

A hand-drawn illustration in black ink on a light background. The scene is viewed from a perspective on a boat, looking out over a body of water. In the upper center, a small sailboat with a single mast and two sails is on the water. The water is represented by numerous curved, parallel lines. In the foreground, a person with a large, open-mouthed expression of surprise or awe is looking out. The person has a simple, rounded head and is wearing a tank top. The boat's railing and some interior panels are visible in the lower foreground.

**VOICES
OF
DETERMINATION**

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This book may be just a simple final project for an English/AVID class, but to us it is tangible evidence that we survived the journey. We want to provide hope for whoever reads this that you can also live to “tell the tale” of your life.

We are dedicating our work to every person who is avid about anything (or AVID, meaning part of the Advancement Via Individual Determination family). We all have potential, but it takes a spark of determination to make dreams come true. To those who are determined, we encourage you to find your voice. Use it. Do not hide your story or your light. As one of the students noted in his chapter, “a mind is a beautiful thing to waste.” Don’t waste your mind.

We would also like to acknowledge the people who have championed the ideals we hold so dear: Mary Catherine Swanson, founder of AVID who proved how support is all anyone really needs; Andy Bryan, Lee County Schools superintendent who recognized our potential; and our entire AVID family in our school system who lifts us up every day. Erin Gruwell and The Freedom Writers inspired us to write this book, and every writer we have studied over the years has had a hand in our journey. Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harper Lee, Chaim Potok, W.E.B. DuBois, George Bernard Shaw, Mary Oliver, Jhumpa Lahiri and several others have served as mentors to us, if only on paper. All of our blood families make us who we are, for better or for worse. Thank you for your love. Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Harvey have husbands who are patient with our avid ways, and we are forever grateful to Stanley and Jake for loving us just as we are.

We have been blessed with new life in our AVID family: Nolan, Kaiden, and baby Morales. The next generation is largely why it is imperative for us to spread knowledge of how we overcame obstacles and used AVID to leverage our potential. We must pave a way for the next generation.

The cover art, created by Diana Thomas, represents two ideas. The first is the notion that in our day and age, most people are wracked with anxiety and uncertainty, which is captured by her rendition of Edvard Munch’s “The Scream.” Many students feel this way and suffer from depression, anxiety, and uncontrolled anger. We wanted to acknowledge these feelings in a subtle but meaningful way. The family fostered in Mrs. Perkins’ room (first 610, now 714), is one place many students have found a way to harness their fears and push past crippling, destructive mindsets and behaviors. To anyone suffering from depression or anxiety, find solace in knowing you are not alone. Millions of people, especially some of the people whose stories are told on these pages, have dealt with similar problems. The second idea represented on the cover is the freedom of a ship sailing out to sea. We love quotes, but one special quote for this final year together is from William G.T. Shedd: “A ship is safe in harbor, but that’s not what ships are for.” To all who read this book, we encourage you to set sail. Leave your harbor. Embrace change. Surround yourself with supportive people and share your voice.

We are sharing our voices out of respect to those who have lost theirs to suicide or murder. We honor them in our words and deeds.

Instead of compiling a yearbook, we wrote a book to commemorate our years together and to explain how AVID has helped us all. Each of the student stories is anonymous because they represent universal struggles.

Chapters

1. Days are long; years are short. (Mrs. Perkins' Prologue – AVID Teacher/Coordinator)
2. Find joy in the small things.
3. Without AVID, I wouldn't be.
4. Is the past really your past?
5. Expectations are accomplished; veils are lifted.
6. Beginning, middle, no end in sight.
7. Please stop calling me a vampire.
8. I abandoned fear; I found strength.
9. Reality hit like a freight train.
10. Friends are temporary; AVID is forever.
11. I'm not patient; I hate waiting.
12. My life is a beautiful struggle.
13. The cub finds his true pack.
14. My family deserves a future here.
15. I am sure of being unsure.
16. Being normal can be totally exhausting.
17. AVID cheers me on every day.
18. My past will not define me.
19. Quiet voices deserve to be heard.
20. The best way out is through.
21. Determination will get you through it.
22. Being the youngest means high expectations.
23. I'm redefining expectations and social standards.
24. So, I could have been famous.
25. We cannot live in the past.
26. The light's waiting at the end.
27. Success does not have one definition.
28. We became a kind of family.
29. In life, endings are new beginnings.
30. Ships do not belong in harbors.
31. Keep going. Keep growing. Keep running. (Mr. Horner, AVID Tutor)
32. Dreaming is a teacher's first language. (Mrs. Harvey, AVID Teacher)
33. What kind of extremists are we? (Mrs. Perkins' Epilogue)

1. Days are long; years are short.

“Just as Socrates felt it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

In our case, nonviolent gadflies create tension in order to allow students and teachers to rise to the majestic heights of achievement and AVID family. My story as an AVID teacher and site coordinator is one of determination, just like my students'. I have worked for many years to provide experiences for students that are always motivated by compassion and care.

Unfortunately, in the world where we live, this kind of love makes people uncomfortable sometimes. This is why I usually describe AVID as my favorite four letter word. It is dangerous to not only be avid but teach AVID in a world where the bare minimum is considered cool.

I guess that's why I am so weird. I've never been a minimalist. My own personal story is fraught with complexity and angst, much like my students. However, despite my past, I've found a way to transcend a turbulent childhood. I worked my way through college, worked hard in the business world, and then left that behind to pursue the only career that creates all others: Teaching. This was the best career decision of my life. It led me to my true purpose on this earth, great adventures, my first children I called “mine,” my husband, and now my son. I've made some incredible lifelong friendships with my colleagues as well. I believe teaching is a noble profession, and if anyone needs evidence, they needn't look further than their local public school. We truly are fighting “the good fight” against complacency and apathy daily.

