Milan Cesal, an ardent chess player, is a graduate of Hinsdale Central High School. He is currently pursuing a degree in psychology at NIA, and his long-term career goal is to attend medical school, specializing in oncology. Milan describes the experience of writing his personal narrative, “Why So Serious?” as his “own personal catharsis.” It allowed him to “talk about a difficult time… and helped [him] come to terms with it.”

Milan wrote this narrative in Jennifer Justice’s English 103 class.
Why So Serious?

MLA Format

Milan Cesal

The night was dark, but the tracers were lighting up the sky. The night should have been silent, left in peace until dawn, but this was not to be. The screeching cries of children filled the never-ending night, children lost in the horror of a nightmare no man can ever hope to wake from. A horror where up is down, right is wrong, and the last thing a dying man, searching for his final breaths, hears is, “You just got pwned noob,” from a twelve-year-old crying in joy.

As I lay there in stunned disbelief, hearing screams of elation spew from my victorious enemy’s mouth, I remembered something that the great sage purveyor of rock-and-roll Mick Jagger once said, “You can’t always get what you want / But if you try sometimes well you just might find / You get what you need.” That was the moment the truly impossible happened. No, the video game Call of Duty did not change my life. What I realized in that moment was that those Stones’ lyrics held a powerful meaning to me; they could be a belief all my own.

At that particular moment, I wanted to reach through my television screen and strangle every last breath out of that kid, but I knew I couldn’t do that (however, should 1337h@xor69 ever come to read this, let it be known that I will find you one of these days, but I digress). After a series of deep breaths and stress-relieving exercises, I saw that, since I didn’t get what I wanted—revenge on a 12 year old I have never met—I was still able to get what I needed: the realization that the great words of Mick Jagger were a belief I have inadvertently held for a long time. But this belief couldn’t have simply come as a result of a game of Call of Duty. There had to be more to it, and I realized that this game was the spark that caused an epiphany—the groundwork for this belief was laid many years ago.

On February 23, 2001, my sister was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. Before the diagnosis, she was just another normal, mischievous, high school senior. She would stay out those few extra minutes past her curfew just to test our parents. My mother would always tell my her that she could go wherever she liked as long as my mom knew where she
was at all times. In my mother’s words, “You can go to point A and point B. Not point C. Not point D.” Well, my sister had a habit of finding her way to points C and D. Whenever my mom found out, I would stealthily make my way to the living room couch because this was the best seat in the house to catch the heavyweight bout between my mother and sister. When that creaky old door handle turned and let out its terrifying screech, that was the bell to begin round one. As soon as my sister walked through the door, it was like World War III had just started. The yells of my mother echoed like bombs falling from the sky. The quick retorts of my sister sounded like a burst from a machine gun. This shootout would go on for a while, but eventually, peace would return and all would be quiet on the western front. The two sides would sign their peace treaties, share a hug, and wait for the seeds of war to be planted again. With the conflict subsided, my sister would return to her normal thoughts—what she should wear the next day to school and whether her hair would look good. But after February 23, 2001, the thought of her hair looking good changed to whether it would be there at all.

The look on my sister’s face when she first ran her slender fingers through her hair and was left with a clump resting between her fingers was one of the saddest sights a person should never have to see. A face filled with nothing but tears and horror. Between her tears of anguish and confusion, I could imagine all the questions flowing like water from a broken dam through her head. Why me? What did I do wrong? Questions for which then, and still now, I could never hope to find an answer. All I could do was leave my sister with empty promises, reassurances that she would be all right and that everything would soon go back to normal, but I knew full well that this was now the new normal. A normal filled with nothing but pain and sorrow for the sister I cared for so much, and there wasn’t a thing I could do about it.

A while later, when all her hair had vanished and the only thing left was a barren landscape, my sister, dad, and I were all together looking in the mirror of the bathroom in our house. I have no idea how we all managed to be staring at the same mirror, in the same room, at the same time, but however it happened, it was quite possibly the most defining moment of our entire ordeal. Before I get ahead of myself, my dad deserves a description. He is a rather large individual, but in the muscular way. He stands at about six feet two inches weighing in at 220 pounds. Staring at the mirror, he towers above all of us, but his most marked feature is the large bald spot he has that encompasses the majority of the top of his head. It came about from the great 2x6 accident of 1982, and its size and intensity is only overshadowed by the great red spot on Jupiter.
While staring in the mirror, my dad took notice of his follically challenged head and said, “You know what? I just realized something: I have more hair than you.” At any other point in time, in any other universe, this comment would have been construed as mean spirited; but the stars aligned for this single moment, and it became the funniest thing anyone of us had ever heard. If there was ever a time when the mythical ROFLCOPTER existed, it was then (and for the less internet savvy, this is when one rolls on the floor laughing, though it’s usually done through a computer without any rolling and/or laughing). We were all laughing hysterically, gasping for breath. I thought, for a second there, that I was actually going to be the first person in the world to die from laughter. When I looked to my left, I saw my sister laughing and tears rolling down her cheeks. The tears that I had become accustomed to were ones of fear and pain, but these were of joy and happiness: something I had not seen on my sister’s face in quite some time. It was one of the most surreal moments I have ever experienced, and it was the moment in which my family and I got what we needed to get through the arduous battle of cancer: a sense of humor.

My father’s sense of humor helped us cope with what was going on, but times were still tough. The sad moments far outweighed the happy ones, but the happy times we spent together are what I hold dear. I try to not allow myself to only be filled with anger and contempt for the past I suffered. But when I falter and blame the world, I latch onto the good times so they can reel me back, and I just remember, “You can’t always get what you want / But if you try sometimes well you just might find / You get what you need.”