

## Narrative Essay

Lying rather uncomfortably on the examination table while facing the painfully bright ceiling lights, I fidgeted nervously, desperately trying to ignore the gloominess of the situation. I attempted to focus on staying warm in the bitterly cold room, but the events of just a few months prior kept running through my head—the intense pain, my overwhelming fear, and the frantic scrambling of surgeons and nurses in the Emergency Room. The doctors told me I had broken a vertebra in my lower back. Briefly, I now smiled thinking about the innocence of my response to the news: “So I have to wear a brace now when I play football?”

Waiting for the doctor now, I became unbearably impatient. I had waited for three months to find out whether or not I would be cleared to play football again, but the thought of waiting another five minutes seemed impossible. Then Dr. Pettinger entered the room. He was friendly, but perceptibly uncomfortable, almost sad. The question remained unasked and unanswered as we went through the standard procedures of a physical and I could tell that I had cleared all of the tests. The time had finally come for him to tell me whether or not I could play. His eyes focused on his clipboard for a moment, and he then lifted his head, frowning. He spoke slowly and softly, but still rather matter-of-factly, as he told me that I would never be able to play football again.

The realization sunk in immediately. I wasn't surprised, or at least I shouldn't have been, but that did not make the order any easier. I refuted the idea wholeheartedly, and for months after I was released, I continued to condition with the football team in hopes of returning the next year. I woke up every morning at five to be at the gym by six for rehab. Even though I was ashamed to wear my back brace, I wore it devotedly, with some sort of false hope that the more I wore it, the quicker and better it would heal the broken vertebrae. At night, I slept on the floor because my bone doctor told me that sleeping on a firm surface was good for my back. I was determined to play again.

Nonetheless, in the end, just as the doctor ordered, I never played another quarter of football. After several nights in a row of coming home from conditioning barely able to walk, I finally gave in. For a while, giving up felt like an admittance of defeat rather than the acceptance of a truth that should have been painfully obvious, but over time, I realized that like most of the difficult decisions I have made and will have to make, life would go on. Rather than focus on what was undeniably unattainable, I understood that even though this particular option was no longer open to me, I had countless other choices to make in its place.

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