

***My Parents Didn't Make  
Sacrifices For Me So I  
Could Fail School***

***--by Nadia Zuniga***



*Next thing I knew, I saw a bright white light in front of me. “Is this it? Am I dying?”*

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**Community college attended:** Manchester Community College

**Location:** Manchester, Connecticut

**Date success story was submitted:** 4 December 2018

**Community college sponsor/mentor and college affiliation:** Patrick Sullivan,  
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**Key search terms:** Recent high school graduate

**Academic major:** General Studies, with plans to pursue a degree in Disability Specialist

I remember being in my English class and preparing to write our college essays. One of my English teachers showed a few examples for us to get ideas, and the first one it immediately caught my attention. It was written by a former student my English teacher had, explaining how they were always messing around in school instead of focusing on their education. They didn't realize how important it was to their parents for them to have an education because they grew up never having any of the same opportunities their child had. Now I am not a student who decided to skip school and never turned in their homework. On the contrary I was the independent student always getting good grades and always on task. Hearing what this student had to write, though, I began thinking about my dad. He's from Peru and had experiences that no one should face. His journey from Peru to the United States was not just a better life for himself, but for his children. Admiring what he had done, years before I was born, I kept that thought in mind to push myself in my education for him and to not waste my own life, a second life.

Why I mention this moment is because I questioned myself constantly if college was for me. It's the next chapter after graduation for most students, but I didn't know what exactly I wanted to do or to study. I thought about taking a gap year, taking general studies, going to cosmetology school instead of college. I had ideas but not a set-in stone plan, which is understandable for any new incoming college student, but I wanted to have a direction to go to and to not pick random classes making me graduate late or taking that last course in the summer to receive my degree. All I knew was that I wanted to go to college. The only questions I had to answer was for what and how I'd do it.



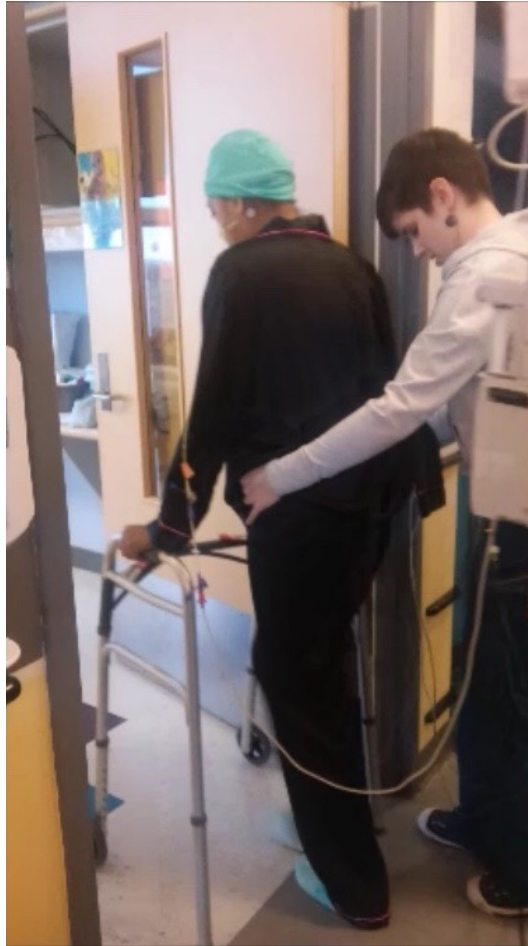
**My Dad on Father's Day, holding a pan flute I made for him in pottery class.**

Having this stress in my senior year was different from other students. The reason for questioning myself wasn't because I was panicking or getting anxiety, but because my life had changed in the middle of my sophomore year of high school. I wasn't feeling myself. I remember it was the last week of February going into the first days of March. Staring Monday morning, I

noticed red dots on my neck. I thought it could have been a rash but when running my fingers through my skin, I didn't feel bumps just my skin. Throughout the week they disappeared and then reappeared on random spots of my body. On Thursday, I was with my dad when these dots started spreading dramatically. He told me, "if it doesn't get better by tomorrow morning, we'll go to the doctors." With no improvement we dropped off my younger brother at school, not realizing he arrived an hour early (which we now laugh about)! When we arrived at the doctors, the doctor didn't know what was going on with me and recommended we go to Hartford Children's Hospital.

