

I'm not sure how to begin a statement I never thought I'd make, or a part of my story I never thought I'd share. So here goes...

My name is Kaylee Fox. I'm a 22-year old woman living on my own in the Appalachian region of northeastern TN with my two cats, and just started my first year of medical school. I've wanted to be a doctor since I was eight years old, so to be pursuing this goal of mine still feels surreal. I am not ignorant to the fact that I am beyond blessed and privileged to be studying medicine, and it's a fact that humbles me each day I sit at my desk for another day of studying. But, before I wanted to be a doctor, I was a gymnast.

The first time I set foot in **Cincinnati Gymnastics Academy**, I was around 2 years old. I had just recently become a big sister, and my mom had put me in a toddler/preschool class at the gym. I didn't get to stay for too long as my mom realized the energy commitment of having a 2-year old to get to a gymnastics class 40 minutes from home and a newborn on the hip. Fast forward to the next time I walked onto the floor at CGA, I was seven years old and knew that I wanted to be a gymnast and I wanted to be a good one. Thus began my gymnastics career from age seven to fifteen – a late start in the world of gymnastics.

My eighth year of life was a big one. I was in the third grade, I decided I wanted to be a doctor, and I “moved up” to USAG Level 4 to begin my competitive gymnastics journey. I was also eight when I was told by a coach at CGA that I would “*probably be better at rhythmic gymnastics*” because I was “*so flexible*” and “*had an hourglass shape*” compared to my other teammates in the lineup. For reference, I attached a picture of me at 8 yo with my hourglass shape obviously displayed. My story isn't about this coach, but this serves as a defining point of the environment I was about to grow up in at CGA – an environment that centered around an *insatiable hunger* for success and an *idealistic gymnast* with a body type to produce that success. I have a strong body composition and would've likely been grouped into the “power gymnast” category of competitive gymnasts. At the time of my gymnastics, this wasn't the celebrated gymnast body type. I was called “**Pillsbury**” because I had the “*biggest butt on the team*”. That nickname followed me to the end of my gymnastics career. That idealistic gymnast I mentioned might have gotten gold medals, a college scholarship, her name on a banner displayed proudly on the gym walls for her to never see again – this doesn't compare to what benefits **Mary Lee Tracy** could reap by creating her version of a successful gymnast.



I had my fair share of injuries as a gymnast, as most gymnasts do. My first injury was when I was 12 years old - my first set of lumbar vertebrae fractures. Then, again at 14 turning 15, I had

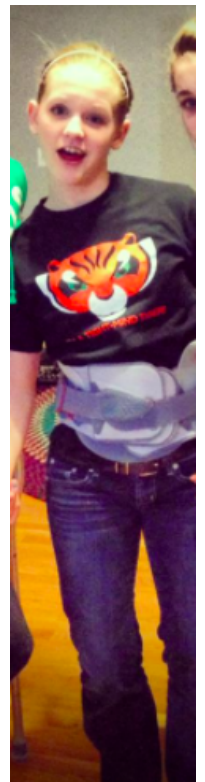
another set of fractures to the same vertebrae. As a 14-year old gymnast, I was training level 9 over the summer between my eighth grade and freshman years of school. At this point in my gymnastics, I knew I wanted to compete in the NCAA following my club career. I had my list of schools picked out and coaches I was excited to meet one day. My back injury held me back



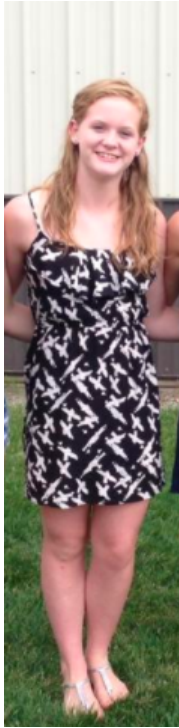
from competing my freshman year, honing in on my level 9 skills to be prepared to train level 10 upgrades, and hopefully compete as a level 10 gymnast with hopeful scholarship offers. Being a gymnast as a freshman in high school, I was already feeling the pressure to make a verbal commitment to a university before the scholarship offers for my matriculating year were spoken for. *If you haven't been recruited by your freshman year as a gymnast, you were getting "old". To the left is a picture of me at 14 yo before my second back injury.*

