

# Events That Shape a Person: My Story

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For as long as I have been living, I have always had to deal with pain of some sort. Whether I was dealing with physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain, or every type of pain all at once, eventually leading to spiritual pain as well, I have always had to battle something within my life. Majority of the problems have come from sports injuries. No one wants to spend their entire life fighting battles, especially back-to-back with no breaks in between. Others may see the battles that you've overcome and see you as a very strong person, but what they don't see are all of the battle wounds and what that fight has taken from you. With so many battles having been fought and each taking a little bit of you with it, eventually all of those add up and you feel like there is no more of you left and can't handle another battle. Do you look for the strength to fight on, or do you give up and end all of the misery?

I have been dealing with long-term physical pain from injuries ever since the beginning of my high school years. I had pain from each injury for at least a year. Learning to live with pain has changed me in ways I could not have imagined and did not even realize.

*Freshman Year...*

I had constant shoulder pain that started immediately after my two basketball seasons.

*Sophomore Year...*

I had a sprained knee, sprained wrist, and pulled muscles from playing soccer and basketball.

Also, I had headaches that I had all day, every day for that entire year.

*Junior Year...*

I had a severely sprained ankle from playing soccer that took nearly a year to heal.

*Senior Year...*

I had started getting back pain and back spasms the day after my senior year basketball season ended.

The concussion was the worst injury I had ever gotten. The concussion and resulting chronic headaches all resulted from a charge I took playing basketball with boys that summer. When I fell back I hit my head. The headaches I got really affected how I did in school and how I socialized with other people. Because I had headaches and was always in pain, I felt like I was not participating fully in my own life- with my family, my friends, even in my favorite classes. I was continuously closing my eyes and massaging my head, anticipating the time when I was able to go home and sleep in my bed. Sleep was the only thing that alleviated my headaches.

My headaches caused me a lot of pain, not only physically but also emotionally. They made me feel like I could not do anything anymore, like I was helpless. They drained me of energy. They left me unable to completely enjoy anything, and because of all of the setbacks my injuries gave me, I felt that I had to give up on my dream of going professional in basketball. What at first was promised to be a noteworthy high school basketball career turned into an unremarkable one. I still play basketball well, but I never got the opportunity to develop to my fullest potential as a player. And it was *so hard* to give up this dream, as a child who loved the sport and was talented and determined to pursue a career in athletics.

I have been an athlete all my life. Prior to graduating high school in 2011, basketball and soccer were my main sports focus, basketball being the most important to me. After graduation high school I decided to retire from basketball and potentially run track. I so contacted the Track & Field coach at UMass Boston, the college I attended after high school, about my interest in joining their track program, but I wasn't able to fit it in my schedule my freshman year. The

summer after my freshman year, summer of 2012, the coach at UMass Boston contacted me to see if I was still interested in joining their track program, which I was. Since the following school year would be my first time ever running track, I wanted to get some experience before the school year season started. So that the sport wouldn't be completely new to me, I decided to join a track club.

I joined a track club that was coached by a woman my mother knew. One practice, the coach tells everyone to put on their spikes, and then she has us all run timed suicides on the turf field with our spikes on (This day of practice is the reason I am in the situation I am in now). This being my first time ever running in spikes, and I'm running on turf, I injury my ankle during the transition part of the suicide and I hear a "pop". I had thought I had sprained my ankle and that it would eventually heal. I take a week off and then continue training and competing, despite the pain.

The school year starts, and I begin training with my school team; ankle still bothering me. Once again I continue to train and compete despite the pain. But I was only able to compete in two meets before my school coach told me she wanted me to stop training until she and I knew what was wrong with my ankle. So in January I get an MRI done on my ankle and the doctor tells me everything was fine and that it was just a bad sprain that hasn't healed. Then I sign up for physical therapy for my ankle, since I was told there was nothing seriously wrong with my ankle. I do physical therapy for about two months and it wasn't helping much. My physical therapist then recommends that I see a specialist about my ankle, and so I do.

I see the ankle specialist and he looks at the same MRI that I had gotten in January, and he tells me that I had stretched a ligament in my ankle that has caused instability and for my ankle to pop out of socket, and that I had two options; I can either live with the pain or get surgery. The doctor also told me that the recovery is about six months. Since I didn't think I would be able to live with the pain and it was preventing me from progressing in track, I chose to get surgery. I had the surgery after my semester had ended, May 30th. After the surgery my doctor told me that I

actually tore my ankle in one and a half places; I stretched the ligaments to the classification of a tear.

