

My life has been filled with many high points, but also some times that I would like to call learning experiences rather than mistakes. It has been a very joyful and pleasant life and I have worked hard to excel in many aspects. A majority of this happiness and prosperity was contributed by role models in my life, my own values, memorable events, and also volunteering experiences.

Although many people have affected my life, there are two specific women that have had more impact than any other person. The first of these women is my cousin Melissa. She was about thirteen years older than me and simply the most amazing person that I have ever had in my life. Unfortunately, when I was fourteen years old, after a long battle with a rare form of cancer, she passed away at the age of twenty seven. When she was still alive, I felt as though I could go to her and talk to her about anything. Somehow, I feel as though she had her life in the perfect balance of happiness and seriousness. Even though she was living with a terminal illness, she lived as if there was always a tomorrow and constantly put others first. For example, during one Christmas season, Melissa was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, but somehow found the strength inside of her to go and purchase presents and personally deliver them to her brother's family which was on a tight budget for the holiday. This was only one small example of the kindness that she shed onto so many people. It is hard for me to even put into words how much of an impact she had, and will always have, on my life. She showed me how I want my life to be, and instilled in me the drive to be the best person I can.

The other woman that has made a dramatic impact on my life is my mother, Martha. She has been there for me from the start. In every instance that I need her, she is there without one ounce of hesitation. She, like Melissa, constantly puts others before herself. Although I greatly admire this characteristic in my mom, at times she puts others before her when I personally think she should not, but I have learned from these instances. She supports every decision that I make in my life and is always there to catch me when I trip up. Overall, she has shown me what it means to be a great mother. I only hope that one day I will measure up to half of what she is.

Something else that has aided me to getting where I am today is my values. A great part of my values are influenced by what my parents taught me and how they raised me. Most of my beliefs are very similar to theirs, but I also did not completely agree with everything that they taught me, so some of my values also differ. As I think about what exactly my core ideas that I live my life by, it is hard for me to put them in words. I find myself vying for love and happiness, and commonly live my life to achieve those things. My values have changed, and will continue to change, throughout my life as I continue find out exactly what makes me happy.

Along with role models and values, some events in my life have had a lasting impression on me and also contribute to where I am at in my life today. As I mentioned before, my cousin Melissa passed away at an early age. Her death had a significant impact on my life because it made me realize how important it is to live your life the way you want to and not just as others think you should. I had gone through so much with

her, especially throughout her treatment, and it was extremely tough to lose her, but the amount of knowledge and insight that I learned from her will go on with me forever.

Another part of my life that has greatly changed the way I view people and how I interact with them was my relationship with a boy in high school. I began dating this boy when I was a freshman and he was a junior and I continued to date him for three and a half years. We were completely head over heels for each other and enjoyed spending every moment that we could together. After two years of being together, I found out that he had been lying to me about certain things for those two years. I was completely and utterly devastated. The worst part of the whole situation was that after I found out about those things, I let him back into my life and he continued to not treat me the way I should have been treated. Previous to us being together, I was completely open and trusting of anyone I talked to. After this whole experience, I now find it harder than ever to let someone back into my life the way that I let him. I find it extremely difficult to trust people completely, but I work every day to be able to view people the way I did previously.

One other important part of my life that has helped me to grow as a person is my volunteer experiences. Although I have volunteered with many different organizations, the opportunity that has influenced my outlook on life the most is spending time with my "little sister", Patricia, through Big Brothers, Big Sisters. I have been meeting with Patricia once a week during the school year since my junior year in high school and I absolutely love her. We come from such different family lives, but I have learned so much from her. Granted, she is only twelve years old, but she has been through so

much in her life and is such a strong girl. I also realize that I have a large impact on her life, which only makes the situation that much better.

Overall, I am very content and happy with where my life currently is. I am in a new environment, meeting new people, and learning things every day. I realize that I will change a lot through these next four years of college, and I am very excited to see where I will be. I will continue to grow as a person and find out what truly does make me happy.