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The world around me crumbled my freshman year when my mother was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. We both struggled to keep our family together since we didn't have my father to care for us. He had been incarcerated after beating my brother bloody in our bathtub. Even after completing his sentence, he had to live with my grandmother for about two years.

During those early years of high school, I lost both of my parental figures and I had to become the adult figure of the house. There wasn't anyone for me to vent to or cope with so the pressure crushed me. I scrambled to hold onto my grades like it was a life raft since it felt like it was the only factor of my life I could control. I couldn't keep afloat with my grades, however, due to my mother constantly being in bed or the hospital from her surgeries and many rounds of medications. My studies had to be put aside constantly when I had to act like my mother for my low spectrum autistic brother, Clement, when I was feeding, cleaning, and watching him. I also had to act like my father for my mother by bringing her pills, water, and making her food whenever she needed it.

Every day was a battle for me. In the mornings, I had to feed my brother and put him on the school bus then run to school late. I didn't understand the content at school and I wanted to take advantage of the after-school tutoring day opportunities. Clement, however, always came first and I ran home to care for him after school. The grades and self-esteem I was desperately trying to hold onto started to sink. This took a toll on me mentally and I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and ADHD. These illnesses manifested physically as stomach ulcers, pneumonia, and kidney cysts. It caused me to be absent a lot and I couldn't focus in school, so the cycle of my grades dropping and my physical and mental torments continued.

On the weekends, it got worse when I had to care for Clement for the entire day. He liked to fling everything out of the drawers and tried to run out of the house often. When I tried to restrain him, he would bang his head on the ground and hurl himself against the wall. I hated knowing that he would often hurt himself because he was frustrated by his inability to communicate. My thoughts and eyes were stuck on his every movement and I sprang up when he stood up from his distraction of youtube. This made it impossible for me to study and made me feel like my future was hopeless. There'd be nights when I cried in the restroom for hours with a towel on my face to muffle the sounds.

Through these situations, I got sick of my self-pity and poor grades. I developed different strategies to overcome my situation. I adapted to study while my watching Clement by sliding pillows underneath him when he banged his head or body. My phone was also a useful tool to study with because I could throw it to the side when my brother needed me. Through these techniques, my grades started going up when I communicated with my teachers about my issues and studied more at home. My circumstances also slowly got better, when my mother was able to get government help to get a babysitter for my brother. There was more time to focus on my education, so I took classes at my local community college. The years of pressure from feeling like a failure started to lift because I was academically going towards a better future for Clement and me. By overcoming my academic slump, I did exponentially better academically and ended up getting an acceptance to the University of California Los Angeles.

The comfort of other individuals helped me too. My psychiatrist and psychologist both helped me by teaching me effective skills and getting medication that helped me focus in class. My father also returned late in my junior year and my mother recovered around that time too.

They were finally able to support me again. My friends were also there for me when I mentioned my circumstances and offered me advice. Then I got my position as Golden Bear S-1 where I created a family at JROTC interacting with the staff. The warmth in the room was obvious when I stayed after schools joking and working with the time flying by. When I thought I would be alone in this storm forever, the people around me helped me learn to float on my own for college and the rest of my life.