**School**: MIT

**Prompt**: Tell us about a significant challenge you’ve faced or something that didn’t go according to plan that you feel comfortable sharing. How did you manage the situation?

**Word limit**: 250 words

# Version 1

When I was 13, I was diagnosed with scoliosis. When I found out I was going to have to wear a plastic vest around my torso for several years, I started crying. The vest made me feel different, and suddenly running, playing sports, and riding a bike were completely out of the question. In the beginning, I would hyperventilate at random moments, but as I learned to live with my situation, those episodes stopped.

When my spine stopped growing, I was able to take the vest off. Unfortunately, I started experiencing strong back pain and was told that my spine was pressing into my lungs and that my life was at risk if I didn’t undergo spinal fusion surgery. It would alleviate my back pain, but it would also impose limitations: I wouldn’t be able to exercise for a year and would lose flexibility for life. That’s a weighty situation to face at age 18, but I decided to go through with it and was operated on after graduating from high school. During the first month, I recovered from not being able to move at all to slowly being able to get up and walk. After 10 months I could resume normal life, and I have figured out how I can take care of my back.

Incorporating this condition into my daily life has taught me how it feels to be different and recognize the massive importance of being sensitive to the feelings and circumstances of others.

# Version 2 (Full Story)

When I was in third grade, I spent three months undergoing MRIs, IQ, and puzzle tests, among other evaluations because I used to cry every single day. Doctors initially thought I suffered from a learning disability because my grades had declined dramatically that year, but that turned out to be just a consequence of a mood disorder.

Over the next five years, I went to a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and an educational psychologist every week. By the end of the five years, I was med and doctor free, and my condition was gone.

During those years I learned to approach life as if the cards I had been dealt were the cards I wanted all along. I adopted a mentality of taking in any problem or obstacle, understanding why it was there, and then focusing on overcoming them to fulfill my objectives.

When I found out I had scoliosis and that I was going to have to wear a plastic vest around my torso for years, I was sad at first. But then I researched what I could do to improve my back health, and I started going to the gym five days a week until it got better. And it did.

When I had to undergo emergency surgery due to my worsening condition and was not able to move for days, again, I was persistent in attempting to walk.

Even though this story started in third grade, it has marked the way I think. It focuses me and gives me the energy to push forward.

# A Combination:

When I was in third grade, I underwent MRIs, IQ, and puzzle tests, among other evaluations because I cried every day. Over the next five years, I went to a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and an educational psychologist every week until my condition was resolved. Thus, early on I grew a strong sense that problems are a part of life, they are not the final statement about me or my future, and it is entirely possible to carry on and succeed.

Thanks to this mindset, at age 13 I was able to accept the limitations of wearing a plastic vest suddenly imposed by my scoliosis diagnosis that ruled out running, playing sports, and riding a bike. I was determined to get my back pain under control, so after researching options, I started going to the gym five days a week.

Unfortunately, my spine eventually started pressing into my lungs. I had to undergo spinal fusion surgery, which meant I wouldn’t be able to exercise for a year and would lose flexibility for life. During the first month, I recovered from not moving at all to slowly getting up and walking. Determined to resume normal life, I adopted an intensive swimming routine, and after 10 months I could carry out all daily activities.

I approach life as if the cards I have been dealt are the cards I wanted all along. I have developed a mentality of taking in any obstacle, dealing with it, and then getting down to reaching my goals.

# Old Duke Essay

Five years ago I was diagnosed with scoliosis. The doctor told me I would have to wear a plastic vest around my torso for many years. The vest was a stigma. It was noticeable even under a shirt. It made me feel different. I couldn’t go play outside because the heat would be unbearable. I couldn’t run, play sports, or ride a bike because a fall could hurt me considerably. I didn’t take it well at all. I would start hyperventilating at random times throughout the day.

A year ago, 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, but after a while, I started experiencing strong back pain.

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.

# Old Harvard Essay

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.

# Version 1

GET FROM DUKE AND ORIGINAL COLLEGES TEXT ON BACK AND FLESH OUT Maybe add a bit more about mental health and how to play life with the deck you are given