

What pushes a person to keep striving forward, even in the face of hardship? For me, it has always been my family's sacrifices, struggles, and unwavering hope. My parents are first-generation immigrants who come from a low-income city in the Philippines. They moved to the United States to provide my brother and I with a better life. Their greatest dream was for my older brother and I to pursue post-secondary education, an opportunity my parents never had. We grew up striving to be the first generation of our family to attend college, a huge milestone for ourselves and our loved ones. My brother is currently enrolled at Western Washington University. While I'm thankful that my brother attends college in Bellingham, it's difficult knowing that my parents work low-paying jobs at our local grocery store to afford his education.

Every night, my dad takes on a second job as a custodian, putting in extra hours to help pay for tuition. In 2011, my mom suffered a brain aneurysm and had to spend a month in Seattle for intensive care unavailable in rural Alaska. The fear of losing her at a young age was overwhelming. Even after her successful surgery, I had to learn to navigate the stress of her condition. Since then, she has been unable to work as much, and her recent reduction in hours has made our financial struggles even worse. I turned to sports as a way to shift my focus and cope with these difficult times.

Growing up in a Filipino household, basketball was a huge part of my life. Between third and eighth grade, I dreamt of playing in the NBA and practiced daily to make it a reality. But in my first sixth-grade game, I rolled my ankle and struggled with basic tasks for months. My family couldn't afford physical therapy, and the slow recovery meant I missed an entire year of basketball. I still wonder what my life would be like if I hadn't suffered that injury.

On top of these tragic events that have occurred, I've always felt overshadowed by my brother's achievements. Mr. 4.0 GPA, best saxophone player in the state, was loved by every teacher, well-known by the community due to his many hours in service... the list goes on and on. I love my brother, but competing with his success has been tough. I felt a deep responsibility to fulfill my parent's dreams, but unlike my brother, I struggled to find my own path.

It took me years to realize that my brother's success wasn't just from talent, it was from grit and perseverance. And from that point forward, I stepped out of my brother's shadow and made a firm commitment to working harder in everything I do. As NHS president, I started a food drive for the Salvation Army, gaining a greater understanding of the struggles many people face. Through this work, I've seen how access to proper care—whether it's food, medical

treatment, or rehabilitation—can have a major effect on a person’s health. These experiences have strengthened my desire to become a nurse, ensuring that people, regardless of their background or financial situation, receive the support they need to heal and thrive.

My background has taught me determination, resilience, and compassion, all of which are not just advantageous but necessary for a career as a nurse. Last fall, I enrolled in a UAS class called Introduction to Health Sciences to better understand healthcare and the body’s healing process. Through this class, I improved my understanding of public health issues, healthcare systems, and the importance of compassionate care. With the support of the June Nelson Memorial Scholarship, I will continue my education, driven by my mom’s experience, to pursue my dream of becoming a nurse. I want to help my parents’ financial strain, become the healthcare professional my 12-year-old self needed, and prove that dedication and hard work can overcome any challenge.