Step by Step: How a Lexington woman rose above a demobilizing nerve disorder

By: Sophia Hughes

Savannah Gibbs, 21

Each morning –or as early as she could make it– you could find a fiery Savannah Gibbs, now 21, eagerly ringing the bell for the kitchen at *Speedy's*, a hole-in-the-wall that helped put Lexington, N.C. on the map for its award winning BBQ. By 3 p.m., she'd clock out, wipe the sauce from her hands, and rush to Davidson-Davie community college for her afternoon courses, all before heading to Lake Thom-A-Lex Park to fish for bass with her step-father as the sun began to set.

By Winter of 2023, you would instead find Gibbs in a Winston Salem physical therapy facility, practicing lifting her legs to climb a stair, and being carefully coached on how to swallow water again.

Gibbs was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) in 2023, with no symptoms present prior to that same year. GBS is a rare auto-immune nerve disorder which results in muscle weakness or paralysis, as the body begins fighting against itself. Patients with GBS are affected by symptoms rapidly after they initially appear; in severe cases, patients will reach a point of needing assistance with vital tasks such as breathing.

For Gibbs, GBS came unexpectedly, but not as suddenly as day and night. Before her diagnosis she would fight a long battle for answers. Her battle began quietly, at the beginning of an ordinary week.

Gibbs began this particular week at her stepbrother's elementary school attending an orientation. The room buzzed with excitement about the new school year, but all Gibbs could focus on was a sharp migraine that, to her surprise, continued into the next day. Along with the headache, she felt pins and needles in her legs during her shift at *Speedy's*, distracting her from her work. At first, she assumed the tingling came from sitting too long at orientation, but each passing day as the symptoms persisted, that explanation began to fall apart.

When she decided it was time to visit an Urgent Care, she didn't realize it would be the first of many trips, as each time she went, she left with more questions than answers.

"They told me it was just stress, and then they told me I had poor circulation," said Gibbs. "One time they even pointed out my dandruff and started talking about my scalp instead of my legs."

It wasn’t until Gibbs could no longer walk without assistance, or control her bladder, that a doctor took her seriously. Her father came into town to take her out of Lexington, to *Atrium Health* in Winston Salem, where she would finally be taken to receive her diagnoses with GBS.

After her diagnoses, Gibbs entered a whirlwind of spinal taps, plasma injections, and electric treatments. Then, the initial surprise which accompanied the diagnoses wore off, and Gibbs’ world slowed down.

Gibbs labels herself as a person with an active mind. She needs stimulation through activity and tasks. During the darkest days of Gibb’s struggle with the disease, the only tasks she could manage were the ones instructed to her from her physical therapist. She spent most of her time in bed. She couldn’t tend to her Lego flower garden, let alone drive to her shift at *Speedy’s*. She recalls feeling directionless.

“It took everything away,” said Gibbs. “Fishing, working, guitar, doing my nails — everything. It ripped away my life. When I hit rock bottom, Casey said it was ripping away my soul.”

Casey Graves was a part of Gibbs’ life that GBS couldn’t manage to shake.

“I remember calling Casey and telling her I was getting an enema. I joked with her saying she needed to hold my hand during it, but she didn’t take it as a joke, it wasn’t too much for her. She held my hand while they filled my rectal cavity with soap.”

Gibbs, Graves, and Gibbs’ family would continue attending countless appointments. After five rounds of plasma infusion, another electromagnetic test showed that Gibbs was improving. Her mother took her to Cracker Barrel to celebrate, and though Gibbs fell in the parking lot- she laughed it off- thrilled to be walking again. Her favorite mile marker was being able to play *Just Dance* at her physical therapy facility again.

In September of 2025, Gibbs' doctor announced after an electromagnetic test that 92 percent of Gibbs' nerves and reflexes were functioning again. She returned to *Speedy's BBQ*, continued her community college courses, and even picked up a hostess position at *Kickback Jacks*.

"It's the scariest thing that ever happened to me, and I knew I wouldn't be happy with a life where I couldn't live it to my fullest. I also had a feeling, though, that I wouldn't let that happen".

Source: Savannah Gibbs (336) 309-4958