spinal cord injury.

Long story short: my legs don't work anymore.

I rely on either crutches or a wheelchair to get around, but I get tired quickly using crutches. So most of the time, I use the wheelchair.

After the accident, mom converted the downstairs office into a room for me. She dragged a mattress down the stairs and put wood slabs under it until I could easily slide onto the bed.

I named the wheelchair *Alis Propriis Volat*, which is Latin for *She flies with her own wings*. You might think it's weird I named my chair, but it's just a thing I do, like five year olds naming their stuffed animals. I named my room *castra*, which is Latin for fortress. I named the window seat *somniare speculo*, which means Dreaming glass.

I love Latin. My grandma decided to teach me when I was 4. Grandma taught my Aunt Elly Latin too, but my mom decided to study French instead. She taught me simple phrases and gifted me a English-Latin dictionary for my eighth birthday. I spend most of my time reading that dictionary in bed.

Like today.

It's raining outside. There's a soft pattering sound the rain is making on my window, and I stick my nose into the book. I look up a few words I can use to describe today. Rain is *imber*. Wet is *humidum*. "Sun! Brunch!" Mom calls from downstairs.

I place a bookmark into the pages of the dictionary and slide into my chair. As I reach the table, Mom places a sandwich towards me.

She gets a phone call and whispers her conversation as I eat, occasionally throwing a glance at me. I catch the words *form*, *cost*, *help* and *dog*. The word *Dog* makes me think. What about dogs?

I roll over to the sink and put my plate in it. Dog is *Canis* in Latin. When I get to my room, I open my book to the page I was on. I love the Latin phrase section of my dictionary. Sometimes I make up my own phrases, like *Ego similis crustula* (I like cookies) and write them down in the margins of the pages.

The rain keeps pouring all throughout the afternoon. After organizing my collection of cool pens, I watch a few videos on my computer and go down for dinner. Over pasta and garlic bread, Mom & I chat. I notice that she looks a little tired. I go back to my room and fall asleep after a round of reading the dictionary. I wake up in the middle of the night & I decide to get a drink of water. I slip into my wheelchair and roll to the kitchen.

As I enter, I see mom asleep at the table. Forms and papers are scattered around. I notice a photograph under mom's head. I slowly pull it out and look at it. It's an adorable German Shepherd dog. It has a beautiful long tail and big black eyes. Then I spot it. There's a vest on the dog's back. It's red and says *SERVICE DOG- DO NOT PET* on it. Everything clicks together. The whispers. The tired eyes. Mom is getting me a service dog. I gasp and mom jolts awake. "Wha... Sun?" she mumbles. I look at the forms. Service dog applications. "Why didn't you tell me?" I blurt.

"You found out. Oh." She says, rubbing her eyes. "I just thought... I would surprise you before I turned in the forms."
"What's his name?" I ask, tracing the picture of the beautiful dog.
"Look at the bottom corner." She says.
In neat handwriting, printed in black ink is the name Seiakio. Sei for short. "Is it *say*?" I pronounce. "*See*." Mom corrects. I feel like someone's just pushed me into the sea of feelings. One moment I feel happy, then sad, then angry, then excited.
"When do we get him?" I blurt. "Whenever you want." Mom says.
"Tomorrow." I say. Mom laughs. "How about next week?" "Sure." I say, smiling.

We talk for a little and I go back to my office-room with the photo of Sei. I use the same roll of washi tape I used for dad's letter and tape the picture of my soon-to-be dog next to the letter. I fall asleep looking at the letter and picture & repeating the name Sei over and over again in my head. This week can't pass fast enough.

After a long week of paperwork and long nights filled with phone calls and deadlines, we're finally here at the Hope Service Animal Center. I spot a boy with a prosthetic leg walking out with his parents and a Golden Retriever with the same vest as Sei in the picture. I smile at the boy and his dog as mom rolls me to the door and presses the wheelchair door button.

I sit near a wooden circular coffee table and page through a *Gossip* magazine. Mom doesn't approve of those kinds of magazines, but she's at the front desk showing the receptionist the paperwork. I spot a few emotional support animals with their handlers. A few dogs pass by and I spot a cat with a girl. One parrot is perched on an adult wearing a Hope Service Animal Center shirt's shoulder. My heart pounds with excitement as mom comes back. She smiles and rolls me over to a room. The door opens slowly.

Out comes another woman with the Hope Service Animal Center shirt and, most importantly, Sei. He's wearing his service vest and the handler is holding a red leash that matches his vest. I gasp and Sei puts his paws in my lap so I can pet him. His black, brown and tan fur is soft as a blanket. I smile as the handler guides us into the room. Sei demonstrates what he can help me do by pulling ropes attached to drawer handles and opening the fridge in the break room and handing me a jar.

We test him, saying things like *Peanut butter* or *Bread*. He gets it right every time, and we give him a scoop of the peanut butter. He can push open and hold non-accessible doors and push wheelchair buttons to open doors. He also can sit, stay, lie down, high five, shake, play dead, speak and do a bunch more tricks.

We get a tag engraved for him using the tag machine in the lobby. I put it onto his collar. We stopped by the Pet Shoppe last week and got him food, a bed and bowls for his food and water. We also got him a stuffed toy with a squeaker. After the demonstration is done, the handler says goodbye to Sei and talks to mom, we head for the door. Sei pushes the wheelchair button. Mom pushes my wheelchair and I hold Sei's leash as he walks beside my chair.

We get into the car and Sei rests his head in my lap. Mom smiles and hands me an envelope at a red light. I open it gingerly. 2 airplane tickets to San Francisco, California, March 12. "Wait... we're going to... Is this a joke, mom?" I sputter. "Nope." She says. Before I can ask, she says, "Of course we're bringing Sei." I squeal and Sei looks at me. I laugh and pet his head. I'm going to California with my new service dog and my mom! The thing is, though, dad lives there. I ask mom about him. She tenses up a little. "You can visit him if you want." She says. "I

don't really want to." I say. She relaxes. Dad left us, & I'm not ready to forgive him.

We spend the next few weeks packing, talking and petting Sei.

Sei can get me my clothes or a snack. He can sense when I'm sad and he can get mom and help me up if I fall out of my chair. Sei sits by the door if he needs to go out, but sticks by my side like Velcro the rest of the time.

The day of the flight, we take a taxi to the airport. Mom takes care of the luggage and check-in. We grab a bite to eat at the airport McDonald's and rush to our gate after Sei goes at the pet relief station.

We sit in a 3-seat row. Me in the window seat, Sei in the middle and mom in the aisle seat. I remember we flew to New York when I was 1. Dad sat in the Middle. My wheelchair folds up and fits in the overhead bin with the luggage. The flight goes smoothly. Sei sleeps for most of it and I watch pre-downloaded movies on my tablet and read the Latin dictionary. I sort of forgot about Latin for a little when I found out about Sei. Mom reads one of her adult novels.

The snack cart comes around and the attendant spots my dictionary. I tell her how to say *Hello*, (Salve) *thank you*, (Gratias tibi) and *goodbye* (vale.)

I feed Sei some of my crackers and go back to watching movies. An announcement states that we're going to land soon and what to do to prepare for landing.

After we land, mom and I get off last so we can take our time with my chair. We take a taxi to our hotel and check in. Mom leads Sei & I to the beach behind our hotel.

Mom lowers me out of my chair so I can sit in the sand.

Sei sits beside me. I feel Sei's soft fur and smile.

Just us, sitting here.

Sun and Sei.