While I had a fractured back, I wore a brace for 6 months (*seen in the image to the right*), then did intense physical therapy for another 4 months to get my body ready for the strenuous rigor that gymnastics requires. I couldn't do much with a fractured back, but because I was on an upper-level team, I was expected

to be at the gym during practice hours. At that time, my team practiced 20hr/week. I was still leaving school 2 hours early to get to the gym, where I could do light arm exercises and apparently, whatever else my coaches could think of that tiptoed around my doctor's orders. When we were injured at CGA, we were required to bring in a doctor's note listing the physical activities that we could and couldn't do. These notes served as our coaches' guides to coming up with exercises that could keep us busy for the four hours we were at the gym while injured. In my experience with a fractured back, this meant hours of "arm sets" with ankle weights strapped around my wrists. Arm sets were walk-throughs of our beam, floor, and bar routines that we would do in front of a mirror. I can remember staring at myself in front of the back mirror by the vault runway for HOURS as I did one arm set after another. One day, MLT walked to the back mirror where I was sitting in front of having my power hour of arm sets. We had small talk as we often did. MLT was someone I looked up to and trusted. Anyways, we got on the topic of doing any core exercises while in my back brace. I replied with something along the lines of, *"It's against my doctor's orders,"* or something of the sort. I was told to lay on the ground with my knees bent so my feet were next to my bottom. MLT described kegel exercises to me, as I laid on the ground looking up at her. **"This will help strengthen your lower abdominals while strengthening your pelvic wall."** **"This is a core exercise you can do that**



won't even bother your back." So, along with arm sets, I worked sets of kegels into my time at the gym.



Once my four months of physical therapy were finished, I was finally released to return to training. This is now the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of high school. I remember being so excited because I was going to get new floor choreography done for a fresh start to competition season. I had gone back to practice for about a week before my floor choreography session, and I knew I had a lot of work to do if I wanted to have a shot at any recruitment within the year. I have always been a health-conscious person, and this stood true in my gymnastics. I was attentive to my weight fluctuations and diet habits, as well as my fitness. With an injured back, there wasn't much I could do to avoid weight gain and I was aware I had some weight to lose to return to a comfortable weight that I did my best gymnastics. *The image to the right is the beginning of the summer at a fellow teammates' graduation party, right around the time I was released by my doctor.* Fast forward to my choreography day, it was a weekend in June. My dad was sitting in the bleachers with a video camera while I was working on my routine with the choreographer. MLT walked into the gym towards the end of my session and I invited her to watch my final dance-through. My dad came to the floor to record my routine and went back to the car to get a check for the choreographer. While

my dad was gone, MLT pulled me to the bar tramp and sat me down on the side. We had a discussion about my goals for college gymnastics and how I was planning on achieving that. I didn't think anything more of this conversation than her lighting a fire in my belly to do the gymnastics I was capable of. Then, she said, **"...but if we want to get you recruited, we need to get rid of some of this extra weight."** My stomach sank, but not because this was a shock to me. Again, I knew I had weight to lose. I was taken aback by this coming from MLT because I looked up to her so much, I thought I had disappointed her by gaining the weight and that I had gained so much she noticed enough to mention it to me. I was not one of MLT's elite gymnasts, but an upper-level gymnast she took a liking to. This made me feel special and think, *"My gymnastics is good enough to attract MLT's attention?!"* She was a woman that I trusted with my gymnastics career and making me the most successful gymnast that I could be. Anyways, my dad came back inside and we all had a conversation about how I needed to be supported at home to be healthier. She ended up emailing me the diet regimen she had her elite girls following, which was a no/low carb diet. She suggested that I do bi-weekly weight checks also. When I got home with my dad, he brought the scale out of his bedroom, placed it in the kitchen, and watched me weigh in and write my weight on that calendar day. My goal was to try this plan for two weeks and re-evaluate, but the results were awful for me. I remember feeling bloated and fatigued and even heavier in my practices than before I changed my diet. I ended

up gaining more weight by the end of those two weeks and felt like such a failure when I had to do my first weight check and write a HIGHER weight on the calendar. I told MLT that that diet didn't work for me, so what should I do next?

