

1970

By Les J Christianson, DO

Verl was born in 1970. He thinks there is something about 1970 that has made him different from his brothers. Not: *Oh, isn't it unfortunate that in 1970 my neurons got scrambled while incubating in my mother's womb?*

But rather, *What is it about 1970 that made me so different from my brothers? I wish I wasn't born in 1970.*

He has said that many times. But who knows whether his neurons were fried in utero or whether my mother simply did not get the Rhogam shot when she should have. My parents were young and scared and this was rural North Dakota. I think all we knew was that there was a new arrival in our house that kept having seizures. Those images are some of my earliest memories. Verl, having one of his seizures next to the TV. Maybe even under the TV with his legs sticking out like the Wicked Witch of the West except that Verl was not crushed because the TV was on four legs.

Two months after Verl moved in with me, and my wife, Kris, I woke up one morning at 3 or 4 am to very bizarre sounding noises coming from Verl's room down the hall. Kris was in Chicago visiting her family so it was just Verl and me. It was April 2000. I went into his bedroom and my first thought was *Is Verl possessed by the devil?* His breathing sounded

very noisy and labored and he sounded as if he were making grunting animal-like noises. One of his arms was stiff and it was extended into the air. He could not respond to me. He seemed asleep but not asleep. I called 911 because I was scared and because I wasn't sure what else to do other than sit next to him on the bed.

When the crew arrived Verl was coming out of it but was still pretty confused and couldn't walk on his own. We stood him up and half-walked/half-carried him into the hallway where he pissed in his underwear. They took him to Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center because that's the location where I worked at the time and because I had enrolled Verl as a KP member when he moved here. I thought it would be better for Verl to be enrolled in the Health Plan where I worked. A nervous control thing on my part.

Pulling out of the driveway to follow the ambulance, I couldn't control my tears crying most of the way there. Twelve miles. Sobbing is probably more accurate. But it's only a seizure. Seizures don't seem to kill many people. The threat to life seems to be somewhere between sneezing and a heart attack. But his seizure scared me. I think I was crying because he seemed so helpless and vulnerable and so much like a child—he was starting to seem like *my* child. ♦