

It was the start of my elementary schooling when I got sick. I was in hospitals having tests run every other day. Blood drawn, dizzy spells, pale skin, etc. I remember being in the doctor's office when my parents came in crying and holding me saying, "it's not fair." I never understood what was going on, I was super confused. I did not know what the doctors had told my parents until my dad gave me a hug and said "it's okay, I can wear a wig with you babygirl." I wanted to cry but I knew I had to be strong. The doctors told my parents that I, their little girl, only 7 years old, had cancer. I was sick, very sick. As they told this to my parents, doctors continued to run tests. At one point too much blood was taken for a blood culture and I passed out. The doctors were so helpful and comforting through this time.

Throughout all the months of me being sick, my family organized a walk for me from Santa Clara to Fierro. There were many there, both family and friends. My parents took a wagon for me in case I was not able to make the complete walk. Sometimes I had enough strength to walk, but a lot of the time I was either pulled in the wagon or riding piggyback on my brother. My mom prayed the rosary almost the whole time. When I got to the shrine at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Fierro candles were lit by those on the walk and together we prayed another rosary and took pictures. By the end of the day I found myself even more exhausted than before.

After months in and out of hospitals and doctors offices, the doctors figured out that I did not have cancer, instead I had contracted both strong monoclonal "mono," or better known as, the kissing disease, from the water fountains at my elementary school. Mono consists of fever, inflammation or swelling in the lymph nodes, and sore throat. Severe fatigue is also present at this stage. I still had to go to the doctors and have tests run on me to help get me better.

As I had entered my sixth grade year in La Plata middle school I was excited to get a new start. I entered middle school not knowing anyone. By the middle of the school year, I was getting picked on by a group of girls. They told me to go kill myself. I received blocked phone calls saying, I was going to get “beat up” to “watch my back.” I was scared to even walk to or from school but I knew that school was my safe space. I enjoyed all my classes and strived to do my best. As the bullying got worse, I knew I had to let someone from school staff know. I told them and they advised me to stay inside while everyone was at lunch. I was always taught not to hide. I still ended up going outside where the group of girls approached me and told me “I told you to watch your back, just wait for tomorrow morning when you get here, you will regret it.”

As the last day of school came, I had my mom pick me up from school. I went with a friend of mine to go walk and pick up my little sister from elementary school where I was jumped by a group of guys. They ran up to me and asked why I was not more careful after being warned plenty of times. They pushed me down and started to kick me. I took off running to the elementary school where I knew I would be safe. As my friend and I were trying to leave the school doors on the other side, we saw the group of guys leaving. It was at this point in time that I knew enough was enough with the school I was attending and decided to transfer to Cliff schools the following year. Even though I was out of Silver school for a few years, I was always still afraid to come out of my home and into public unless I was with my mom or dad. I hated whenever I would have to be outside of my home because all I would think about is “What if those that bullied me see me?” “What if they try to jump me again?” I was very scared.

The pandemic of 2020 has had a huge impact on my highschool career. As I entered my freshman year of high school in 2019-2020, I was excited to see high school as a new start for

me. I was always so involved in school, I was involved in FFA and Youth Group for my church out in Cliff, along with being involved with basketball. I always looked forward to going to school and getting my work done. As spring break in 2020 had rolled around, the state announced that we would get an extra 2 weeks off of school due to a “national emergency”. As most of us were, I was beyond excited being told we did not have to attend school for 2 more weeks. The world pandemic had gotten worse and schools had shut down for the rest of the year. I was upset that I was unable to finish my first year of high school.

The following year of high school I had hopes that I would get to attend school again in person. We got told that COVID-19 was worse and that we were to be online for school. The district had provided laptops and textbooks for us to use for the year. I was upset because I am more of a face to face learner and struggle with not having the actual presence of a teacher in front of me. It was very tough for me to adjust to having to do every little thing on a computer. I struggled, I always had to ask for help which is something I never had to do whenever I was in school in person. I would always finish my work on time in class whenever we were in person. Being online made me feel like it was an option and not required. I would never wake up on time for my google meets and would procrastinate on doing the work that was assigned. I never really engaged in online schooling. I had struggles with teachers not helping me in a one on one meet whenever I needed it.

I decided to transfer back to Silver schools for the last quarter of my sophomore year due to it being easier on my parents since we were still living in Silver and I was attending Cliff. I was scared, super nervous, I did not want what happened in the past to happen again. I was hoping and praying that my appearance had changed over the 4 years that I was in Cliff schools that way nobody in Silver would notice me. I struggled yet again with transferring to a school

where I used to get bullied and harassed physically, mentally, and emotionally. My grades would slip and I would have grades that I never had. I was working a job at the time I was online and would try to multitask by being at work and listening to lectures on my online meetings. I never socialized in my meetings or with teachers. My entire sophomore year was online and I had lost my connection that I had with school.

The summer of my sophomore year I had decided that I wanted to graduate early and go to college. I never wanted to be in school the way I have the past 2 years. I wanted to bypass my Junior year and jump straight to Senior year that way I could be done and over with high school. My high school experience is something that I never would have thought I would experience. I absolutely HATED my high school years because I feel like I did not really get to experience it. I always have people tell me “why are you graduating early ?” “Your high school years are the best four years of your life, enjoy them while you can” “I don't know why you want to grow up so fast, life isn't really all that.” These people are also the ones I thought would be extra supportive of the fact that I am finishing school a year earlier than expected and holding a job, as well as applying to go to college right after I graduate.

I am just hoping that when I start to attend college, I will be able to engage more in college than I am in high school. I look forward to attending college because I want to start pursuing my career pathway and start going to work at a job that I enjoy being at. I want to become successful at a young age and be able to afford anything I would want or need. I know that with all the challenges I have faced my years throughout school, I will be able to achieve college and start a career no matter what other challenges that God faces me with. The obstacles I face are for a reason and help me to become a more successful person in life. I am ready to start working towards my career goal.