



In 1991, I began a life that most would consider unimaginable. It was the first snow of the season, in early November, when my family experienced a motor vehicle accident as a driver lost control and hit our van head-on. My mother, sister, brother and I all suffered injuries, mine being a high level spinal cord injury, but this seemingly tragic event, would create a bond within our family like no other and provide opportunities that we may have otherwise overlooked.

After several months of rehabilitation, I quickly recognized I could do anything I wanted in life, just maybe a little different from other people. As I became one of the youngest in the country to learn how to drive a power wheelchair, I saw how I could still chase after my brother or enjoy being outside during the summer. Over the years, I also realized how important it is to advocate for yourself while also helping others as an effective method of combating prejudicial attitudes. One of my most significant realizations, however, occurred in my pre-teen years when I finally understood that I needed to use my intellectual abilities to the fullest extent possible regardless of my physical limitations because I could accomplish anything by using my mind.

This was a turning point and the first time that I considered becoming an attorney. At some moment, we all need an advocate that is sympathetic and passionate, and this is what I wanted to provide to our community. By age sixteen, I encountered troublesome conditions at my local high school, some of which could have prevented attending college. I had heard about younger students enrolling at MCC by taking the college entrance exam so my mother and I decided to inquire about this option. The day I met with an Admissions Counselor at MCC was not only one of excitement, but also one of optimism, as I knew that my dreams were actually attainable. After preparing for and passing the entrance exam, I started at MCC. This turned out to be a life-changing experience because of the unwavering positivity and dedication by the professors who sincerely cared about their students and building the skills necessary for achieving success.

Being so young at the time, the biggest challenge was deciding what classes to take, especially because of the diverse course offerings at MCC. The opportunity to take several uniquely different courses initially was very beneficial and helped determine my true passion. With a year of study completed, I chose to major in criminal justice. The intellectual vigor of this program provided skills that are still with me today and allowed me to achieve my goal of becoming an attorney. Although difficult at times, diligent study and support from family and professors brought results and I eventually earned membership in Phi Theta Kappa. I found that being an active learner, reviewing the reading before and after class, and talking about the course material with professors was essential. As I entered my final year, my family and several faculty

members suggested that I apply to Cornell University, which was something I never considered. Apprehensively, I decided to send my application to Cornell along with other applications to local colleges in Rochester.

To my surprise, I received an acceptance letter from Cornell and I enrolled in the Industrial and Labor Relations program. The study skills I learned at MCC were invaluable at Cornell. During the next two years, I remained mindful of my background at MCC, especially the importance of helping others. With my leadership skills from being an officer of Phi Theta Kappa, I participated in many volunteer activities, including starting a program that assisted students with disabilities or temporary injuries with daily activities such as grocery shopping or doing laundry. By engaging in extracurricular activities that benefited those in need, I found a healthy balance between intense studying and engagement outside the classroom. This same approach would carry me through to graduation from Cornell and ultimately graduation from SUNY Buffalo Law School.

Today, I work for law firms in Buffalo and Rochester as a legal researcher and writer, advocating for the needs of people that suffer workplace injuries as well as elders experiencing obstacles in obtaining healthcare or others that are victims of medical malpractice. Having seen the pitfalls of our healthcare system first-hand, I am now pursuing an advanced degree in health law to allow for a more active role in the improvement of health care policies.

As you continue on your educational journey, I urge you to pursue your true passion, never question whether something is achievable because there is always a way to accomplish even the ostensibly impossible, study with diligence and enthusiasm, and never forget where you came from and the community around you.