I took it upon myself to speak with my ex-level 8 coach. She was a former gymnast and IFBB professional. I remember before she started coaching me, she held a "clean-eating seminar" for the young team gymnasts. I looked to her for advice. She hadn't been my coach for two years and left CGA to move to France. After telling her MLT's no/low carb recommendation didn't work for me, she suggested I talk to MLT to work with her on nutrition. Instead, MLT sent me the diet she had her elites following at the time, seen to the right. Along with this, I was sent some extra workouts I could do outside of the gym to speed up the process. *It may be the trauma I have been through, but looking at this again, it seems like a very clean, regimented meal plan. Hold on to this, because this serves as my template for the remainder of my gymnastics career.* My ex-coach approved that I follow this, adding some olive oil into my strictly vinegar "salad dressing". So I did, and I saw results. Between 07-21-2013 when I was sent this meal plan and my check-in with my ex-coach on 7-31-2013, I had lost 7 lbs and was SO PROUD. I had been disciplined in my nutrition, regaining my skills in the gym where I was practicing 20hrs/week, and doing the extra workouts I was sent before/after practices. But, I was apparently starting to notice how hypervigilant I was becoming of my fitness and body image. Below is a conversation between my ex-coach and I, with my text in blue.

Inbox

1 of 3

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BREAKFAST: protein, fruit
Choices - 2 eggs / plain oatmeal or a couple slices of lean meats
Plus- 1 fruit (preferably berries, apple or orange)

LUNCH: protein, veg, fruit
Salad / veg and meat on salad (chicken, steak or salmon)
add veg and fruit to salad or eat on the side (1 cup of each)
Dressing (pure balsamic vinegar)

SNACK: 1 cup of fruit or vegetables

DINNER: protein, veg, fruit
one piece of meat the size of your palm (chicken, steak, fish)
salad with vegetables only (pure balsamic vinegar)
1 Cup of fruit

SNACK: 1 cup of fruit or vegetables

I miss you too!!! How is the eating going?

7/31/13, 6:57 PM

Great now! I lost 7 lbs that week of the diet! It's like, my second day off and I feel like I have more awareness of what I'm putting into my body. It's kind of hard transitioning back to a "normal" clean eating diet after 3 weeks of the strict ones I was on. I kind of need to mentally learn to be okay with my body, my self image has kind of changed.

I continued eating clean, but being more lenient in terms of not following the meal plan to precision. In August 2013, I was doing the best gymnastics I had ever done. I finally figured out vault and was making strides there, working on new skills on all of my other events, and really fine-tuning the skills I had pre-injury. I finally felt like things were falling into place and that college recruitment was a realistic opportunity for me. Until September 2013 rolled around... I noticed while I was on a run, a funny sensation in my right hip. Of course, this run was outside of my gym time as I was still doing the outside workouts MLT sent. I figured that being stronger wouldn't hurt my gymnastics. The pain, unfortunately, didn't go away and I suppressed the pain for two weeks. Admitting that I had an injury felt equivalent to admitting to murder at CGA. My first back injury, when I was 12, I trained on for a month before going to the doctor. This was a recurring theme in back injury #2 at the start of this statement. I knew the pain in my hip wasn't normal muscle pain and I knew I needed to get checked out. But being so newly released from my back injury, telling my coaches at the time literally seemed like a death sentence. It wasn't until I was on a vault rotation that I knew I couldn't hide it anymore. Our coach had us doing yurchenko timers and I couldn't run down the runway putting any more than my right toes on the ground. I was running with the most evident limp, and my vault coach had me sit out the rest of the day. I found out the next day that I had an epiphyseal fracture of my right hip. The growth plate of my hip had not yet closed at 15 yo, and the wear-tear I had been putting my body through took its toll. My orthopedist told me I was to be out of the next season, yet again, and I lost it. But, my first thought wasn't my gymnastics or college recruitment. The first thing to cross my mind on the exam table was, *"I just worked my ass off to lose this weight, and now I am going to gain it all back."* After years of therapy, I realize this was the lightning strike of the perfect storm leading to my eating disorder.

I came to practice the next day with another doctor's note, seeing the disappointment in my head coach's face too soon after my previous injury. She told me I was still expected to come to the gym every day, ready for practice in my leotard, and doing any kind of conditioning I could do. **"Even though you're hurt, you're still on this team and you need to support your teammates."** So, despite the fact that I could do zero gymnastics, I was still required to leave school 2 hours early to get to the gym 20 hrs/week for even more weighted arm sets, kegels, and leg-tightening exercises. Does that sound repetitive?

