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CURTIS, Neb. (AP)—Her mother called it a journey. Twelve-year-old Rachel Lashley and her father called it “the unbending of Rachel.’’

With a spine curving in three different directions, Rachel was 9 when she was first diagnosed with scoliosis. Trying to fix that took Rachel from her peaceful farm outside of Curtis to the surgery ward at Children’s Hospital and Medical Center in Omaha.

It began in the summer of 2009, when Rachel made a quick stop at her dad’s office in Curtis before going swimming. During that visit, her parents noticed one shoulder blade was significantly higher than the other. Alarmed, her mother took her to the doctor that afternoon, where she was diagnosed with scoliosis and referred to Dr. Brian Hasley in Omaha.

Before that visit, Rachel and her father dove into the Internet to find out what they could. They found that scoliosis is most common among pre-teen girls, with many using a body brace to correct the curvature of the spine. A brace seemed certain, they decided.

But after consulting with doctors in Omaha, it wasn’t that simple. X-rays revealed Rachel had three curves in her spine, the middle one at almost 60 degrees and getting worse.

“My back looked like a long curving snake!’’ Rachel wrote in a notebook she kept of her experiences.

Since the curves were so severe, wearing a brace was not the answer. Surgery had to be done, yet at 9 years old, doctors were concerned that it would affect her growth.

The six-hour ride home from Omaha was especially quiet, recalled Rachel’s mom, Renee.

“We were all trying to soak it all in,’’ Renee said. “I don’t remember much, I cried a lot.’’

Once home in Curtis, Rachel and her dad, Ted, did extensive research again on the Internet to find out more. One website in particular Rachel found comforting, as it told the stories of other girls who had scoliosis, although many of them were already teenagers.

After another trip to Omaha and more X-rays, Dr, Hasley came up with a plan. Surgery had to be done as soon as possible, to stabilize the middle curve, using permanent rods and a rib from Rachel to fuse the vertebrae.

As any 9-year-old would be, Rachel said she remembers being frightened. At the same time, she said she also felt strangely comforted.

“Once I got to know Dr. Hasley more, I realized there was nothing to be scared of,’’ she wrote in her notebook. “I believe it was the Lord who brought Dr. Hasley in my life and between my faith in God and Dr. Hasley, I didn’t feel scared!’’

The 10-hour surgery felt like five minutes to Rachel. Waking up in a room full of friends from Curtis and family from across the state made the pain a little easier to bear. Also, the fact that there were other children at the hospital with illnesses much worse kept Rachel and her parents grateful, said her mother.

The surgery was a success, with Rachel’s height increasing by an inch. But the body brace became Rachel’s best friend for the next two years, having to be worn 22 hours a day, including at night.

It didn’t stop her. Rachel participated in as many activities as she did before and now, does everything most 12-year-old-girls do in her area: showing cattle and swine at the county fair, playing basketball and volleyball, competing in archery and marksmanship.

The “unbending of Rachel’’ has made the family stronger, her mother said, and their faith real,

especially for Rachel.

There is still more surgery ahead, with one scheduled in July to extend the rod in her vertebrae. But this time, Rachel knows what to expect.

“Nothing compares to the love that I feel from God,’’ Rachel wrote in her notebook. “He was my constant strength, my constant comfort, and my constant courage.’’