

Lessons from My Brother

Growing through Struggle

Ana Elisa Damaceno

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does it mean to “grow through struggle?” If you can, share a time that a struggle helped you grow.
2. Think about the word *premature*. Notice the prefix and the root word. What does it mean?
3. As you read, underline the places in the text where the author describes how having a disabled brother affected her.

Fabio

Growing up with a younger brother who has a disability has changed me in ways I never expected. My little brother Fabio is the best person I have ever known. He was born as a *premature* baby in 1995, and he had damage to his lungs and his heart.

I was a child when he was born, so I could not understand a lot of about it, but I knew something was going on. My mother did not know he had the problem until months after he was born. She was having a hard time feeding him. When he started to cry, his body turned blue, and he could not breathe. She took him to the hospital, and they told her about all his health problems.

My Mother

Everything got harder when she had to go back to work. She needed to make money to care for him and me and my other brother. Now, she had even

more expenses, like medication, to take care of my brother.

My aunt took care of my brother, so my mother could work. However, almost every single month she had to miss work because he was sick. She had to stay home with him or stay in the hospital with him. At some point, she had to stop working so she could take care of him.

When he started going to preschool, more challenges began because we did not live near a good school to support him and his disability. My mother found a good school, but it was far away from our home. She had to pay for private transportation so he could go to school. It was difficult for us because we did not have enough money. My stepfather was the only one working to take care of three kids and my mother.



My mother tried to find free transportation but because he could walk, they did not give it to him. He could walk short distances, but even then, he would get out of breath. He did not have enough oxygen getting to his lungs and heart. As he became older, his problems got worse. He was dependent on medications every day, and he started to be sick more often. He spent more time in the hospital. His condition was rare. Doctors were still learning about it.

A New Awareness

Having a brother with a disability has affected me in meaningful and unexpected ways. I didn't understand his diagnosis. But I could clearly see that his life was challenging and difficult for him and my mother. When we got older, I started to see how the world wasn't always built for someone like him. This awareness changed me. It opened my eyes to empathy, patience, and support.

His journey has not just taught me to be more patient and empathetic, but has also made me stronger. My brother taught me to never give up. He was a big reason why I came to the United States to try to have a better life and opportunities.

Today, I have those lessons with me always and forever, especially because he's not here with us anymore. Losing him was one of the most difficult experiences of my life, but his impact on me remains permanent and powerful. He taught me how to support my friends and my clients and how to face my own problems. I do so with determination and strength.

Because of Him

I am so lucky to have had the opportunity to grow up by his side. I am who I am because of him and my mother too. I wouldn't change that for anything. My youngest brother has been my greatest teacher. His presence in my life has made me more sensitive and more open-hearted. If I am kinder, more patient, and more understanding today, it is because of him.

My youngest brother was one of the happiest people I have ever known. Everyone who met him loved him – not because of his situation, but because of his genuine love, his happy spirit, and his deep faith. Sometimes, I think of him as my angel gift from God. He never complained. Instead of getting mad, he always chose to smile. He chose joy. Because of him, I see the world very differently than I would without him. I want to help others feel accepted and valued, just like he deserved to be. I'm proud of who I have become, and I have my brother to thank for that.

AFTER YOU READ: In what ways did Ana Elisa's brother change her? Be specific. Refer to the parts of the text that you underlined.



Ana Elisa Damaceno is a student at Santa Rosa Junior College in Santa Rosa, California. She has been in the United States for four years. Prior to this, she was living in Brazil. When she first arrived, she did not speak any English. She has been taking ESL classes to improve her language skills to better help her work in her chosen field as a nutritionist.