

Checkmate

A funny thing happened on my way to becoming a child prodigy chess master—I gave up.

At five years old, I discovered a love for chess. In kindergarten, I joined my elementary school's chess club and quickly became the chess champion of my school. I loved the deep thinking, the strategy, the quantifiable ratings. After winning several school competitions, I ventured out to the LA chess club tournaments and beat kids years older than me. I took weekly chess lessons, studied theory, and attended chess camps in the summer.

When I was in second grade, and my younger brother was in TK, I taught him how to play. After that, he too watched the videos on chesskids.com, began taking lessons with my instructor, and attended the same chess summer camps as me. Our chess teacher shied away from having us play each other, afraid it would cause family drama. Eventually, however, when he was eight and I was eleven, we played against each other in a tournament in downtown LA. I lost. “The student has become the master,” my little brother crowed as I ran from the room sobbing. Devastated and humiliated by my loss, I quit playing chess.

I threw myself into a myriad of other activities: dance, journalism, mock trial, debate, and then cheerleading and photography in high school. The chess board in my living room seemed to call to me, but I tried not to think about it. I didn't play a single chess game for four years.

It was in my high school photography class sophomore year that I learned some important lessons: ISO should never go over 100 and, more importantly, seek new perspectives and don't give up easily. I felt inspired to check out my high school chess club. One Friday at lunch, I

stepped into a room full of the nerdiest kids I had ever seen; I felt right at home. Surprisingly, I noticed that there was not a single female in the club. I decided to change that.

Stepping back into chess was like returning home after a vacation. It just felt right. I had matured and was prepared to lose lots of games (and learn from each one of those losses).

My favorite type of chess is bullet chess—games under three minutes. From bullet chess, I learned how to perform well under pressure. This extended into other aspects of my life like mock trial. And in theater, I picture my most devastating chess losses to be able to cry on command. Chess has taught me lessons that carried into unexpected places. For example, I learned how to think ahead, use a short-term sacrifice for a long-term benefit, and to be aggressive...or, in cheer terms, how to B-E-AGGRESSIVE!

I recently became vice president of my school's chess club and am determined to be president my senior year. I have overcome so many challenges and grown in so many ways since starting high school, and now I won't give up until...checkmate!