Now is when I turn back to the meal plan. Leniency was taken out of the question, I followed it precisely. However, each week, I would take something else out... modifying the meal plan until I felt like it was the amount of food my body needed or deserved because I wasn't doing any sort of rigorous fitness. I still remember what I ate EVERY DAY to this day I write this, seven years in the future. I always looked forward to breakfast because it was the only time of day that I allowed myself to splurge. **Breakfast was 1/3 cup oats with a mashed banana and peanut butter.** MLT would frequently comment on "how great and healthy I looked" and want to discuss my diet. I told her about my breakfast one day and MLT told me a *"whole banana was*

too much and peanut butter is too much fat." I modified this further - **1/3 cup of oats with 1/2 mashed banana and a tablespoon of PB2 (for that peanut butter flavor but not the fat)**. I had to drink a bottle of water before I ate though, that was a rule I made for myself. I stopped my grandma from packing my lunch, and instead made my own for school. **Lunch was 1 cup of spinach, with 3 sliced strawberries and 2 crushed almonds with straight balsamic vinegar and an Oikos nonfat greek yogurt, with more water.** My grandma would pick me up from school and always have a snack ready for me. I started making a special request - **snack was a honeycrisp apple**, because they were in-season and my grandma loved buying whatever was in-season. I would get to the gym, have a monotonous four hours of conditioning, come home and make myself dinner. **Dinner was typically 1 egg or two spoons of cottage cheese and 1/2 cup of broccoli.** I avoided whatever it was my mom had cooked for herself and my sister. I'm also someone with a major sweet tooth, so if I felt like I had done well all day, I would treat myself to a **bedtime snack of 8oz of light, vanilla-flavored soy milk**. I ate this every day from September 2013 until November 14, 2013. Every day in between, I would step on the scale in my mom's bathroom after she would leave for work to see how the numbers decreased. I'd ask my grandma to rub lotion on the dry patches of skin that appeared on the hard-to-reach places on my back. I kept my nails painted to hide my purple nail beds. I was aware that something wasn't right, but it couldn't have had anything to do with an eating disorder because I was still over 100 lbs. The picture to the right is me on 10-15-2013, right after getting my learner's permit.



I began to keep a sweatshirt over my leotard when I was at the gym. The weather started to cool off, so the gym was an icebox to me. I kept a sweatshirt on the entire month of October until the last time I stepped on the floor as a gymnast. November 13, 2013 was the day I was released from my orthopedist to practice. I knew I wouldn't be ready to compete this season, but at least I could train. I figured I would have a quicker time getting back into "gymnastics shape" because I had kept the weight off... including the 20lbs I lost from September to November. I kept my sweatshirt on, jogged out to the floor, and began national team warmup with my team. I was so excited, but I knew something was off. My coaches were looking at me, but not saying any cynical jokes of "Wow, look who is back on the floor." Instead, MLT walked out to the floor, summoned me off to the side, and told me **"I can't have you practice and look the way you do."** I was confused. Was it my sweatshirt? Was it my leotard poking out underneath? Nope, MLT was concerned about the parents in the stands seeing me working out with their daughters, as they were MLT's paying clientele. MLT sent me to the locker room and told me to call my mom to have a discussion and take me home. My mom arrived at the gym,

coming in as she typically did from the side door. She texted me to tell me she was here, and I met her outside of the locker room. I was crying and I told her what MLT had told me about not being able to practice. We walked into MLT's office together and sat down. I let my mom and MLT do most of the talking, as I was really emotional and scared at this point. MLT told my mom that I needed to go to the doctor and be checked out. She questioned how my mom hadn't seen "*these signs*" at home, or how she could've "*let me get this sick.*" Again, MLT stated that she couldn't have me training in her gym and look the way I did. I remember the next moments precisely because my mom got defensive and I am haunted by the next words of MLT. My mom argued, "She only did what you asked her to do." **MLT replied, "I NEVER asked her to be anorexic."** I was shocked. I had never heard anorexia associated with me before. Again, I knew something wasn't right, but it couldn't have been an eating disorder. My mom grabbed me, told MLT goodbye, and we walked out of the gym. I walked out of CGA for what would be the last time I was there as a gymnast, and I had no idea.

