

“The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?” (CommonApp). The audience may include graduate school application reviewers.

At 18 years old, my world was not full of possibilities and hope for the future. My body had failed me in a way that I could not accept nor forgive. That year, I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, a disease which felt like my body was betraying me. Knowing so much about the disease, by virtue of my younger brother Matthias having it for most of my life, was little comfort to me. I was under the impression, at that point, that I had been lucky enough to outrun it somehow, as most diabetics are diagnosed at a young age. The months following my diagnosis are ones I still have trouble reflecting on. Mentally and physically, I was the most unhealthy I had ever been, or have been since, in my life— for the most prolonged period by far. Diabetes was a word I abhorred, and it was solely how I identified myself. The disease consumed me in more ways than one— by the time I was actually diagnosed, I was under 90 pounds, with brain fog that was nearly debilitating and exhaustion which crept into my days with no regard for energy drinks or optimism.

What I have learned is that diabetes works slowly. I did not realize how sickly I was, as the changes were so gradual— I remember not being able to swallow because I had no moisture in my mouth, but cannot pinpoint when exactly that symptom started. My parents did not notice my dramatic weight loss, which was brought to their attention for the first time by my grandmother, who had not seen me in a few weeks and was incredibly concerned by how gaunt I looked. The mental hurdles, post-diagnosis, were also extremely difficult and slow for me to work through. The closest description of my thought process that I can offer is grief. Each stage took me what felt like ages to overcome. I could not logically accept the diagnosis at first, and the rest of the stages followed slowly after, each a new challenge that I never signed up to

overcome, and debated giving up altogether regularly. I am most proud of myself for never giving up the battle, though.

Working through what it means to be me and how, if at all, separate from my identity my diagnosis is, is a question I still find myself puzzling through at 21, three years later. Recently, I have been engaged in discussion about vocation and meaning, and I'm finally able to do something with a diagnosis that I've always struggled to fit into who I am. Being a Type 1 diabetic is so connected to the worst time of my life, but it is simultaneously something which I have crafted a career plan around. It has only been through deep, repeated, difficult internal reflection that I have allowed myself to wonder what I can do in the future that is related to a part of myself that I hated for so long.

At this point in my journey, which I expect to continue for the rest of my life, I hope to work in health communication. My senior project as a Communication and Media Studies student is to dive into how care providers can articulate diagnoses to pediatric patients and their parents in a way which feels compassionate and continuous, and how that relates to long-term benefits on both ends. My dream is to work in the Public Relations department of the same hospital in which I was diagnosed, and to disseminate meaningful, real stories which help real people. My diabetes is still something I struggle with to this day, but has led me to a dream in which I can change the stories of people like me for the better.