I have so much athletic potential, but I've never been able to show it all due to limitations of past injuries. With this injury, I can't partake in any athletic activity anytime soon. And the fact that I can't play any type of sport, train, lift, or even workout is killing me inside.

Sports would be my escape from life's problems and troubles; a stress reliever. That escape isn't an option right now, so where do I go to escape when my problem follows me, literally? I'm constantly reminded of the fact that I am currently a "cripple", and can't do the things I'm used to doing or was able to do. To make matters even worse, I'm not even recovering at the rate I am supposed to be. I'm actually regressing. My surgery was May 30, 2013 and I am still not walking. I've been using my crutches to help me walk ever since I got out the walking boot, and I was recently put back in walking boot after being in my brace wasn't showing much progress. I am afraid that this recovery process could possibly cause another injury while trying to heal my ankle. It's now May 2014 and no one knows why I am not healing the way I should have. I have seen both my surgeon and an orthopedist close to my new school, North Carolina State University, have had an X-Ray, a MRI, and an EMG and they all have come back normal. I also got a Cortisone shot in my ankle and it did not help at all. This whole experience is painful, depressing and stressful, and hard to overcome.

This injury is holding me back from so much in so many ways, and it is taking a toll on me emotionally and mentally. I've caught myself crying a many times, and I never cry. I feel like this injury may be God's greatest test of my strength. I've dealt with many sports injuries before, but never anything to this extent. None of my past injuries needed any surgical attention or caused me this much physical and emotional pain.

Worst of all, I can't even dress the way I would like because I am limited to certain footwear, either because of the brace or the boot. Because I've been in the boot for so long, there are always people noticing and having curiosity. Every day for the past year I have had at least one person ask me about my foot. The repetitiveness has built up extreme frustration within me.

Multiple times every day having to answer the question “What happened to your leg?” and every day having to be reminded that burden. But I couldn’t release that frustration out on any of the people asking, because it wasn’t the same person always asking and I know that people are only concerned and sympathizing, so I had to keep it all inside. I would lose more hope every time I witnessed people who have injured the same body part as me after I did, recover before me. It just brought an awful feeling, It’s undermining. Why me?

I believe that everything happens for a reason, but I feel like it is wearing me down and I'm not sure if I can find a "bright side" to this or what the purpose of me going through this is.

I hope that this is the last injury I will ever encounter that withholds me from reaching my full potential in any aspect of my life. Many of the injuries I have encountered over my lifetime have not only affected my athletic performance but also my academic performance. This injury has not only deprived me of playing sports, but also my ability to do other things I enjoy doing; such as volunteering, getting involved, traveling, and walking, activities I enjoy doing to keep me sane.

No one around me understands how I feel about my situation. It is extremely degrading to constantly witness the old and obese walk much faster than I can. For having been an athlete my whole life, I feel like I was robbed at gun point for any future athletic success I may have had, and I'm the only one paying the price for someone else's actions. How do you continue living when half of you is gone? Not knowing how to deal with the fact that I may not get another chance to play sports. And walking around every day with the consequence of someone else's decision as a constant reminder does not make it any easier to deal with the fact that that part of my life may be over. It gets ever harder to deal with when the injury raises more problems to deal with on top of it. How much can one person take at once? I feel like control over my own life has yet to take place, due to all of the adjustments I've had to make while dealing with situations I'm forced to deal with on my own. It's like a game with 672913767286829275 obstacles you have to go through before reaching the finish line...but there's no finish line or bright light at the end of the tunnel. For so long my instinct has just been to continue on, but now

part of me just wants to give up, not seeing the point of these battles when there's only a war waiting ahead not a giant prize.

No matter how strong others believe or have witnessed I am, I believe this is the last battle I can endure. This experience has surfaced more problems than itself. It brought out my depression, the worst depression I have ever been in for having been depressed majority of my life.

Doctors can read the signs of depression and diagnosis you. But the prescriptions they give you can only bound the depression; they don't get rid of it.

Depression is a type of possession. It uses your body as a host for its destructive ways; parasitically feeding off any negative thoughts or feelings that enter your mind. It leaves you fighting for control of your own body, as it makes every decision for you. It consumes you from the inside, out. It starts with the destruction of your mind until your whole body breaks down and there is nothing left for it to control or possess, accomplishing what it was created to do; destroy.

The depressed are like zombies, walking among the people of today. Empty, no energy, lifeless, and just going through the motions of every day. The only difference being that the depressed sleep (occasionally) and don't eat brains. Oddly enough, the depressed often don't want to use their brain.

