

# The Impact of Critical Illness on Siblings as Expressed Through Personal Narrative

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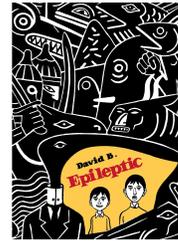
## The project:

The bond of a sibling is unmatched, and when a brother or sister is diagnosed with a critical illness, the sibling is impacted equally, although, in different ways. Some studies have attempted to capture the feelings and psychological adjustment siblings must make following a diagnosis. However, by quantifying and measuring these experiences they strip away the core of the story. Rather than transforming stories into data we should do as Arthur Frank suggests and “learn with stories” rather than from them. While illness memoir is a growing subgenre, there are hardly any works written from the perspective of a sibling. Through writing my own memoir about my sister’s cancer diagnosis to reading other illness memoirs written from the perspective of a sibling I have found three recurrent themes: a change in our relationships with our siblings as a result of illness, isolation, and the pain that comes with watching the repercussions of illness on the growth of our siblings.

## The Texts:

1

Epileptic by David B



2



Marrow: Love, Loss, and  
What Matters Most by  
Elizabeth Lesser

3

Dear Caitlin: And other  
Letters to my Family  
by Brenna Cameron



## Themes:

1

### A change in relationships with siblings

David B grows distant with brother Lesser becomes closer with sister as result of illness.  
I grow closer to my sister while distancing myself from my brother.

2

### Isolation

We all feel isolated from others around us – peers and society. But we also feel isolated from our families.

3

### Repercussions of illness on sibling’s growth

David’s brother and my sister experienced their illness as children; this led to them being left in a child like state, not able to join the adult realm in a meaningful way. Lesser’s sister, who is an adult when she is diagnosed, is able to mature and grow from her illness rather than allowing it to hold her back.