The days are long, but the years are so short when you are a teacher. I am thankful for the long days because they have taught me so much. I have my students to thank for my education on Education. They are truly remarkable in every way. They may not all be the “head of their class,” but every single one of them has unique talents and strengths.

To me, the best gift I can give to any student is unconditional love and support as well as a challenge not just in English class or AVID, but in life. Before I knew about AVID, I still believed this pedagogy. However, who wouldn't love to know they are a part of something bigger than themselves?

AVID can transform systems by helping teachers stay true to their hearts for children. Our AVID family in Sanford, NC is growing exponentially at my home base, Southern Lee High School, as well as district-wide. Our superintendent has championed AVID in Lee County Schools for many years. Our secondary sites are strong, and we are proud that after successfully expanding to one elementary school this year (Broadway Elementary), our fourth and fifth graders in all of Lee County Schools are combining AVID with “The Leader in Me” mindset next year. When people visit our district, they often note how nurturing and opportunity-driven we are. AVID is one of many opportunities set forth to nurture kids, so its expansion to provide the same opportunity to younger students is a natural next step for us. At Lee County Schools, we want to see every child graduate with more than a high school diploma. I have been honored with the opportunity to share not only the depth of AVID but its profound simplicity. AVID is the essential “glue” needed in public education to hold us together. Students and educators cannot thrive in isolation—we need WICOR, we need college and career readiness outlets, and we all need AVID family.

As in many public school districts across the United States, we are balancing tough demands, seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and the sad truth that poverty, abuse, gang violence, and assumptions seek to destroy public education as well as in turn our nation's youth.

Nevertheless, we are determined to keep dreaming and prove how AVID helps students achieve their potential. I believe in focusing on WHO we are teaching, not just WHAT we are teaching.

I believe AVID cohorts and school wide AVID create an edge, which is this winning combination: a heart for service and a bold drive to lead by example.

In a word, AVID means HOPE. These two four-letter words are dangerous, but they are worth pursuing. I encourage each one of you who finds this book to do just that—be AVID; pursue HOPE. Remember to take Edmund Lee's advice, which one of my beloved students and "AVID daughters" Addie quoted in a speech: "Surround yourself with the dreamers and the doers, the believers and the thinkers, but most of all, surround yourself with those who see greatness within you." I will never be able to thank my AVID students enough for seeing greatness not only in themselves but in each other; I am grateful to have been surrounded by them for all these years.

The next chapters were shared voluntarily by some of my AVID seniors and juniors. They are very candid, open, and honest about their lives. They deserve respect for their bravery in sharing their voices. They are the quintessential voices of determination, and I am proud to say that every senior is graduating high school with plans for greatness, and the juniors are soon to follow. Although no two paths are alike, they all lead to success. This group is a model for how AVID can be a catalyst for change, much like Sheraud was for The Freedom Writers. We never had a specific moment where we knew we were changing more than ourselves, but for some reason (maybe torture? maybe love?) they all kept coming back for more.

2. Find joy in the small things.

No words that I put on this paper can or ever will do justice to what I have been through. It is hard to find the right words to describe all the grief, joy, excitement, and fear I have experienced in my 18 years. However, here is my meager attempt.

I was born in Mexico. Sadly, I have no remembrance of my birthplace because my parents and I emigrated from Mexico when I was six months old. My father said he had to come to the United States to give my mother and me a better life. Three years after I was born, along came my little sister, and a year after that, my little brother. Growing up, my dad worked very hard to provide for a family of five. But with his limited education - he dropped out of school in the seventh grade - he could not always get the best jobs, or the best anything really. My mother stayed home and took care of us. We grew up very humbly. We were poor, but very united. We stood by each other.

When I was five, my father got terribly ill. He went to see doctor after doctor in hopes of finding the cause of his sickness. Unfortunately, no one could figure it out due to his inability to thoroughly explain his symptoms because of the language barrier. He was not getting any better. So after spending the thousands of dollars he had saved up for years, he finally decided to go back to Mexico to see if they could figure out what was wrong, or die in his home country among people he loves.

We only lived in Mexico for a couple months because my dad's health improved. The doctors were able to find the source of his sickness, his prostate. My limited memories of Mexico are happy ones. I remember my grandmother's kitchen filled with sweet, delicate scents. The aroma always drew me in. I remember people all over town would come just to eat her savory food. We would have twenty guests for dinner sometimes! I remember walking to school with

my cousin and walking back home once it was over. He was a funny, goofy looking boy. His dark eyes always seemed to hold some kind of secret. He was so fun to be around. We were supposed to grow up together.

My grandmother is the single most influential person in my life. Although I was only five when I met her, I vividly remember her beautiful, warm smile that could turn anyone's day around. I remember her calloused hands from her working out on the farm and around the house. I remember her kind words and free spirit. I remember her godly perspective on life. Little did I know that she would later play a role in shaping my career goals.

After living in Mexico for almost a full year, my parents were pretty much set on staying there for good. However, my father's best friend, Carlos, had other plans in mind. He found a job and wanted my dad to join him in Los Angeles, California.

Months later, we were all ready to go. We set out for Los Angeles. We ended up in a crowded two bedroom apartment in an overpopulated area of East L.A. I remember people, people everywhere. While in Los Angeles, my sister, Cindy, was born. Thirteen of us lived in that two bedroom apartment for a few months. The lady who lived in the apartment first, *Doña Lily*, was cranky and unapproachable. She did not let me go near her son's toy box. There was a waiting list to go to school, so I was only able to go to school for a few weeks before moving again.

