

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? "How do I contribute? How do I do my part? Who am I?" I find myself asking these questions daily, especially over the past two years. "How do I really make a difference in a world of chaos and a country divided by politics, racial inequality, economic hardship, and a distrust in our healthcare system?" I am often left wondering how I can make a difference in a puzzle that often feels far too complex for one person to make a positive impact.

My dream, from the time that I was twelve years old, was to play softball at a collegiate level. I was invited to multiple Division 1 unofficial visits with coaches and faculty. I was invited to countless prospect camps. I was offered verbal commitments from multiple programs in 8th grade. I thought, for sure, that was my destiny. When I sustained a back injury that ended those dreams; I found myself starting over. In the moment, it felt like such a setback; a heavy blow that left me desperate to find my new identity and purpose.

Little did I know at the time, but that setback actually fueled me to learn so much more about my community and the pockets of people who needed me. I found a passion and calling for getting involved in underserved communities and communities that looked different than me and believed different than me. It fueled me to want to unify our people and expose the beauty in diversity. It fueled me to want to share my blessings with others that did not have the same opportunities. I became more and more involved in community service and volunteer opportunities such as our local food pantry, our local hospital's volunteer program, our homeless restoration ministries, organizations leading child development and education. I discovered that I had so many opportunities for one person to make a difference, to make a positive impact on others, even if it's just a handful of people.

I grew up in a home with a single mom, a Nurse Manager at our hospital in Champaign-Urbana. She taught me so much about serving others and serving our community. She taught me about doing what's right, even when "right" isn't always popular. She taught me that hard work and grit and kindness will provide all of the treasures that you could every need. She taught me to never give up on myself, never give up on others, and never give up on society. She taught me to find joy in what I do and that joy and passion will bleed over to the people that I meet along the way. I'm grateful that I have such a clear vision of how I want to share my blessings with my community and the rest of the world. I know, without a doubt, that my calling is the nursing profession. I plan on touching as many lives as possible and using my gifts and talents to serve others.

Roger Ebert, a very well-known film critic from my Champaign-Urbana community, was not only a role model and a servant to our community but also a voice for underserved communities. He shared a quote that I will never forget. It motivates me to touch as many lives and as many hearts as possible. He said "I believe that if, at the end of it all, according to our abilities, we have done something to make others a little happier, and something to make ourselves a little happier, that is about the best we can do. To make others less happy is a crime. To make ourselves unhappy is where all crime starts. We must try to

contribute joy to the world. That is true no matter what our problems, our health, our circumstances.
We must try. I didn't always know this, and am happy I lived long enough to find it out."