I went to Cincinnati Children's Hospital, as it was still business hours. We waited for my name to be called to be checked on by one of the internists that headed the eating disorder program. I was stripped down into a hospital gown, weighed, and prepped for an EKG. My resting heart rate was 32 beats per minute, the average for a 15 yo girl being 70-90 bpm. I was walking around with a barely beating heart, for months. I was diagnosed with sinus bradycardia secondary to anorexia nervosa and admitted to Cincinnati Children's that evening. I was inpatient from November 13 to the beginning of December, when I was transferred to an acute care facility for mental health disorders until Christmas. *The leftmost picture is me as an inpatient, with flowers MLT had delivered to me. The middle picture was taken during a visit with a friend after I had an NG tube placed. The rightmost picture is of my sister, mom, and I on Christmas Day after I had been released from the treatment center that morning.*



This was just the beginning of the reign of my eating disorder. I would continue to relapse three times and develop suicidal ideation within the next year, being admitted for each occurrence. I attended residential treatment for 5 weeks in the summer of 2014, which was not covered by insurance. My relationship with my family suffered immensely, especially with my mom. I moved out of her house my junior year of high school and lived with my grandparents until I moved away for college in 2016. I was not the only one affected by my gymnastics career and eating disorder. My family sacrificed so much for me to continue gymnastics for so long - a divorce, financial burdens, time dedicated to my younger sister... My eating disorder only added to any of these things, including the amount of debt that ensued because of my medical bills and mental health treatment. This is still a burden I feel to this day, though I have worked through a lot of these feelings throughout years of therapy. I say all this because my life after gymnastics and after MLT was turned around completely.

Like I said, I have always wanted to be a doctor. This is a goal I have never given up even when everything in my world was demanding me to give up on this life I had been living. After my parents' divorce, I realized how expensive gymnastics was. I figured the least I could do was get a full-ride scholarship, so they could focus on my sister's college education. After gymnastics was taken off the table, I had no idea how I would make the rest of my life happen. The fact that I am writing my statement as a medical student, seven years after these events took place, is so surreal to me. Truthfully, I've had a lot taken from me. Gymnastics was taken from me due to my eating disorder - it was never my choice to leave gymnastics behind. After I was weight-restored, I still wanted to return to CGA. I had my identity taken from me, lost in manipulation at the hands of MLT and other CGA coaches. Being a competitive gymnast, I had a typical childhood taken from me, with no idea how to blend in with the other people I went to school with - fellow classmates who had years to develop friendships with each other between football games and after-school events. I have held on to a lot of the things that I had taken. Until I moved to TN, I carried around the last competition leotard I ever wore and kept it in my closet. I have held on to praise and trust for Mary Lee Tracy after all these years, knowing what role she played in the development of my eating disorder and how that has shaped the woman I am today. I write this statement because I am SO READY to let these parts of my life and these memories go, so I can accept and embrace THE REST OF MY LIFE that I have worked so hard for.

I have had a reflective, and emotional week. I had my first block exam of medical school, realized the depth of the abuse that I lived, and have had to balance this realization with the demands of my schedule. I didn't think I had a story to share. I know I have a story, and it's one I'm proud of. The last thing I wanted to do was make a mockery of all the abuse that has come to light in the gymnastics community since the Larry Nassar trials. I wasn't an Olympian, I wasn't a national team member, I wasn't an elite, and I wasn't a college gymnast. But I was a competitive gymnast at an influential age who was told by an adult I trusted that **I WASN'T**

ENOUGH. I know there are a lot of young girls and women who find themselves now in the place that I was seven years ago. If my story can save one girl from spiraling into an eating disorder because her coach has instilled body image and food insecurities in her mind, I can find comfort in the vulnerability I feel as I write this. If I can save one family from losing their son or daughter to an eating disorder, or save a family from the financial burden that a negative gymnastics environment and eating disorder commands, I can find peace in the fear I have writing this. If I can protect my future patients from the horrific realities of power-hungry people in this world, I will proudly share my story.

Thank you for embracing my story and hearing my voice.

You are enough.

You have a voice, you have a story.

YOU MATTER.

Kaylee Fox.