We found ourselves back in Sanford, North Carolina. We ended up at my godfather Toño's house again - this is where we went when I was six months old. Again, we lived with other families. Eighteen of us lived in that three-bedroom mobile home.

That year I started kindergarten at Deep River Elementary in Sanford. My first day of school was horrifying. I remember standing in the room in front of unfamiliar faces. A nice

looking blonde lady was speaking some foreign words to me. She looked upset because I did not respond or react. How could I? I had no earthly idea what she was saying. She became very upset and moved my newly made clothes pin from green, to yellow, then red. Finally, she realized that I was not being disobedient; rather I did not understand her. I quickly befriended a girl named Lucy and she became my classroom interpreter. I was integrated into English as a Second Language (ESL). I only attended Deep River for a couple months before moving. But unlike the moves of my past, this time it was only a 20-minute move. I finished the rest of my kindergarten year at Johnsonville Elementary in Cameron, N.C. I remained in ESL there until I placed out a couple weeks into my first grade year.

I loved that feeling. I felt capable of doing anything. I no longer needed someone's help with understanding this new language. However, I was still not comfortable enough to speak it. Therefore, I was very introverted and did not speak much to my classmates.

My first best friend died when I was six years old. I remember my mom receiving that phone call. She was trying to be strong for me. It was the first death of a loved one I lived through. It was hard. I did not understand why I would not be able to see him again. I did not understand why I could not travel to heaven. In my mind, heaven was a place on earth, like Mexico and the U.S. How could you tell a six-year-old girl that her best friend had been run over by a bus, along with his little sister? I did not know the whole story until several years later.

After the first few weeks of second grade, we moved yet again. We moved back to Sanford, where I finished the rest of my second grade year at Deep River Elementary. Here, I was chosen to be a part of the Academically or Intellectually Gifted Students Program (AIG). I was shocked. Looking back I still find it surreal how someone who knew no English in kindergarten could be in AIG in second grade. I learned so much in the span of those two years. I

reconnected with my best friend. Sadly, we moved again at the end of my second grade school year.

I attended Benjamin T. Bullock Elementary School in Sanford from third to fifth grade. These were my favorite years from elementary. I finally got the stability I secretly longed for throughout my childhood. I could finally make friends and not be forced to leave them. I could finally form good connections with amazing teachers: Mrs. Lloyd (3rd), Mrs. James (4th), Mrs. Matthews (5th-Social Studies/Language Arts), Ms. Proia (Math/Science), Mrs. Edmund (AIG). I was able to finally open up more than I had ever done before.

Throughout my time at Bullock, I remember teachers brought up the importance of having a college education. They stressed how exciting those four years were. Unknowingly, they instilled a dream I have since been pursuing: attending a four-year university. As a little girl, I remember going home and telling my parents how I would go to college when I was older. They looked at me with tear-filled eyes that only meant they had bad news. This is when I got my first real taste of bitter reality. I knew I was not born in the United States, however, I had never realized how that made me different or what that meant. It was that moment that changed my life. My parents told me that I should not get my hopes up about going to college here because with the ever-changing rules of immigrant students being able to attend college, it was no guarantee that I would be able to go.

Starting middle school at West Lee Middle School in Sanford was scary for me. It was going to be a drastic change. Middle school ended up being rough. During this time, I endured a lot of tough situations. I lost my loving grandmother who I always promised to visit once I graduated high school. Along with other family members, I was sexually abused by my uncle's older nephew. I was trying to figure out who I was. I became an angry person, full of hate. I saw

no good in people. I became depressed. I lost hope. I figured people would be better without me, especially my family. I felt like a burden. Therefore, one night after an argument with my mother, I locked myself in the bathroom and set my mind to taking my life. I was determined to do it. As I sat in the bathroom, alone, I contemplated on which way would be best. Finally, I decided an overdose on pills would be the least painful and quickest way. I vividly remember opening the medicine cabinet and taking a bottle of pills. I put them in my hand. However, something strange happened as I was about to ingest them. Something made me stop. I could not go through with it. Perhaps it was my grandmother looking out for me up in heaven, or perhaps it was God telling me that my work on earth was not yet fulfilled because I did not die that day.

In my eighth grade year, I became a part of something that would ultimately change my life forever. I joined AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination. I liked what it stood for and what it represented. I liked the fact that it looked good for college. While in AVID, I went to my first college tours and I worked on public speaking. I slowly came out of my shell. I was growing into the person I was always meant to be.

Freshman year I went to Lee County High School in Sanford. Unfortunately, I did not know they offered AVID, so I was not a part of it that year. The next year I moved, yet again. I attended Southern Lee High School my sophomore year. This is the year that changed me. I met Joanna Perkins, my English II Honors teacher. Her teaching method was unlike anything I have ever experienced. Her activities made me open my mind to new ideas and perspectives. As the year progressed, she mentioned something that sounded familiar. She mentioned AVID. She told me she was the Site Coordinator at Southern Lee and she wanted me to join. I did not have to think twice about it. I missed being a part of such an incredible thing and wanted to have Mrs. Perkins again as my teacher.