Part of the everyday attire for the depressed is a fake smile. Most people smile because they are happy or are enjoying themselves, but the depressed are neither. The smile is merely used to give the impression of happiness. The depressed constantly have to tell themselves "smile, look as if nothing is wrong. Look normal. Don't give anyone a reason to ask 'What's wrong?' or 'Are you okay?' Remember to smile".

Depression allows you to see all that is going on in your life, but leaves you it with no control over any of it. You are a prisoner in your own mind and body. People can see who's on the outside, but no one can see who's on the inside. You try to break free and let them know that "this is the real me, not the one that you see!" You are stuck living a life that you have not made, a life of isolation. Depression brings you to the point where there is rarely anything you want to

do, anyone you want to spend time with, places you want to go; confining you to your room. Depression defies you of your need to eat, sleep, and often times your need to live. It leaves you with a feeling of emptiness, sucking out every ounce of goodness that you were able to see, surrounding you with nothing. Depression takes away your sense of self-worth. Depression makes you feel heavy, sometimes as if there is a million tons of negativity on your chest suffocating you or holding you down to the floor of a body of water so you drown, never seeing the light of day. We all search for happiness in our life, having one's ability to see and seek goodness be clouded with nothing but negativity can drive one to believe their life is worthless and that there's no longer a point in living, because there is no other escape from being prisoner in your own mind and body. The hardest part about it all is being controlled by something that you don't know how to defeat. And you feel like there is no sense on fighting a battle you can't win.

The amount of pain one can sustain without feeling drained, depends of their willingness to remain sane. The strongest of souls can accomplish this goal.

It is extremely difficult to remain sane when you can't see any good occurring in your life, and you're constantly dealing with situations that you don't deserve to be dealing with. The hardest part is going at it all alone, because no one understands.

“All I know is pain  
 All I feel is rain  
 How can I maintain, with madd shit on my brain”

Ruff Ryder's Anthem- DMX

The second verse of the song, Welcome, by J. Cole expresses pretty well how I feel about all that I've been through. I find some type of comfort in this verse, knowing that there is one other person feeling similarly to how I feel and is forced to deal with his problems on his own as well because no one else understands. It's a good thing that I am not yet of age to legally purchase alcohol, because I probably would have sought comfort in bottles, to drown my all pains in attempt to free myself.

“I let these words flow out, like water from a spout  
 Like rain from the clouds, it's the pain from the crowd  
 Cause these words go deep, from my soul when I speak  
 Then my flows hit the souls of all those that I reach



If I die 'fore I wake, hope my songs live on  
 Will they miss me when I'm gone? And if so, for how long?  
 So much shit is on my brain try hard to maintain  
 Sit and analyze my thoughts sometimes I wonder if I'm sane  
 Man it's hard to trust friends, when the paranoia blends with the marijuana,  
 Wonder will this high ever end  
 Swear I'd never smoke again, ya'll niggas blow the weed  
 Let me take another shot man this liquors all I need  
 Just to put me in a zone, so far away from home  
 Nobody truly know me got me feelin so alone  
 They wonder whats on my mind, whats lingerin in my dome  
 I tell them ain't nothing wrong I'll deal wit it on my own  
 I'll deal wit it on my own”

Welcome - J. Cole

Freeing yourself from “yourself” sometimes feels like the only option you have left. Draining out all of the negative, heavy, oppressive feelings. Giving in to the depression to free yourself. The cold of the blade against your forearm is the only thing sitting between life and death, so you chose life; the freeing of your soul. As the burden of life exists your body, the lighter, the freer, the more alive you feel. Every ounce of blood draining out would have been an ounce of blood keeping you alive for another day trapped in that prison. Taking that last breath was the most free you’ve felt in your whole existence.

“I swear to God I just want to slit my wrists and end this bullshit  
 Throw the Magnum to my head, threaten to pull shit  
 And squeeze, until the bed's, completely red  
 I'm glad I'm dead, a worthless fuckin' buddah head  
 The stress is buildin' up, I can't,  
 I can't believe suicide's on my fuckin' mind  
 I want to leave, I swear to God I feel like death is fuckin' callin' me  
 Naw you wouldn't understand (nigga, talk to me please)  
 You see its kinda like the crack did to Pookie, in New Jack  
 Except when I cross over, there ain't no comin' back  
 Should I die on the train track, like Remo in Beatstreet...

