

Worthy Women's Scholarship Finalist Essay - Third Place

By Janisha Szabo

If I had been asked ten or even twenty years ago where I see myself in the future, I never would have responded that I plan to be a lawyer. Sampling majors throughout my lengthy undergraduate career made me feel as though I would never amount to much, or at least not anything of which I could feel proud. Now, having been accepted to law school, my trajectory for the next ten years is wildly different than I ever could have imagined.

Over the past twenty years, the most consistent component of my life has been community service (and my cat, Lincoln). Volunteering and serving the community has been a guiding light through the tumult of my personal life – divorce, changing jobs, changing addresses, and fluctuating mental health. The other part of the past twenty years has been spent juggling undergraduate studies. The eventual prospect of a legal career, along with having built a solid support system, propelled me to finally attain a bachelor's degree, something I had all but given up on. With such a robust undergraduate experience, I gained insight that I would have never come by with a typical four-year undertaking. I have come to understand the importance of women and gender-diverse individuals in STEM fields. I have worked directly with the Deaf community and have advocated for people with disabilities. I understand ethical ramifications in workplaces, medicine, gender politics, and criminal justice.

My education has been a major complement to my volunteer work and has allowed me to develop greater skills, knowledge, and abilities for helping others achieve goals, growth, and autonomy. As an active volunteer with organizations that focus on migrant rights, children in crisis, judicial fairness, and women's and gender equity, and as a future lawyer, I desire to repay the communities that have always shown acceptance, patience, and empathy towards me. During my most difficult times in life those communities and organizations always made space for me, made me feel purposeful and welcomed.

Ten years from now when I am a licensed, practicing public interest attorney, I plan to provide pro bono services to the organizations and the people who humbled me, supported me, and encouraged me to continue my education. At the same time, I hope to support myself and earn income with a firm that advocates for marginalized and underrepresented groups. Working for a firm that prioritizes social responsibility is ideal, and if I struggle to find employment that aligns with my personal values and commitment to service, I will work to create a space for like-minded legal professionals and civil servants. In ten years' time, I aim to inspire in others that it is never too late to start, return to, and complete educational goals, to be an example of

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someone who has done just that and who pays forward the support and encouragement that I received along the way.