I was officially a part of AVID again my junior year. This was a great year. I was experiencing a typical high school year: I was participating in sports and clubs and worked part-time. Unfortunately, good and bad come hand-in-hand. My grandpa, *Abuelito Pancho*, received his visa my junior year. I was super excited because growing up, I did not have the opportunity to have a close relationship with my grandparents like other children. As a child, I did not understand why I could not go see them. I was jealous of other children's ability to see their grandparents whenever they pleased. Being born in Mexico, I was not legally allowed to go visit them. If I went, I would not be able to re-enter the country. It was heartbreaking. A life without a grandparent's hugs, kisses, and affection lacks a needed kind of joy. My grandfather was now going to have the ability to come visit us from Mexico. He now visits us once or twice a year for a couple of weeks. Every time he leaves, I feel like it may be the last time I ever see him. I had just lost my grandmother a couple Christmas Eves prior to that.

Why does it have to be so hard? I wish I could have grown up knowing my grandpa, at least that way it would be easier to get used to the idea of him passing. This experience has made me realize that we have to make the most of the time we have with someone. Our time here on earth is short, and we should not waste a second of it. We have to "find joy in the small things," just like my *Abuelito Pancho* said.

After thirteen long years of school, I am finally in my senior year of high school. It has been a long and tiring year. Applying to college was the most stressful process I have ever gone through, especially since neither of my parents went to college. I am their pride and joy because I will be a first-generation high school graduate and college student. It is all happening so fast. Looking back and thinking about how I got to this point is surreal. There were moments in my life when I thought it would be impossible to obtain a post-secondary education.

With college right around the corner, I have started thinking about what I want to do with my life. I have decided I want to pursue a career in medicine for many reasons. First, science fascinates me, from the functions of organs, to the groundbreaking research, it is so intriguing. I always find myself wanting to know more. Second, I have always wanted to serve back to the community, and what better way than to help them live a healthy life? Finally, there was a tragedy that confirmed my desire to pursue a career in medicine. My grandmother's death was what really convinced me this was what I had to do. Prior to her death she suffered from lupus, diabetes, bone cancer and many other diseases. Unfortunately, she lived in a small town in Mexico that still lacks medical treatment today. My interest in pursuing a career in medicine heightened tremendously due to that. I want to be a physician that helps those in small villages, and those who are less fortunate. I want to contribute my loyal service to the medical field in the future. I hope to one day be able to say that I made a difference in someone's life.

I cannot believe I will be a part of Davidson College's vibrant community soon. It makes everything I have been through worth it. I know that everything has led to this moment. I have worked hard to be able to say that I am going to be a college student. I have made my dream a reality, a dream that I pursued fearlessly for years. Giving up was not an option, even when it seemed that it was only feasible. I still have years to live and many more stepping stones in my journey. I know that everyone who I have crossed paths with in life had a purpose in my life. They all helped shape me into someone who will, like Gandhi noted, "be the change you wish to see in the world."

3. Without AVID, I wouldn't be.

I never thought I would have to write out my whole life story. At first, I thought that this would be easy-peasy. I mean, I lived my life, right? But now as I sit here, so many things are running through my head. I have never fully shared my life or my story with ANYONE before, which is why I am a little hesitant to write this. Well, as Dr. Seuss said once, "Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is youer than you," so here goes nothing.

I was born in Sanford, North Carolina. I was in the hospital a lot as a newborn. My birth mother did all sorts of drugs and alcohol when she was pregnant with me, so I had them in my blood. Throughout my childhood I never knew exactly where I was. I would either be in my house, with about twelve other strangers and my mom or I would be at their houses. When these strangers were at our house, my mother would not let me out of my room. I didn't know why then, but I do now. If I was not at my house, I would either be at one of the stranger's houses, or in the courtroom. Why the courtroom? Because my grandmother at the time, was the only person who genuinely cared about me and wanted a better life for me than what I was receiving. She fought for me continually to get me away from my mother. I saw and experienced many different things as a child, things no child should ever see or experience at such a young age. But, without going through all the things I went through, I wouldn't be able to be the person I am right now and I won't be able to be the person I want to be.

I cried almost all the time, because I was in pain from the toxins. My birth mother never wanted to deal with me or comfort me, so she would drop me off at my grandparent's house which I actually loved. My grandparent's house was mostly filled with happy memories. I loved my grandpa to pieces, because he was the only man in my life. I loved my grandma as well, but at the time she was the person who did all the behind the scenes work.

In 2001, my half-brother was born. But I don't feel right referring to him as my half-brother, he's my brother point-blank. His father was there for him as well as his father's wife, who my brother thinks is his mother. My brother believes that his father, is my father, and it may be better for him that way. I didn't want him to be around our mother, even if that meant her only seeing him once or twice a year.

When my grandpa died in 2002, my world was completely shattered. I cried more on his funeral than I had in my whole four years of being alive. He was the only man in my life and then he was just gone in a blink. When he was on his death bed, I had gave him my favorite teddy bear, a purple one with a little red bow around his neck and one of his ears ripped off (because of my old dog). When I got in the van to go to say one final goodbye to my grandfather, my grandma gave me the purple bear back, telling me that he wanted me to have it in remembrance of him. She said that he had had it in his arms until the nurse took it away after his death. That may seem morbid to many, but it made and still makes me immensely happy. I care so dearly for that bear. I took it everywhere with me until the age of 11. Then, I placed it in a dedicated spot in my room, forever to stay, forever to remember.

When I still lived and associated with my birth mother, I was emotionally, sexually, physically and verbally abused. I would get screamed at and hit for almost anything I did. If I cried, I would get hit. If I wanted food, I would get hit. Along with getting hit, I would get harshly yelled at with words that are too crude to mention. Hearing these words as a child completely ruined me. It taught me that I don't need emotions; I don't need to be emotional, because "it's stupid," which still has an effect on me today, because I am not very emotional.

