Five years ago I was diagnosed with scoliosis. When the doctor told me, I started crying. I knew it meant I was going to have to wear a plastic vest around my torso for many years.

The vest was a stigma. It was noticeable even under a shirt, so people pointed it out, and asked what it was. It made me feel different. I was limited in a number of ways by it. If it was sunny, I couldn’t go play outside because the heat would be unbearable. I couldn’t do anything that might cause me to fall because hitting the ground with the vest on would hurt me considerably. Running, playing sports, and riding a bike were completely out of the question. Moreover, every time I went through airport security I got pulled aside and was asked to explain the vest.

In the beginning, I didn’t take it well at all. I would start hyperventilating at random times throughout the day. As I learned to live with it, this started happening less and less frequently.

Once I came to terms with the vest, time passed quickly, and a year ago, due to my spine having stopped growing, I was able to take it off permanently. It felt weird at first. After years of having worn the vest, not having something pressing on my chest felt liberating. I started enjoying all the activities I had lost touch with again, but after a while, I started experiencing strong back pain.

The doctor told me that it was caused by the lack of muscle supporting my back, so I decided to join a gym for the first time. It’s been a whole year, and I’ve never stopped attending. I developed a love for it because it allows me to put conscientious effort towards fighting a condition I’ll never be able to get rid of.

A few months ago I was offered the possibility of surgery: having a titanium rod attached with bolts to each side of my spine to straighten it. It would alleviate my back pain, but it also has its drawbacks. I wouldn’t be able to exercise for a year, and would lose flexibility for life. I’ve thought about it long and hard, and I believe it’s worth the sacrifice. It will allow me to go through my life without fear of damaging my spine. I'm proud to say I will undergo the surgery this February.

I acknowledge and I am very grateful for the positive effect of those who supported me and helped me cope. My experience with scoliosis made me realize how it feels to be different and misunderstood, and recognize the massive importance of being sensitive to the feelings and circumstances of others.