

Who or what in your educational experience has influenced your direction in life?

When I was nine years old, my parents decided to transition me from being homeschooled to attending public school. At that time, I was excited about this change, thinking that I would make new friends and learn new things. However, I quickly realized that my homeschool education did not prepare me well for this transition. I found myself struggling to keep up with my peers in various subjects. I spent several years trying to catch up with my classmates, but it wasn't at all an easy journey. I often found myself in classes with younger students or in special education classes. While I appreciated the extra help and attention, it was difficult to admit that I needed it. I felt embarrassed and ashamed of my academic struggles, especially when my friends talked about their summer vacations while I spent my time in a classroom trying to master basic skills like multiplication.

When I started seventh grade, I was finally taken out of SPED. This was a big accomplishment for me because it meant that I could attend classes with kids my age and not be pulled from certain classes anymore. I also decided to try something new, such as basketball. But what I didn't know was that this decision would change the course of my life.

Joining the team was mainly an attempt to prove myself. I knew I wasn't the most athletic person, but I wanted to push myself and see what I was capable of. I struggled at first and felt like I was in over my head. However, the basketball coach must have seen something in me that I didn't see in myself. She pushed me harder than anyone ever had before. There were strict rules for student athletes when it came to their academics. If a student was doing poorly in classes and had developing grades, they were deemed unfit to play sports. This meant they would not be able to travel with the team or play in games. I struggled with my grades at first and was in danger of not being able to play. However, my coach saw my potential and was determined to help me succeed. She stayed after school with me to make sure I understood the material and helped me improve my study habits. With her guidance, I saw a version of

myself that I had never seen before. The limits I had set for myself were ripped away and I was able to achieve things I never thought were possible.

My coach told me that having “bad grades” was not an option for me anymore. Therefore, I worked hard and was able to improve my grades while continuing to play basketball. I went from being the lowest in my class to the top. I started out as a terrible basketball player and became the team captain. Although my coach has recently retired, I will always look up to her and strive to make her proud. As a senior, I can confidently say that I have come a long way because of her.

As I embark on the next chapter of my life, I am excited to expand my knowledge in writing. Basketball has made me into a good communicator and my coach has instilled a deeper understanding of education. I have been accepted to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Communications at the University of Alaska Anchorage. My coach's influence on and off the court has inspired my route, and to further my education.