[Assignment: Write an essay explaining how you changed your mind about something. Perhaps you decided not to go out for wrestling your senior year; perhaps some series of events revealed something important about yourself or your community you never knew or suspected to be true. Keep in mind that you will want to recount events, incidents, perhaps conversations or things you read that helped change your thinking process.]

I took one last look at the clock as the referee prepared to give my teammate the ball out of bounds. Only one second remained in the half. This was the first game of my high school junior basketball season, and I wanted to make a lasting impression on the coaches by putting the ball in the basket. The referee blew the whistle and handed the ball to my teammate. With practiced precision, I held off my opponent and reached one arm into the air, making a target for the pass.

"Ball, ball, I'm open," I screamed.

The ball soared high through the air, far from my target. I was still determined to catch the ball and score. I twisted my body and reached at the same time, still hoping to put the ball in the basket. My opponent pushed me. My body started to rise but my left foot stayed planted. Suddenly, I was on the floor. The buzzer sounded, but I continued to lie there, grabbing my knee and screaming in terror and pain. The lights above became a bright blur. My coaches and the trainer were quickly at my side, comforting and helping me. Tears welled in my eyes and poured out, even though I did not want to cry.

I rolled over onto my back, thinking that maybe my knee cap had popped out or maybe I had broken my leg. I could feel my knee slip out of place every time I moved, which frightened me, causing my tears to roll faster. After about five minutes of icing and relaxing my knee, I was finally moved off the court to the sidelines.

Despite my wanting to stay until the end of the game, the pain was too much. My parents drove me to the emergency room where my knee was X-rayed and examined. The doctor said my knee cap had popped out of place, and that I could be back on the court within a week. I was ecstatic. My prayers had been answered. It was only a short term injury, so my only concern was to get back out on the court again. A week passed. My knee did not improve. Eventually I went to a sports medicine doctor, who sent me to an orthopedic specialist. I was afraid of the outcome, and I definitely had a right to be. The orthopedist said I had torn my anterior cruciate ligament and some cartilage in my left knee.

I knew my career was shot for my junior season, but the doctor gave me good news. He said that I could play again without having surgery, but I would have to wait about two months for the swelling and
pain to go down. I agreed enthusiastically knowing that I would be back just in time for regionals and the state tournament.

My recovery was slow and painful. It started with the draining of my knee with a large two-inch needle attached to a long syringe, and continued with physical therapy at least three times a week. Rehabilitation was tough. I lifted weights until I could no longer move my leg, and I iced my knee until I no longer had any feeling, but I knew that the hard work and pain would produce great rewards.

The dreadful two months finally ended, putting me back on the court in time for the end of the season. Somewhat timidly, I began practicing hard again, and I even put in extra time, working outside of practice. I played pick-up, did sets of shots, and lifted weights at the community center. I also played one-on-one to work on my moves. The stability in my knee improved, but it did not last for long.

After one week of playing, I hurt my knee again. The pain was tremendous, but was not as great as before. I went back to the orthopedist. He told me straight up that I would have to have major knee reconstruction surgery if I ever wanted to play basketball again. The healing process would be nine to twelve months, which would knock out the rest of the basketball season, my entire softball pitching season, and half of my senior year basketball season.

I decided then and there that I would not have the surgery. I would never play basketball or softball again. It was too much pain and work, and by the time rehabilitation was done, my senior year basketball season would be nearly done. The decision was tough, but I could not stand the thought of the pain and the rehabilitation.

A couple of days passed, and I became very upset. My love for the game and for my team were enormous and I could not imagine the thought of being without basketball. I changed my mind about having the surgery, and I truly believe that it was one of the best decisions I ever made.

The surgery was on April 28, 1992, five months after I actually hurt my knee. The process of rehabilitation was not easy, especially during the first six weeks. I had to wear a large, bulky immobilizer that covered my entire leg, allowing my knee to bend only a certain distance. I also had to haul myself around on crutches. With any wrong move, I would experience terrible pain that would shoot from the tip of my toes all the way up through my hip. I felt helpless because I was not able to do anything for myself and I felt dependent on my family and friends.

Three days a week I had to go to rehabilitation, where my leg was strapped into a machine. The machine forced my knee to bend, an incredible feeling. I felt as if my ligaments were going to tear again because I could feel a great amount of stretching, and I could hear my knee parts squeaking as they rubbed against each other. I continued to wear the brace and use crutches for six weeks.

I was relieved when I no longer had to use the brace and crutches, but the rehabilitation was far from being over. I had to begin lifting
weights, and I also had to use the stationary bicycle, the stairmaster, and the treadmill.

During my healing process, I did many things to help out the team, and I truly believe that my support and hard work helped to bring us to the state tournament my junior year. I was the positive one on the team, and no matter how down I felt, I always provided encouragement and support. I also kept rebound and shot statistics, videotaped games, and I even helped the coach finalize plays every once in a while. I was a true team player. My junior year we were runner-up in the state tournament, but to this day, I believe that we would have been state champions had I been able to play. I believe I had what it took.

Eventually, after much hard work and determination, I regained most of the rotation in my knee and about three-fourths of my strength. The doctor was cautious in letting me begin practice again, but my enthusiasm won him over. Even though the recovery period was supposed to be a year, a lot of hard work and rehabilitation had brought about a quick recovery of six months.

I was back with the team on the first day of practice in November, practicing as hard as ever in a heavy knee brace. But my knee was not as stable, and it had trouble handling the hard work and pressure. My knee was not quick and mobile enough, so I did not play often, even though I had been one of the best players on the team. My coach did not appreciate aggressive defense or an awesome shot; he wanted speed, and my leg dragged.

I often regret being injured, but I never regret my decision to continue to play basketball or my decision to have knee surgery.

Everything happens for a reason, people say, and I believe that I was injured because I needed to realize that there is more to life than just sports, especially basketball. My life was ruled by basketball. I worshipped the sport. I practiced basketball constantly, and when I was not practicing, I talked about it. This determination and dedication helped me become a good and smart player. But after my injury, and the long period of rehabilitation, I lost some of this determination, and I began to realize that there is more to life than basketball. I continue to see a constant determination in many of my friends, but through my experience, I learned that this quality is not always appropriate.

During my experience, my attitude was good. My personality became positive and I never complained about being injured. I became more cheerful and found that everyone around me became more cheerful. I always tried to keep smiles on everyone's faces when times were tough.

When I did get that rare chance to play my senior year, I had my own cheering section which consisted of the entire crowd. Parents, students, and teachers cheered me on and commended me for my persistence and determination. They knew that I had been a true and positive force on the team, and their applause was a great reward.

My dedication to the sport paid off at the end of the year when I was presented with the first ever "Most Inspirational" award. I was truly
touched, and knew that I had made the right decision in continuing to play basketball. My dedication had paid off.

To this day, I continue to play basketball for fun, and I also enjoy being competitive. I still have to wear my brace when I play and I still experience pain and discomfort, but this does not stop me from participating in one of my favorite activities—basketball.

I have learned that hard work, dedication, and determination are key elements in life, and they are a driving force in these experiences I have related. Basketball is no longer a chore for me, but instead it is an enjoyable and fulfilling pastime.