

## Personal Statement

The world starts to spin again, so I close my eyes and fall to the floor. I don't know how to deal with this reality, but understand that there is nothing I can do. So, I do the only thing I know how to do: grab my guitar, a pen, and start turning my pain into music.

I was 8 years old when I wrote a song for the first time. Little did I know that it would one day save my life. I was always head over heels with music as a child, drumming on my desk and humming the latest melody that just wouldn't leave my mind. My mind overflowed with song ideas as I walked the halls of elementary school. It was on one very average afternoon that I decided to put one of these ideas down on paper and write a song. From that day on, it was like I had unlocked a secret power. I realized that whatever I was feeling in a given moment, I could turn into a beautiful song that made people feel. I wrote about anything and everything I could, from the boy next door to the latest fallout at school.

It was shortly after this time when I started getting sick. From what felt like out of nowhere, I was overcome with pain and a feeling that my mind was screaming at me. I wasn't even acting like myself. My parents took me to doctor after doctor in an attempt to figure out what was wrong with me. We finally discovered that I have a rare auto-immune disease, one that with time and patience, I would have to learn to manage in order to lead a normal adolescent life. It was responsible for my pain, fatigue, and other random but intense symptoms. At that age I didn't fully understand what this meant for me and life, but I did write a song called "On my Way," a promise to myself that I was never going to give up on the things that I love.

Fast forward to Junior High, months before I started on my road to recovery. On any given day I would feel so riddled with pain that I couldn't even sit through a lunch with my friends. I was canceling my plans, activities, and could no longer without the very

real fear of not being able to make it through. It was at that point in my life when songwriting stopped being a hobby and became my lifeline. I knew there were walls surrounding me, and that I somehow had to get myself to the other side. I came to realize that while the majority of the situation was out of my control, there was something I could control. "I'll just write my way out," I thought. And that's what I did. It's what I do to this very day. From then on, I wrote day and night. I wrote a series of 50 imperfect, honest songs that captured the suffering and loneliness I was experiencing. In the midst of the silent battle, my writing gave me a voice. As I continued to navigate my teenage years, I never stopped using songwriting as both an outlet and empowering form of expression, allowing me to take control of my narrative through the most unpredictable circumstances.

Unlike many illnesses that are commonly endured in childhood, no one could see the struggle I went through as I learned to live with my autoimmune condition. It is something I will never be completely free from, but as long as I have my secret weapon, I know I will make it through. Now, nearly 10 years later, I am proud to say that I have kept the promise I made to my younger self. I have never let my diagnosis stop me from achieving what I put my mind to. Despite periods of being sick, these setbacks never limited my success, and I continued to shoot for the stars with my course load, active participation in my community, and pursuit of my passions. I no longer view my condition as a curse, knowing it has led me to find my greatest passion and taught me the most important life lesson of all: while I may not always have control over the situation, I will always have control over how I want to tell my story.

My world starts to spin again, but this time when I open my eyes I remain standing.