

*My sister, Lauren, is dying. The hours at the hospital are getting longer. Ashley and I play in the wheelchairs as mom and dad look worried. They're always worried now. Why is Lauren so skinny? She cannot play football in the front yard anymore. She cannot direct our family plays. Our family has no money now; I do not know where the money has gone. I ask Mom to go by the ATM and get more money so we can buy pizza and ice cream and a basketball. She says we cannot get money from the ATM. We have always gotten money from the ATM. What has changed? Everyone is stressful now. Their voices hush when I come near. Why can they not talk around me? I see and I hear more than they think I do. Just because I'm little does not mean I do not understand. When is Lauren coming home? She's been away for a couple of weeks now. I miss my sister. We have to watch movies and play dress up and stay up all night to wait for Santa Claus. It can not just be me and Ashley; Lauren has to be there too. The three of us, it's always the three of us. Ashley is different now. She's so quiet at home. She misses Lauren like I do. My sister, Lauren, is dying.*

These were my thoughts when my oldest sister, Lauren, was diagnosed with anorexia at age eleven. I was merely five, yet I was thrust into a world run by doctor's clipboards, therapy sessions, weight scales, and mandated diets. My sister rotated between facilities, her weight and disease severity fluctuating as she went. She would get sent away for a month and appear to recuperate, only to come back home and shatter the illusion we desperately wanted to believe. Tensions rose around the house as her disease wore on all of us. 90% of parents with an anorexic child get divorced; luckily, my parents were in the 10%. Their love for my sister and for each other was immense beyond words. They were helping combat a terrible force, fortified only by each other. My family's morale seemed to crumble around her illness, counting the days, pounds, and meals until Lauren's disease would finally overcome her. Miraculously, it never did. Lauren persevered through near fatalities, failed kidneys, and shouting matches with my parents as I watched firsthand. She had always been the hardest worker in the family, and her grit was on full display as she battled her infectious enemy. Through watching Lauren, I have learned the value that determination, refusal to quit, and a desire for something better can have. Not settling for anything less than what you deserve applies to fatal circumstances and everyday situations. Lauren deserved to fight for her life; I deserve to use what she taught me and never settle in academics, in relationships, and in life. Lauren also taught me that love goes deeper than anything else. My parents would have spent every dime and laid down their lives for Lauren's recovery. They loved her so much. Love does not derive from convenience. Love forms and displays itself when the ones you hold dearest are in unbearable circumstances, where you would do anything to lift their burden, even if it requires you bearing it yourself. My family's love for Lauren was immense; a love that has stayed with me, rendering me a loving son, friend, classmate, student, teammate, and human being.