

I have been cross country skiing competitively since I was in fifth grade. I love being outdoors and pushing myself. I love the feeling of flying across the snow, and I loved the competition. In high school, most skilled racers train to qualify for and race well at Junior Nationals. I attended JN's my freshman and sophomore year. Freshman year I raced well but not my best. Sophomore year I was racing well and in a position to place in the top ten, when two weeks before nationals I had a sinus infection that made it impossible for me to train or even ski. I finally was able to get on skis the day before the first race, but I finished terribly in all the races that year. This lit a fire in me to do better my Junior year. My season went well that year and I was one spot out of qualifying with one race left. Three days before that race I fell in training and dislocated my shoulder. I tried to race in that race anyway. I dislocated my shoulder again and caused more damage meaning I needed surgery. I was racing well that entire year and shaping up to ski well at nationals but didn't even get to go because of an injury.

After having come up short two years in a row when I knew I could have done well I was seeking redemption. I decided to truly dedicate myself to skiing, training before hanging out, workouts over homework, races over relaxation. I trained hard over the summer, doing little other than eating, sleeping, and training. I put in the time before and after school, spent my weekends out running or skiing. Everything I did I did to try and be the best racer I could. I had that same desire to be the best from freshman year, but without the hubris attached. After six months and 400 hours of hard training, it was the first race. I was doing my pre-race warm-up and something new was happening. It is normal to get butterflies before a race, but this was worse, much worse. I raced well, but it didn't feel like enough. I went home disappointed with an incredible race. I put pressure on myself to race better next time, to not make stupid mistakes, to train even harder. I started to lose sleep over mistakes and times when I should have trained harder. As the season went on I was unable to have a race without feeling like I wasn't good enough, I could podium and it wasn't enough. This pressure reached its peak at the Aspen home race. I was so nervous before the race that I had to sit still for five minutes in order to stop shaking because I felt that if I didn't win I shouldn't be racing. It was a ten-kilometer race and after seven kilometers I was leading the race with my teammate, Everett, and then two college racers right behind us. I was feeling exhausted and felt like I couldn't keep the lead for the final three kilometers. Instead of fighting to try and finish in the top five I decided to drop out of the race. I was putting so much self-worth on this race that I couldn't stand to get second. In my mind, it was better to pretend to have to drop out than face my friends and family after not winning. Embarrassed and humiliated by my choice I told my team and my coach that I had started puking because I couldn't face the truth. This race was hard for me and an eye-opener. I realized that I was putting an unhealthy amount of pressure to succeed in myself. So much so that it was sucking the fun out of racing, I wasn't racing to do well but rather to not do poorly. I

needed to relax, to convince my mind that racing was for fun, results didn't matter. I was able to calm down and race well at States and Nationals, but the passion had disappeared. I had

become so competitive and nervous about racing that all of the enjoyment and the passion had disappeared.

After racing for the past four years and putting in 1500 plus hours of training I decided not to ski in college and to instead attend a school in California. I share this story with you because I hope you can learn from it. No matter how good you are, how much you love competition, don't let it consume you. Make sure it is still fun, you are still supportive and competing for the right reasons. Because if you don't you will watch as something you once loved slowly turns into chains that hold you down.