...I reach my peak, I can't speak,  
 call my nigga Chic, tell him that my will is weak.  
 I'm sick of niggas lyin', I'm sick of bitches hawkin',  
 matter of fact, I'm sick of talkin'.”

Suicidal Thoughts - The Notorious B.I.G.

These thoughts almost had me to the point of actually committing suicide. Somehow I was able to suppress those thoughts and never pick up a knife with that intention. I'm not sure how I did it, but I did. But if anyone else was given everything that I have been put through, they most likely would have committed suicide long ago. And the circumstances that I have previously stated are only a fraction of the situations that I have endured.

It does take a lot of strength and perseverance to continuously get knocked down 5 seconds right after standing back up. I feel like I'm a puppet and the Joker is the one pulling my strings. He being the Joker, he'd have an evil plan on how to destroy me. He'd throw something in my life that'd make me think it's going to be a good experience, but instead he finds a way to make my life a living hell. Literally toying with my life, constantly teasing me like a dog walking on a treadmill with a bone tied on it.

It's hard to believe that better days are forthcoming when all evidence says otherwise. Better days are only a mirage, like water in the desert. This is ironic since my days are full of rain and no sunshine. Me trying to convince myself that there's hope is like a Christian trying to convince an atheist that God exist. In order to believe that God exist, an atheist would need hard core evidence, probably would need to see God Himself in order to believe. It is hard to change someone else's beliefs, especially if they are not willing to be open to seeing other views. So imagine you trying to convince your depressed self that everything will get better and that there is hope, but the depressed you is not trying to change its view on any aspect, leaving you feeling stuck in that state of mind. It takes a lot of energy and dedication to change someone's beliefs. But where do the depressed focus all of their energy when they are fighting more than one everlasting battle, when each battle requires all that they have.

I try to remind myself that God knows what He is doing with my life and where it all will lead me, and that He is not doing any of this to punish me for no good reason and that it is all out of love not spite. I just have to endure what He places in my life for as long as He feels I need to learn something from these tough battles. Whenever I begin to have doubts, I remind myself of the Bible verse Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” This verse reminds me to continue to have faith in God and to trust Him with my life, even though at times it may not be the easiest thing to convince myself of doing. But knowing that God can do no wrong and believing that everything He throws at me is simply a learning experience to build character, makes it easier to convince myself of trusting Him.

One Sunday in early March while visiting my friend, who lives in Philly, I went with her to church. The sermon that day helped me open up to accepting this hardship and to not think I was being punished or abandoned by God. The message from this sermon was that “God’s leading is personal.” The pastor used the story of God leading His people from slavery to the Promised Land. He said that God did not take them the shortest route to the Promised Land, but the route He deemed best for them, which took much longer than they anticipated, so that they would be better prepared for what He had in store for them. The people began to lose their faith in God and doubting that He would keep His promise of delivering them to the Promised Land, because of the duration of their journey to get there. They fell into the worst sin of all, grumbling. They began to complain about the way God was leading them, and questioned His character. They even preferred to go back into slavery, at least they’d know what to expect because continuing on God’s path they had no idea what else was to lie ahead of them. They would rather be comfortable than afraid.

In relation to God’s people of today, the pastor told us that God is in no hurry, He takes His time getting us ready for where and who He wants us to be. He will continue to put us through the wilderness until we learn the lessons that God wants us to get from going through those hard times. God doesn’t give us the easiest route in life, but the route He thinks is best for us; out of love and protection. The pastor said that “God proportions His people trials to their strengths”,

meaning that He will not give you anything you can't handle. He wants us to grow and mature so that we are prepared for where He is leading us. We can't let our hard times define God's character, and need to know His presence is always there and His real character. The pastor told us that we can't diverge from God's wilderness path just to seek comfort without His presence, and that "fear keeps us from the promise God has for us" because the wilderness is our formation to build us. The pastor wanted us to know that the question about going through the wilderness is not "when do I get out?", but "what do I get out of it?"

God has a plan for all of His people. It is up to us to entrust Him with the path of our life. No matter how hard it gets to continue to have faith in His plan because of all of the hardships He throws our way, we must try not to stray from His path in sought of comfort.

I'm not sure how much fight I have left in me, so I can only hope that the Bible verse, Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." speaks the truth, and that brighter days do await. I am not sure how many more battles I can fight through, but I am going to try my best to entrust that God knows what He is doing with my life and that it is all in my best interest. Although these events have shaped me, they do not define me. So remember that you know my story, not me.