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A defeat that I have faced that has shaped me into a better version of myself is the defeat of my own body. The day after graduating high school, I was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis, an autoimmune disease that causes my body to attack itself, particularly at the joints. My rheumatologist sat me down and said, "I know this is not what any eighteen-year-old wants. But you will be okay."

At that point, I did not really care whether I would be "okay" or not, because what was even meant by okay? My rheumatologist told me that even with the strongest medications, I could only expect to see, at best, a 90% improvement in my symptoms. This might sound like a good prognosis, but not to a young girl who could no longer partake in her favorite hobbies, and was quickly losing her ability to dress herself or even walk. I had a fear of needles, and now I was told that I would constantly be dealing with injections and venipunctures for the rest of my life. I was supposed to be celebrating the end of my high school career and looking forward to college, the next big chapter in my life. But I wasn't. Instead, I grieved the health and life I felt I was supposed to have. I felt very dark, alone, and hopeless.

But things did get better. I was able to move again. I went a year and a half without being able to use my left thumb, but that eventually got better, too. So I did things. Now that I could crochet again, I opened an Etsy shop so that I could share my love of amigurumi. I sold at a craft fair. I joined my college's dance team, even though I hadn't danced in over a decade. I was not sure if I would be good at dancing or not, but I did not care, I just wanted to do it, because now I could.

My symptoms are 99% better. I have achieved a level of remission that my doctors did not expect to ever happen. Because of my diagnosis and my recovery, I recognize that I am living my life so much more fully than I would be if I had never developed this disease. I do not take my ease of movement for granted. Most people view working out as a chore, but I understand it to be a privilege. I am not so scared of needles anymore; in fact, I enjoy going to have my blood drawn because the phlebotomists are always so friendly to me. In college, I have pushed myself to try as many new things as possible, because I recognize that not everyone has the opportunity or ability to be able to do so.

I will never say that I am glad that I have psoriatic arthritis. I want to live in a body that works on its own. But I see how Maya Angelou is right to say that defeats are necessary so that we can know who we are. From my defeat, I have learned that it is okay to be optimistic. It is okay to have hope, and it is okay to believe in miracles. I have setbacks, but my defeat was necessary for me to become the grateful, positive person I consider myself to be today.

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