Going back and forth to strangers' houses was very hard for me. If I was at their house I would have nothing to do, nothing to entertain me except to watch these strangers and my

mother smoke something, take handfuls of pills, or snorting what I know now is cocaine. During these times, I would often be by myself and we are not sure what else might have happened to me. I sometimes force myself to believe that everything was a dream, even though I know it wasn't. My mother sold me for drugs, alcohol, and money without skipping a beat, without thinking how much it may mess me up later in my life. But to be honest, I don't think she expected me to live past the age of six.

About 2004, I was finally adopted by my grandmother, which was the turning point of my life. I never had to worry about something happening to me ever again; I knew I was safe.

Through elementary school and middle school, life was pretty balanced. I had my weird times and times when my birth mother would arrive at my school when we had a restraining order against her, but that wasn't a big deal for me. During this time my brother and I also grew apart, which I both loved and did not love. I loved it because I wouldn't have something that triggered my memory, but I didn't love it, because I loved him and he was my brother. I met my best friends during this time, met Justin Bieber (yes, I touched his body), and I got to finally grow up on my own pace rather than be forced to. I rarely had any worries; life was a breeze. But, when I got to ninth grade, life started to frighten me again.

When I got to high school, I automatically felt out of place. I knew that something wasn't right, and I automatically blamed myself. I was stressed out all the time, because I couldn't get the hang of high school life everyone did. But I wasn't only stressed out about school. I also started to think about my past again which would bring me down a lot. I always wanted to talk to someone, but no one was there for me. So I decided to take out all of my stress on myself through self-destruction.

Further and further into the hole I went, always digging myself deeper and deeper. And the scary part? I didn't even want to bring myself back out, nor did I want someone else to. Yes, I had suicidal thoughts and yes, I tried to commit, but something would always go wrong. After about my fifth attempt, I figured that someone wanted me to be alive, so something needed to change. I began to talk to my AVID teacher, Mrs. Perkins, who had a life very similar to mine, which is the only reason I even considered talking to her. Talking to her helped me a lot, because I believed that if she could do it, so could I. She really pushed me out of that hole that I had dug myself into. Without her, I would probably have succeeded in an attempt to end my life.

Now, as an 11th grader, I cannot understand why I let it get to me so much and why I went to such measures to deal with it. I have been in AVID for three years, and I could not imagine my high school career without my AVID family. These people have seen me at my best and my worst, and still love me which is the best gift I could ask for. I have opened up to these people, and they didn't leave me. I am here for them and will never leave them. Everyone in our AVID family has a different story and that is spectacular. I am so glad I have learned and grown with the same people for three years. I am glad that I have people to lean on when I need it. I am glad I have such a great teacher who went through similar things like I did. I am ecstatic and grateful to have such a great program in my life to help me be a better me. I want to leave you with some quotes that have seen me through this far: *"There's always a rainbow after a storm, when one door closes another one opens, after death there is life, and after heartbreak there is a stronger and happier person."* – Unknown

"Even your worst days only have twenty-four hours." - Unknown

4. Is the past really your past?

As heard from one of my previous history classes, “Is the past really your past?” This quote made me realize that no the past can never be the past because everything comes back to you at some point and it’s hard to realize most of it. It’s hard to realize how far you’ve come.

I was born in July of 1998 and over these sixteen years I’ve been through a lot. I grew up in very humble areas throughout my life with all minorities. My parents have gone through so much to get us to where we are now. I remember living in Guerrero, Mexico with my mother, older siblings, my grandparents, and aunts and uncles surrounded our living. My father didn’t stay with us at the time for about four years; he was in the United States when trying to find a good living for our family. I remember those times when I was in much need of my father and I never actually knew why he wasn’t around until I got older.

As time progressed, I remember a specific time when I went outside to smell the garden flowers and a flower seed went up my nose and I could hardly breathe, my mother had to take me to a special clinic in Mexico to have the seed removed. That was the first time I was calm on the outside, but terrified in the inside. I was glad I had my mother there with me at the time and the only one at the moment who I could turn to on those fearful times. I would have wished my father was with me at those times of fears.

As years went by my father came back to Mexico and I finally actually knew what he looked like and began to know him better. We moved back to the United States as a whole family and moved in with my favorite uncle for a couple of years. I went to Broadway Elementary School my Kindergarten year. There would be times when my parents, nor my uncle were at home and I had to stay with one of my aunts across the street and I hated it so much as well because she was very strict. I had to do everything she told me to do and at the exact time

she wanted me to do it and if I didn't then I was a "chanclado." Years later we moved in with one of my parents' close friends and I hated it there also because she had two daughters and out of the three of us I was the youngest. One of the daughters was so cruel to me and disliked me; she did anything and put the blame on me. A couple of years later my family actually found a place for ourselves. I began my Elementary journey at Greenwood Elementary and on top of that I was relieved to know I had a stable place to call home. I enjoyed the time being.

Years later after we moved into our house, my mother surprised us with a younger sibling. We spent years living there and learning each and every day something new. My fifth grade year of elementary school, my now brother's wife moved in with us and that was when I felt I had lost my older brother for good. Days went by where I felt I had no one else to turn to because my older brother who would go out and spend time with me now only had time for his girlfriend. I had to accept the fact she was never going to leave and neither was he.

Beginning my sixth grade year everything was going great until January 9 that year, my grandmother passed away. It was very painful for me to know my second mother was gone because she meant so much to me. I remember those dreadful days especially for my mother. Time flew by and not a day would go by that my mother didn't cry and a day when I was hurting on the inside. Thankfully, I slowly recovered.

