When I was thinking about an important event in my life to talk about, only one came to mind. However, my story is not just one event, but a circumstance that has affected me my entire life.

When I was one, my parents took me into the doctor's office for a regular checkup. The doctors noticed a bump in my back and, thinking I had a tumor, they sent me directly to the Stanford Children’s Hospital. I ended up having scoliosis, more specifically, Infantile Idiopathic Scoliosis, meaning that I had scoliosis (a curvature of the spine), developed it as an infant, and they have no idea how it developed. I was then given a brace to help prevent further curvature, and was sent on my way. My entire early life consisted of me wearing back braces and going to get x-rays every 6 months to measure my progress.

I was an extremely active kid, if I was not in school, I would be playing sports. I played a lot of baseball and football, but my favorite sport out of all of them was basketball. I was exposed to basketball at a very early age, some of my earliest memories are of me going to watch basketball games with my parents. I would shoot hoops everyday after school, go to all the summer basketball camps in my area, and would play in youth leagues so I could compete against other kids my age. These leagues led me to make a lot of friends, some of my closest friends to this day I met playing youth basketball. However, I could not do these activities wearing my brace, as it would limit my movement and cause too much discomfort. So I tended to put off wearing my brace so I could go have fun.

My experience with scoliosis can be compared to a dam resisting the pressure of water, with the water being my spine wanting to curve, and the dam being everything resisting my spine from curving. And as we know, after a dam experiences enough pressure, it bursts, causing catastrophic damage to anything within the path of the now free flowing water.

That dam broke when I was 16, it was my junior year of high school, basketball season had just started, and I was getting ready for Midterms for my classes. That morning, I woke up to the worst pain I have ever experienced in my life. All throughout my back was a searing hot pain, like someone had put a red-hot iron bar and pressed against my back. I did not go to school that day, nor the next day, nor the rest of the week, all due to the amount of pain I was experiencing. As a result, I was put into home-in-hospital, I was no longer able to play basketball for the rest of the season, and my grades began to drop.

I was already supposed to get surgery to straighten my back, but due to the amount of pain I was in, instead of it being 6 months away, it was moved to being 3 weeks away. That time moved very fast, and before I knew it, I was at the Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital, being wheeled into the operating room heavily sedated from the drugs I was given to slow my heart rate.

In order to give you some insight on what this surgery consists of, let me give you a quick explanation. The surgery itself was a seven hour process, during that time they would slice open my back, use a hammer to force my spine to straighten, then they would put two titanium rods on either side of my spine to prevent any more curvature in the future.

Before they put me under anesthesia, I took in my surroundings. It looked a lot different than what I expected. After watching those corny doctor tv shows, I was expecting a small, dimly lit room; but instead, it was very large, and filled with bright lights. It looked more like a classroom than a room they would use to slice open my back and forcefully straighten out my spine. There were also other things I was able to observe before they put me under anesthesia. The smell of the disinfectant they used, the big clock on the wall showing the time, now looking wavy due to the drugs messing with my vision. As I began to go to sleep, I remember the feeling of dread I felt, I was scared that I would never wake up again, or that something would go wrong and I would get paralyzed. But in moments, my mind went blank, and I woke up to my family sitting next to me, the surgery was successful.

After the surgery, I stayed in the hospital for five days. On the third day they had me stand up and walk to the door of my room that was ten feet from my bed. That was the most grueling ten feet I have ever walked, the painkillers made me feel sluggish and dizzy, so dizzy in fact that right when I got back to my bed I puked for a minute straight. However, while I was barfing up all the Jello I had a couple hours prior, I was ecstatic, I was getting better. After I left the hospital, I was bedridden at home for two weeks, rotating from laying in my bed to sleep, to a recliner couch to play video games. I was also unable to participate in any physical activity for six months while my back healed, which distanced me from many of my closest friends who I have been playing sports with since I was seven years old. After those two months of being bedridden, I went back to school; however, the combination of the pain I felt from sitting in the school chairs along with the immense feeling of loneliness I felt, I feared school, skipping almost everyday just so I could go home and lay in my bed. As a result, my grades suffered.

The future I had planned out for myself since I was in middle school was completely destroyed. I turned from an A’s and B’s student to a C’s and D’s student, I would not be able to go to my dream school, playing sports became a question as I would be unable to twist or bend my back due to the titanium rods that would be forever stuck to my spine.

This forced me to mature, instead of only thinking about the present and how I felt in the moment, I began to think ahead, and do things that would benefit me in the future, even if it caused me discomfort in the present. I went to physical therapy to help my body compensate for the lack of motion I now possess. I went to school and endured the pain, even if it caused me to come straight home and lay in bed for the rest of the day. I went on runs everyday so I could get back into shape and play sports again. And that hard work paid off.

That hard work I put in then has shaped me into the person I am today, and I have kept the mentality that future me comes before the present me, and I will do anything to benefit the future me no matter what.