Now with more concern, we rushed to the hospital. I felt sick with each minute passing by. Once we got to the hospital we meet with my mom, who was waiting for us there. As my parents were checking me in, the front desk noticed I wasn't looking too hot, asking if I wanted a bag. I didn't have time to answer and snatched it. That's when everyone took action. I was taken to one of the emergency rooms. I was someone who was terrified of needles, but at that moment I didn't care. I only wanted to know what was happening to me. As this was going on, I felt tired, wanting to sleep for just a few seconds. From the late nights doing homework I believed was the reason for feeling this way. Eventually the more I rested my eyes I ended up falling asleep, at least I thought. Next thing I knew, I saw a bright white light in front of me. "Is this it? Am I dying?" I thought. Mind you, for whatever reason I still believed I had fallen asleep, but from being in a hospital half of me knew something was going on. Within what felt like a second, I woke up in a dark room with the only lights faced on my parents and a doctor telling them, "Your daughter has leukemia." Want to know what I thought? "Oh, I have cancer" and "Oh, I did a project on this." After that I fell back into my coma.

After "falling asleep" in the emergency room, in reality the cancer was spreading throughout my whole body, which was the reason for the red dots appearing. My body was trying to fight back and eliminate the cancer. But slowly, I was becoming weaker and as I was lying in the hospital bed the cancer was spreading all the way to my head, causing me to pass out. From there the doctors had to do emergency surgery. Everything done since stepping into the hospital was a risk. Saving my life from an emergency surgery to me waking up from a coma. Doctors questioned if I would make it. They were surprised I was still breathing after the surgery so when I woke up from the coma, it was a miracle. Granted, I don't remember waking up officially from my coma. Everything that I did, saw, felt, anything at all I don't remember. There're only a few memories of random days from 2 months in the hospital. Everything that was done in the hospital to help me get better was, again, a risk because the type of Leukemia I had was rare. But I was a fighter who didn't give up. My dad told me that even if I was tired, I'd always get up to do my routine work out of walking and building my muscle strength. There was one time, which I do have a memory of, where I was pretending to be asleep to not do the exercises. They didn't believe it but they let me have a break. From being in a coma and on bedrest for my time in the hospital I had to start from zero and relearn everything, just like a baby. I had to learn how to walk, eat, talk, and most importantly MY MEMORY.



**Coming back to my room after practicing to walk.**

My recovery ended earlier than expected and I was able to go home early! I had to go back for chemotherapy, but I didn't have to stay in the hospital. From all the medications that I was taking, though, it was draining my energy, so I couldn't start on the school work I missed right away. Once I was stable enough to stay awake and have a better memory, I began to get tutoring. I couldn't go back to school since I still had my chemotherapy. Everyone believed I would end my treatment within 2 years, so that meant there was a chance I would have been homeschooled or be a part time student. Little did we know, in November I was going to give the biggest thanks to God. It was Halloween, not even a year has passed, and my doctor told me I was going to end my treatment on November 4th of 2016! I believe in God and I believe he works in mysterious ways. Before getting diagnosed, in September my hair was slightly past my hips and after having long hair for years I decided I wanted to donate it. I cut off almost 12 inches of hair. In February, my biology class was doing a research of cancer and we needed to do a presentation of what the cancer we chose was about. I picked a type of cancer out of many from a list but for some reason something was telling me to pick a different one. As I was researching about the cancer I chose, I continued to look for another type of cancer. Minutes later I found Leukemia. The week before landing in the hospital I had just presented my presentation on Leukemia. I felt as if God was preparing me to face a challenge no one should face.





**Last day of chemo!**



### **It was superhero day at the Children's Hospital!**

By the 3th quarter of my junior year I was back in school, first as part time and later full time. On top of the classes I had I was still getting tutored until the end of summer. The last week of summer going into my senior and I had just finished two semesters worth of work. I was so proud of myself for completing everything because unwillingly I could have been stayed back graduating a year later.

Here is where I obviously meet my senior English teachers and the first assignment was to start our college essays. I knew I wanted to do something with my life, but I had zero clue what that plan was. Hearing what a student went through opened my eyes that not only did my Dad sacrifice his life for me, but I beat cancer and was given a second chance on life. I was not going to waste it. Since I love kids, I took a Childhood Development class where we learned about the process of how children learn, how they're taught, and because my high school had a preschool inside, we had the chance to work with the kids during some classes. There was a boy who needed support to stand and sit so he had a wheelchair made specially for him. There was a day when it was recess time and the teacher handed me a ball to play with the boy. We were encouraging him to say and ask for the ball when after a few moments later he said, "Ball?"

Having that experience with the not just the boy but with other kids and how I was treated in the hospital I knew I wanted to help people, specifically younger ones.

When I was in elementary school we were required to sign up for after school programs and without knowing what it was, I signed up for American Sign Language. I fell in love with the language right away. Since they discontinued the program the following year, I was self-teaching on and off. During the time I was receiving chemotherapy I also took physical therapy. One day when I was taking my physical therapy in the other side of the room, I saw sign language being used for the first time in my life. Seeing it motivated me to learn more about the language. Later in my senior the year, after constantly thinking about the moment, I started a ASL Club and with my surprise on our first meeting we had almost 50 students who also wanted to learn about the language. Having an interest in caring for kids and wanting to discover more about the Deaf culture, in my Childhood Development class we were doing a research when I came across a career of being a Speech Language Pathologist. After high school I took some time to do a little more research about what it takes to be a SLP and what exactly happens in that field. I have yet to figure out if this is truly something I want to do but I know even if it doesn't turn out the way I had imagined, coming to college opens many opportunities for me to discover ways in how I can help people's life change for the better. That's why I'm in college, so I can help others.