My seventh grade year in middle school things were going good and still recovering from my grandmother's tragic death. Towards the end of my seventh grade year on April the 16th, my family and I were being pursued by a tornado down St. Andrews Church Rd. I remember that day clearly because it was one of the scariest days of my life knowing we were distanced from a tornado by only a few feet. That day it was my siblings, mother, sister-in-law and I who were coming down St. Andrews Church Rd. on our way home from shopping. It was very terrifying to

know how close you are to what most likely would seem to be your death. I was even more frightened to know my father was home alone and that something terrible could come his way and he would have not even known of it; if it wasn't for us who noticed a huge dark wind coming towards us at a very high speed that even my older brother who was driving could not speed up enough to get away. Luckily, we got home safe and found my father safe also.

Once the tornado situation ended, then my eighth grade year came around and in the month of November, my grandfather began to feel sick. On November 15 we received news that my grandfather had passed away. It was a hard time then also because I hadn't seen him since I was about four and neither had my father since the time he reunited with us in Mexico. I cried for so long and especially when I thought about the times I did spend with him and how now I wouldn't be able to see him again.

Time flew by again; then my freshman year of high school began and it was a totally new experience I had never had before. It started off well and then a couple of months later my mother began to have kidney pain. She had gone to the hospital to have it checked; she had many gallstones. We thought that she could get them removed easily, but it was much harder than it seemed because there were so many. Mostly every month she was hospitalized and a new surgery about every month or two for almost a year. It was a very hard time for me because as a female I had to worry about my mother, the household, my siblings, my education, and the struggle of finance. It was a very rough time for us because every month it was a new hospital bill; lucky for us my father did as much possible to have everything taken care of. My parents began to argue a lot during and after her health problems and other family situations became heavier for us. Our family problems took a few months to settle, but things got better.

My sophomore year was better, I met new people and for the most part I enjoyed the time being. There were very few situations I went through last year. One of the situations I went through last year was when school had just ended and I had missed calls from my family members saying my father had gone to the hospital. At the time I heard the news my heart started racing, but luckily it was nothing else major except the fact my father had injured his finger at work.

Well now I'm a current junior and this year has been fair, still a couple of family problems, school is going well, but after all I can proudly say that I have made it this far. This year we have struggled in the situation were two of our family cars were unable to start again. My parents are still making it through as well, paying our family bills and just bought two new cars. I couldn't be much more thankful for all we have accomplished because as we experience the situation, we grow out of the situation.

I am proud of myself for showing my parents that it is possible to get through High School without having the thought of dropping out. If I have made it this far in my education, then I know for a fact I am willing to do what it takes me to graduate and continue my life goals of going to college and graduating. I plan on attending a four year university and seek my career in the nursing or criminal justice field.

5. Expectations are accomplished; veils are lifted.

They say, "What's the good in it?"
 What do you see?
 Why even bother
 when you look like me?

Well, I say:
 In AVID I trust,
 In AVID I believe.
 In AVID I dream,
 In AVID I succeed.

Expectations are accomplished,
 Veils are lifted.
 Conformity is abandoned,
 Goals are visited.

We are what we eat.
 We eat success like it's leftovers
 but with no rehear.

They don't see what we see
 because they have no experience
 with the rich and the poor
 all gathered in one fence.

And my story begins. I was born in Sanford, N.C. No, I wasn't born overseas or in a blizzard. Just in Sanford, N.C. I don't know if my mother had birth troubles or not. I can't ask her, because her response would be quite silent. You may wonder what I am talking about. Well, as Maya Angelou said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." So let my story be told.

One day, my mother was heading home as a passenger in her friend's car. She did not have my brothers and I in her home with her at that time. She was staying with another friend while we (her children) were staying with our grandmother. While on their way home, the driver somehow got into a collision. Right then and there my mother, my gift from God, my angel had passed away. At that time I was only two years old. That explains why I can't tell you all of the

details I wish I knew. So no, I don't have any memories of her playing with me or us going to a park for a picnic or anything. If no one would have never told me that she had passed away, I would not have ever known that she did. I guess God still knew what he was doing at that time. He knew if I would have been older, things would not have turned out as He planned. So now my mother is gone, where do I go? Then steps in my aunt.

She has been with me for awhile now so I just call her Mama. I really thought that she was my birth mother for a long time. When she told me the news that she wasn't, I wasn't mad or upset. Instead I was thankful for her not letting me wither in the streets with the other side of my family. There is my other brother that she could not take in unfortunately. Even to this day, I think about how he could have turned out so much better than he is now if only he had come with us. Anyways, my mama raised us as her own.

My elementary years were the most fun of all. That was when I had my first "boy cooties." Our way of flirting back then was to chase the person you liked around the playground. Needless to say, I chased my special boy every day. Middle school came around and I thought I was everything and a bag of chips. I wasn't a kid anymore. I wasn't doing coloring pages anymore. One of my sixth grade teachers was Mr. Newby. He was always hard on everyone because he saw potential. This was the year when I started getting in trouble for the pleasure of "friends". I got into my first fight with this girl because she hit me with a ruler. She thought I wasn't going to hit her! Seventh grade came around and ISS was my fortress. Almost every month I was getting in trouble for something.

I am now sixteen and ready to get out of Sanford. I am so ready to go. I know that "everyone says that" but I really am. I may never come back unless it is to visit my favorite people of the city (including Mrs. Perkins). I skipped a whole decade and some of my life with

you all in mind. Some things are meant for family only. My mother is gone, but I'm not motherless. I don't know my father, but I'm not fatherless. God has been guiding me from day one. Including guiding me into the AVID registration process and becoming part of our precious AVID family. He knew that AVID would be that one good thing to make me who I am meant to be.

