

When I saw my sister, Miranda, in the ICU at Hasbro Children's Hospital, I broke down at the sight of the monitors surrounding her. Her beautiful head of black curls had been shaved off. The nurses had cleaned her up the best they could to make her seem like the fifteen-year-old girl she had been two months and fourteen surgeries earlier. Her face has been imprinted in my memory forever. I was nine years old.

Miranda defied the odds and awoke from her coma, which was a medical miracle due to the brain damage she suffered. The first time she spoke to my parents after waking up, Miranda thought that she was in the third grade and did not remember that our parents were divorced. However, she did remember my name and the name of our sister, Anna, who is autistic. Anna spoke to Miranda as if she had never been gone, but I was anxious about Miranda's future.

When Miranda learned how to speak and eat again, I was elated. With determination, patience, and the excellent rehabilitation care at Mass General in Boston, Samantha was able to graduate from high school and become a medical assistant. During this time, I worked with Anna by involving her in activities that helped her come out of her private world and interact with others. Anna graduated from high school after playing two unified sports for all four years and is now a student at Roger Williams University.

For the past seven years, I have developed an inclusive nature and the desire to understand other peoples' perspectives and backgrounds. I attended all of Julia's unified games and my close relationship with her coach prepared me to implement my own Youth Activation Committee at my high school and become involved at the state level. I travel to the Special Olympics state office once a month to meet with other co-chairs and discuss upcoming events to unify the community. This position has given me the opportunity to create a positive and inclusive environment for the participants and their families and to transform my peers' opinions of people with mental and physical disabilities. Watching my sisters struggle has made me want to create a world that is more understanding of their needs.

Being on the Youth Activation Committee has led to many volunteer opportunities. This past February, I traveled to Costa Rica, where I had the privilege of meeting the most grateful children I have ever encountered. They accepted the simple supplies I had collected back home that I had taken for granted. I spent four days with the ticos, used my Polaroid to give them their first picture of themselves, and joked around with them in Spanish. My personal experiences have made me eager to explore other cultures and meet more extraordinary people who give me hope.

Because of my experiences, I stand up for what matters to me, put myself in other peoples' shoes, and cope with whatever life throws at me. During my seventeen years, I have supported my family members and remained positive through many trials and tribulations. The people in my life have taught me to believe in the power of the human spirit. My optimism, resilience and courage are the essential qualities that I will bring to college and I greatly look forward to sharing my experiences with the people I will meet there.