**The ASL Club!**





**Me graduating from Manchester High School.**

This is my first semester at Manchester Community College and the transition from high school to college was nerve wracking at first because this was going to be a different environment with a different customs. But after getting to know the campus and how the college functions, I've gotten the best experience here. Before the semester started, I took a week and a half class that explained to me the transition from high school to college and helped us understand our class schedule, the books we needed, and for some of us understanding the steps necessary to complete financial aid forms. We went into an event in one class that was very informational for us. They explained to us how a student in college would change from a student in high school and how many hours we had throughout the day and how to manage it by showing an example of the "Jar of Life." Robert Turner was also there to let us know about counseling and what happens if we begin to fail a course. There was also a former student who told his story about how his college life was and, in a way, it motivated us. His first years of college weren't the best and he got a second chance when he came here to Manchester Community College where he graduated with a degree and transferred to a university. The best part was towards the end on the event where we did a scavenger hunt, so we could get to know the campus.

Starting my first day of college was exciting but also scary because I didn't know what to expect. The amount of homework was heavy, but I managed to finish still having an 8-9 hour sleep schedule. Until we got more into the semester when the courses obviously became more intense. I'm taking Spanish 1 and 2. I wanted to improve on my Spanish and understand it better because I'm not a fluent speaker, and the material gets challenging each day and I'm now finding it difficult to study Spanish as much as I have before. I was in Aleks 095 for math but finished early so now I'm taking the next math course and I have had my focus on there more than any other class since. I got an A for the first unit, but still have 3 left to go, meaning I need to finish the chapters left with millions of topics. I also have a First Year Experience class which is helpful in a way. Most of the material I already knew. The work is what challenges me because there's millions of assignments to finish before I can start other class work. Out of all my classes my favorite is English 093. Even though our first assignment was to read two articles and having two separate responses, each class we had was to challenge us to become better readers and writers, which I was excited about. Our professor gave us books as a gift and because my day is filled with school work I have yet to read more than 5 pages of one of them. It's the first time where I feel excited for the semester to be over, so I can finally get to read all the books.

So far, I'm still deciding to where I want to major in. I'm balancing classes by taking courses that both Liberal Arts and Sciences and Disability Specialist require so by the end of this semester or beginning of the next one I can think about which major fits best for my interests in helping people and possibly being a SLP. Before transferring I wish to study abroad because I'm not a fluent speaker in Spanish and in any career knowing more than one language is super beneficial. Besides Spanish I also want to learn ASL since I was self-taught but there's only so much that I can learn that I need to learn from someone who's fluent at it. I hope to transfer to UConn to get either my bachelor's degree or master's degree after graduating at Manchester Community College.

What I can say to you is, never be afraid to ask questions in college. No one can make it through alone and no question is “stupid.” I remember asking how I can change my address at the Registrar’s front desk and they had no problem helping me. It’s the best advice that you may never stop hearing because it’s true. For some reason some new upcoming students think it’s okay to not come to class. Please don’t follow in their footsteps especially if your taking First Year Experience, even if it isn’t the most interesting class. Skipping those two hours will only affect your grades. Last thing you would want to happen is for scholarships to notice your grades dropping leading you to not only not get that help for your education but also failing your first semester. So please, unless there is a major emergency don’t skip classes. I have appointments at a hospital I need to attend every 3 months and when they call me to confirm an appointment I always said yes. Now, being in college I asked if it would be possible to change them to Fridays since I don’t have class. There was no issue with doing so, so don’t make an appointment another excuse to not come to class because they can always be changed. The last advice BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH. You already paid to come to college for an education. You’re only paying more if you continuously buy lunch. You have to pay just to print paper so be smart with how you use your money. If you can bring lunch, there are microwaves to reheat, and have your own printer to use don’t come to college expecting more money appearing because in a way you will put yourself into your own debt. Lastly, learn how to make sacrifices in order to balance your time. Manchester Community College gives the same number of hours to do work as a university. Entering college didn’t only affect me but my family too. Everyone was used to using me for their time and now I need to focus my time on school, especially when quizzes, tests, and exams come along. If you know you will work better at school, come to campus and study. It’s open for all students to use. Don’t be afraid to do things. As stressful as it may be, the feeling of accomplishment will be the best reward once you walk across the stage to receive your diploma.

