

## PB&J Scholarship

Letter Essay

04/09/2021

Forgive the Disney reference, but a quote from has been resonating with me lately. A wise old character says “ The past can hurt, yes, but the way I see it is you can either run from it or learn from it,” This is said during a scene when another character is contemplating returning home but not wanting to deal with the pain of facing his past. The thing is, though, facing issues does not mean reliving them but rather having the courage to look at them and know how you can deal with them.

I spent my early years living with my grandma in a house with five families. My mom was pregnant with me and my twin when she moved in with my dad and his family and, even though I was not in this world just yet, I was already being put in life-threatening situations. My grandma wasn't very fond of my mom, rather she felt some sort of disapproval towards her. She wouldn't let my mom go outside, rest, or even eat much while pregnant with me. This resulted in my mom, and by extension me, becoming anemic. This led to her losing one of the two babies she was pregnant with. We stayed there until I was about two or three and then moved into a home of our own where my brother was conceived. By the time I was starting kindergarten, transportation was very difficult for my family and it didn't start to get easy until I was in middle school entering high school. I experienced a lot of bullying in my elementary years up until fifth grade which established a poor mental state, low self-esteem, rebelling constantly to gain attention, and terrible grades.

As the oldest, I had not been setting a good example for the rest of my siblings. Knowing this inflicted a lot of pressure on me in the years to follow, but at the time I was focused on just getting through each day. While I was in elementary school from about the age of five to eleven, I experienced sexual abuse after school from my cousins. I would experience a day of bullying and mental torment at school, then head to what I suppose you could call babysitting from my aunt where I was sexually abused for years. These were the worst years of my life and I truly felt as if I could not tolerate anything any longer. This resulted in terrible anxiety and suicidal thoughts at an incredibly young age. I vividly remember my mom catching me watching suicide prevention videos on YouTube when I was 10 and asking me why I was watching that. All I could bring myself to say was, “I don't know”. She looked at me with astonishment and deep sorrow and she brought it up at dinner that night with my dad. They then asked me what had been happening and asked for an explanation for my actions. I couldn't bring myself to tell them

my reality and the many things I was going through every day so I only said, "I'm being bullied at school" and even that was enough to bring my mom to tears. Despite the emotional scene, not much happened afterwards. Instead, I distinctly remember my dad saying, "Ok then stand up for yourself. Don't let it happen" and that seemed like the appropriate advice, but for an older child I was not that. I remember the look my parents gave me once they found out I had been hiding the abuse from them and I still believe they felt more hurt that I didn't tell them rather than knowing I had been hurting for years. I contemplated a lot of things at a young age, like "why me?" or "why am I alive?" and although many might hear my story and think that children forget things as they grow, I'm living proof that it's not true. In fact I beg to differ. What children go through tends to form who they become and often the only thought lingering in their mind is "what is my purpose here" as they grow. Nobody should live with constant trauma and paranoia because often a pattern of unfortunate events will follow. I shouldn't have had to be strong or stand up for myself. I should have felt safe knowing my parents would help.

I struggled with what felt like depression in my middle school years and beginning of high school years and felt like I was returning to the terrible mindset I was once in as a little girl. All my past experiences and trauma came flooding back as if it were yesterday. I lived with panic attacks that happened out of nowhere and flashbacks of the things that hurt me. I began to lose friends I worked so hard to get, my grades began to drop. No matter how hard I tried, my energy and motivation decreased at a rapid rate and my negative emotions and suicidal thoughts came creeping up on me like a tsunami with nowhere for me to escape. Thankfully, I had a friend that remained with me during all those times and helped me through it and, to this day, I thank him for that because if it weren't for him, I can't say I would be here today.

As I move through my senior year and think about my future, I have been reflecting on my past. I have decided I want to study to become a neonatal nurse through the nursing program at Dominican University of California. My aspirations for this career come from having several younger cousins stay in the intensive care unit as babies and each time I heard one of them was in there my heart sank. I always felt an almost tug-like force encouraging me to become a nurse for that unit, but wondered if I could handle the stress of such a job. Now I know that I have the strength and resilience it takes to succeed in that essential career. I'm grateful to have the love and support of my family when making this choice. It's a difficult and complicated process with a lot of work ahead, but I'm very happy with my decision.

Today, I am a very different person than I was years ago and I'm proud of my improvement. I am no longer in the trauma state of mind. I motivate myself and use my moments of failure as fuel to keep me going. If I don't make a future for myself by using what I have in the present then I won't have one, and I am starving for success because I want to be better every single day. I want to be a better influence for my younger siblings and friends and show that it is possible to move forward and that doing so doesn't mean forgetting. Often it means using that trauma to remind you of where you want to be and just how far you have come. You have to start

a path so others can use it as the main road and so they feel the support you may not have had. I chose to be a leader, strong and resilient. I know my worth, and as Arnold Schwarzenegger said “Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is “strength.”