from when I was a young girl to when I grew into a woman. There was never a time that I didn’t realize that sport was an important part of my life. Having Dad as a coach, with his background in tennis, put the pressure on from a young age.

The first match I really remember vividly was in the under-9s category of the Greenwoods Club summer tournament. It was late August and the summer had been a particularly hot one. Endless sunny days, no rain, and dry, yellowing grass in every front yard. Legs covered in mosquito bites from leaving the windows open all night. We had to be at the tournament early in the morning for registrations, so Dad and I left in the car when the sun was still rising. I remember I almost left my racket at home and he was so mad at me for nearly making us late. But we got to Greenwoods just on time and got me signed up.

My opponent in that first match was six months older than me which at that age felt like two years. She was much taller! I felt terrified and sure I was going to be humiliated. Her name was Mallory and that really stuck with me because that was the main character in a series of books that I loved reading at the time. Mallory quickly took the lead in the game, but as I got into my groove and my confidence grew, I managed to snatch back some points and suddenly things were a lot more even.

I lost that match but not by much. And I definitely held my own. Dad was starting to see that I had some natural ability, so from then on life was tennis, tennis, tennis.

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Through all of this time, as with my whole childhood, my brother was of course still the focus for the family. Ben’s illness seemed to be sewn into the fabric of our daily lives. Every decision had his wellbeing at its heart. Adult conversations often happened in hushed tones in other rooms. It was inescapable.

 Ben hated the attention. He just wanted to be a normal kid. Not special. It breaks my heart to think back now and there’s not a second of the day that I don’t wish things could be different. If Ben had been born 20 years later there