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On One Foot and Growing Wings

Plummeting to the ground, I closed my eyes and stuck out my foot to brace myself. First, there was a sharp stab, and then the pain. I remember feeling like someone was sitting on me, my lungs unable to get enough oxygen in my body. I was lying on my back on a scratchy blue cheer mat, and eventually my body allowed deep breaths; I could feel the tears rolling down my cheeks, filling my ears. Nausea overcame me as my coach removed my shoe as slowly and carefully as possible. “Can you wiggle your toes? Can you move it to the left and right? Okay. Let’s see if you can walk.” I tried to put pressure on my now purple ankle, but it did not rotate like it was supposed to. I called my mom, my face pale and scared, and told her she needed to come to school. When my mom arrived, I tried to hop out by myself, but considering I didn’t have any warm clothes or proper shoes in the middle of February, I was carried out by two of my teammates. We drove directly to the clinic. Three hours later, after the waiting, the painful x-rays, and the endless phone calls, I heard the words I most dreaded, “Katherine, you have broken your ankle clean into three tiny pieces.” The dam that had caged my fears for the past three hours was finally released, for my ankle was crushed along with my sophomore cheerleading season.

Cheerleading had been everything to me. As a flyer on the top of a stunt it gives me a sense of accomplishment, pride, and purpose. As a main component, without me, there would be no shows for the halftimes. As I sat in my hospital bed, my ankle wrapped like a newborn, I was handed crutches that were stiff and frigid. How could something I love so much hurt me to the point where I couldn’t even walk?

As I returned back to school with my broken ankle and broken faith, I was asked “who was supposed to catch you?” This question snapped me back to my middle school years. I was again on the top of the stunt, but this time I had fallen onto someone’s head and hurt her neck. I remember feeling responsible and wanting forgiveness from my teammate, so when asked who was supposed to catch me, I replied “It doesn’t matter. I did it to myself. I put my foot out.” I didn’t want the people who were under me to feel responsible for my own defensive reflex to protect myself from the ground.

I took full responsibility for my actions because regardless of who was under me, I was the one who stuck out my foot, and if I had trusted the people under me, the incident would have never happened. Breaking my ankle taught me about patience, healing, and perseverance. Experiences like these are just set backs, and I will never let myself be discouraged by a setback, because nothing is really over until the moment I stop trying.