6. Beginning, middle, no end in sight.

I'll just start by saying that I was born small, and labeled failure to thrive, but after a while it was clear that I was fine. I grew up with my father in the military and we moved around a lot. When I was two years, two months, nine days, and 13 hours old, my brother was born. We moved around some more (we've moved around 30 times in my life so far). My father left us when I was in my early teens while my mother was incapable of walking due to a back surgery that she'd gotten. My mom healed and remarried eventually.

When my mom remarried, she and her husband found out that he had stage four pancreatic cancer. Six months after they got married, my mom's husband died. He died just over a month ago, and my mom is still upset of course but she's doing well considering. Once all of this school year is over with, we will move back to Maine, where we have lived about three times already. I will graduate high school there and then I suppose I'm going to college. My mom said that if I graduate college then she will pay to send me to Europe where I could stay in Italy or France with some friends of hers. But this is only if I *graduate*, and not from an online school.

I don't really remember anything from in between the major events of my past, so I either have a bad memory or it just wasn't important. I don't remember the people either. I make friends and lose them as soon as I move away, only recently have I been able to keep contact with people, so I still have some friends in Maine and one friend here in North Carolina that I will probably keep in touch with for a while. I am thankful to have gotten to actually make some friends in AVID even though I move so much. It's nice to be accepted.

7. Please stop calling me a vampire.

I was born in Ohio to a soon-to-be-broken family. I lived in a poor area where crime and gang violence was frequent (which surprises most people that I tell). Throughout my childhood, my parents were usually gone because of work. Only in the dead of the night while the me and my older sister were in bed would they come home, so we didn't see them too often. My parents divorced when I was around 4 years old, and my mom found a new man, who is now my step-father, not too long after. He was an army man, who was young and had a volatile temper. My sister, who was not as fortunate as me since she was old enough to understand the weight of the situation, was shattered by the experience. She felt resentment towards our step-dad and missed our real dad terribly. She would cry to both of our parents, begging them to get back together. They did not, of course, since the relationship was broken beyond repair. I never hated my step-dad, although I was wary of him. The only thing left for us to do was try and salvage what little happiness we could from it. Fortunately, we had (and still have) contact with our real father even after the separation, so I did not have too hard of a time adapting to the new arrangement.

With a new family set up, we continued with our lives. My dad moved away and we stayed in the same house. Life with a new father was strange and uncomfortable, but it is not as if I could have changed anything. At 8 years old, my little sister was born. My life was not affected much by this, unlike most people, since I was used to having little children around. I have a very large family with many children, so there was never a time where there was not at least four children at my house, even after my step-dad came along. My life was relatively uneventful until I was told that we would be moving to Tennessee. For the first time at 9 years old, I heard a Southern accent. It was the most foreign thing I'd heard to that point in my life.

When I moved here, I felt out of place immediately. Hence, the title of this chapter. As a Northerner and with the rise of the popularity of “Twilight,” I’ve been called a vampire way too many times to count.

My freshman year I had Mrs. Perkins for English, and luckily I got to stay with her all four years. Through AVID, I have been able to broaden my horizons by learning to communicate with people I used to think I would never be able to handle.

I’ve always felt a little odd, and recently I’ve learned that this is not a flaw in my character. It is the opposite. My uniqueness is an asset. As time has gone by, I realized I should be more proud of my talent for art and my perspective on life. Once you start treating your strangeness as a positive, then you become more comfortable and so does everyone around you, sort of like the Pygmalion effect. I am thankful for the structure AVID gave me in which to discover all of these things.

8. I abandoned fear; I found strength.

My story starts here: in Sanford, North Carolina. I was born at Central Carolina Hospital at 10:27 pm. I got my name from my Grandma, on my mother's side. She died before I could meet her. I had gotten the opportunity to meet my grandpa, who everyone called "Snowball," but he died when I was four or five years old. The only living Grandparents are on my father's side. My Grandma is sweet, God-loving grandma with a big heart but she will not hesitate to beat any child's behind if the circumstance called for it. I was fortunate to never really get into too much trouble. My grandpa is funny man and really weird. Everyone calls him the funeral man; he was always going to someone's funeral. He would go to one even if he didn't really know the person.

My parents are my life. They have always been there. Even though they are not together they still find ways to work together civilly to support me. My Dad is always giving me advice on how I should live a life without struggling financially and that I should always aim for the best. He is the reason why I want to become a Dentist. My mother is the reason I am in AVID. She wanted me to stop living life afraid of everything and she wanted me to become more confident.

Growing up, I was never really excited about school and I am still not. The funny thing about this was that I always got good grades. I was never really motivated when it came to school and I never really challenged myself either. My mindset was: make good grades, take easy classes and go just through school without any problems. Taking AP or honors classes would be a problem (or so I thought). I also avoided being in classes that made me get up to speak. Growing up, I had a fear of meeting new people. It was so bad that every time I had to meet someone, I would mentally prepare what I would say to the person. Sometimes I could easily talk to someone without a problem, but if they did not look so intimidating. Now that I am

in AVID, it has helped me realize how important my school is and it made me realize how bad my communication skills were. AVID also made me realize that if I wanted to go to college I needed to change my mindset along with my motivation.

