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During a health check in 7th grade, a school nurse suspected that I had scoliosis. After getting an x-ray, my doctor measured my spinal curve to be a moderate 40 degrees. I was prescribed a back brace- a stiff plastic cast that was to be worn 23 hours a day. Although it seemed like an impossible task, with the support of a community, I learned that strength and determination can overcome any obstacle.

Because scoliosis is idiopathic, there is no “cure.” While back braces are meant to slow the progression of the curvature, I had to cope with the fact that it would not reverse my condition. I started wearing the back brace for a few hours at a time and removing it for meals. Dealing with nausea and chest pain, I was constantly reminded of how much the brace restricted me. Simple exercises like tying my shoelaces and leaning over my desk became next to impossible. Furthermore, nothing in my wardrobe could hide my awkward shape. At school, kids would ask me what was wrong with my shoulder blades because the upper edges of the brace stuck out beneath my shirt. They would poke my back after noticing my unusual posture.

When I didn't wear the brace, the prospect of spinal fusion surgery tormented my thoughts. As a competitive Taekwondo sparring athlete, I felt guilty for leaving the brace off during long practices. I was terrified of having surgery and losing my athletic abilities.

Despite the initial discomfort, I found ways to cope. I learned how to fasten the straps myself and to ask for help if I needed to bend down. I bought loose-fitting clothes and slept on my side. Over the next few months, the brace started to have a regular place in my routine; I would even take it with me when I traveled for Taekwondo competitions.

By hearing success stories of bracing and spinal fusion, I felt more comfortable with my condition. Blogs and Youtube channels from other individuals with scoliosis back braces were empowering- I learned that many teenage girls have struggled with scoliosis and could relate to me. A year later, I joined an online support group called Curvy Girls, where we share our personal stories and discuss treatment methods. I am now friends with several people on the forum. It has taught me that I am not alone and that there is strength in numbers.

After five years, I was finally able to stop wearing the brace. Even though I thought the day would never come, this experience helped me realize that perseverance does pay off in the end. At 55 degrees, my doctor suggests that surgery may be in my future. I will be re-evaluated in two months. But whatever happens, I am proud of my honest effort in wearing the back brace. I did what I could with the situation, adjusted my habits, and worked around it. Scoliosis will forever be a part of who I am, and I've finally embraced it.