

Growing up, I was encouraged to fail classes. Instead of focusing on academics, I was expected to make up for it in the home. From the time I started school at five, the idea that education was unnecessary for women was instilled in me. My parents being raised in the Philippines influenced those beliefs, where traditional expectations often placed less value on education for women. Because of this, I grew up without a strong academic foundation or encouragement to succeed in school. Despite that environment, I performed well in my elementary and middle school. Although I never got homework help, I was placed into advanced classes and consistently ranked near the top of my classes. Although my parents scoffed at any academic award or honor roll that I received, I was proud of myself. That early success showed me that I was capable, but it did not last.

As I transitioned into high school, the lack of academic support and the increasing household expectations rose from being the oldest daughter. When my mother gave birth when I was fifteen years old, I stepped into more tasks at home. I also took on two jobs to help financially support my family while also participating in cheer and volleyball, which limited time for schoolwork. At a young age, I was forced to learn how to manage competing responsibilities without structure or guidance. My days were jam packed with work shifts, practices, school work, and responsibilities at home. This fast-paced life became my normal.

It wasn't until a pivotal moment in my sophomore year that my pace slowed down. On October 4, 2023, I got in a car crash and underwent major surgery. The aftermath forced me to stop and step back from my usual routine. After living on autopilot for years, the sudden pause made me realize how disconnected I had become from my own direction. I had been so focused on surviving each day, that I had lost my sense of identity and purpose. During this period of stillness and recovery, I felt lost. My legs were broken, my jaw was wired shut, my outlet of sports was gone, and my schoolwork continued to pile up. Without the distractions that once occupied my time, I was forced to sit with that feeling.

I continued to feel this weight of misery throughout the rest of my sophomore year. I resumed my daily activities with a sense of detachment, moving through each day without the same energetic personality that I was notoriously known for. I struggled to find motivation and direction. It felt like I was present, but not fully engaged in my own life.

During this time, one person began to shift my trajectory. My PLTW Biomedical Sciences teacher and HOSA advisor, Mrs. Williamson, became a steady source of support when I needed it the most. After my car crash, when I was at my lowest physically and emotionally, she showed up for me in ways that I had never experienced before. She listened when I needed to talk, gave me a safe space to process everything I was going through, and supported me through challenges at home that made it difficult to focus on myself.

Her presence gave me a sense of stability during a time where everything else felt uncertain. Through her class, I was introduced to biomedical science in a way that felt meaningful and real. The positive impact that science and medicine has in underserved communities that Mrs. Williamson passionately emphasized empowered me to step into my true purpose. She did more than just teach content. She showed me how to stay committed, how to

persevere through difficult circumstances, and how to take my education seriously even when life felt overwhelming.

With her support, I began to rebuild my academic habits and my confidence. I became more involved in my school and started seeing a clear path for myself in healthcare. I recently had the honor to serve as Alaska HOSA's vice president, where I led conferences, supported members, and represented Alaska on an international level. Over time, I stopped focusing on how far behind I felt and started focusing on the endless possibilities that I can make happen.

She became a constant in my life, and her belief in me changed the way I saw myself. This scholarship not only reflects her support, but also the growth she helped me achieve, and it will allow me to continue pursuing the future she helped me see.