If I had to pick four words to describe my life I would chose happy, sad, exciting and funny. I did have times where my life where it was an emotional roller coaster, but then again I am a teenaged female and we are emotional roller coasters. I am always—always—scared of something. For some reason I am always worrying about something. I also have really bad anxiety and I got that from my Dad. The only time my anxiety would act up was when I had to do presentations or speak to anyone I didn't know. I also had two main flaws that always drove me crazy. I had a soft spoken voice and I was and still am very sensitive. I do not know who I got it from, but I want them to take it back. I sometimes get really emotional, whether sad or mad. In daycare I was made fun of for my shyness and soft spoken voice. The only thing they kept me from getting depressed was my mother who would often said I got my soft spoken voice from my Grandmother, who died before I could meet her.

When I was younger I did not take jokes very well. Not only did I take offense to many jokes directed at me in a playful way. I was also insecure. My mom would always say that I should love myself, imperfections and all. I would always listen to my mom's advice but there was part of me still insecure. I didn't like my skin or my face. I thought that if I was lighter I would be pretty. If I was pretty then I would be more outgoing and everyone would be my friend. I had this insecurity from preschool through middle school. It also caused me to become a little depressed and somewhat antisocial. I had friends but none of them knew the real me. I was so blinded by my own fears and insecurity I didn't realize I had met my best friend in the 7th grade. I neglected her because I didn't think she was a true friend.

My fears of public speaking and feeling insecure about the way I look have made me a prisoner in my own home. I never wanted to go outside. I have tried so hard to change myself but it has only made me feel worse about myself. I was so insecure about my own skin I had thoughts of brightening my own skin with lemon and honey or maybe with bleach. I don't why I was so insecure about my own skin, but I guess I always heard of how dark skin females are not as pretty as the girls with lighter skin. Hearing that when I was younger made me think lowly of myself and that led me to create a comfort zone. Listening to music and daydreaming about me being more outgoing was one outlet but it only held me back. For the longest time I have been living in a world created by me; I thought it was an escape but it was only a chain to keep from spreading my wings to fly. I was so oblivious to the fact that comfort zones do not help me but hold them back. Because of AVID I now know that comfort zones are only temporary.

AVID has also taught me to love myself more and that I am not the only with going through struggles. AVID is my second family and Mrs. Perkins is the best second mom ever. I truly believe that AVID should be global. I think more teachers should be like her. It is very rare to find teachers that will see the light in a dark past, who are understanding of situations and they never give up on students. She is the reason why I am more confident in the things I do. I even presented for my last project without crying. To me the people in AVID along with teachers like Mrs. Perkins make it worthwhile. The feeling of having someone support me like a second family makes me more determined to get rid of the fear I had built over time.

9. Reality hit like a freight train.

When I was a child, reality hit like a freight train. And to this day I am stronger for it. Growing up in a family of engineers and doctors wasn't easy for me because I was different than all my cousins. I was always the one who played sports and never let anyone bully me. My dad was similar in that he was the black sheep of the family because he was not like his brothers and sisters. When I was born, my mom and I took that same role because my dad's family didn't like my mom. So my mom and dad had to work harder to get my grandparents' approval. When I was four years old, I played T-ball, but I didn't like it at all. Then I played football. That is when change hit me.

I finally left the "harbor" and learned that you have to fight for something you want, like playing on the field. As I grew up, football influenced me and taught me a lot that I didn't learn at home. Football taught me that you have to be tough and strong for the people that you care about, and to never give up, because when you give up that means you quit, and I was taught that if you quit once, you will quit at everything you play. So when I see people quit I try to keep them from doing that because it is not a good idea.

As I got older and started the third grade, I struggled because my parents were fighting and doing it in front of me. It crushed me. I started to get in a shell. All my coaches and some of my teammates knew that I was struggling. I told my cousins and they helped me keep a positive mindset.

My parents fighting hit me like a Mac truck. I shut down in school, stopped doing my work and never paid attention because I didn't know how to handle myself and my emotions. I was too young. At football, I didn't let anyone see that I was hurt because that shows weakness, and when you show weakness in that sport, people take advantage of it and can really hurt you.

So I used it as a power with my anger and started to hurt not only myself but other people. But I didn't care too much. Failing the third grade made everything worse and I was picked on by other people because of that. My grandfather told me that I was like my brother and I would never become something in life. To this day I have been trying to prove him wrong.

Then, I went skiing with my family and I got in a really bad accident that severely affected my football career. I had made it to the double black diamonds with my uncle and was very hesitant to go down but I just went. I dodged all the trees and made it through all the rough terrain. I got to the bunny slopes and crashed and tore ligaments in my knee. I couldn't even get up to finish going down the slope. They had to get a snowmobile to get me down the rest of the way. My knee looked like a basketball, but I couldn't stay in the hotel while everyone had fun, so I sucked it up and went and got a snowboard.

As soon as I got back home I went to the doctor and got bad news. He said that I may not be able to play football, and I freaked out. He put me in a cast for six weeks because my knee looked like a water balloon and hurt really bad. After every football season, I got a cast on my whole leg so we could get the swelling all the way down before the next football season. I did everything possible to play. I got cleared to play right before football season and I was so happy.

I was riding my bike to school and I was paying attention to a car that kept going so I sped up to avoid getting hit. Suddenly, I went flying in the air. When I landed, I hit my already hurt knee on the curb and couldn't stand up. This lady ran out of the car looking crazy with half of her face with makeup and the half without makeup. She wasn't paying attention because she was putting on her makeup. Afterwards I called my dad and told him my bike was broke. I knew if I called my mom and told her the truth she would come and hurt the lady. This was just another injury in my life of many.

I got better in football, and as a young kid I was asked to go to certain high schools to play for them. That really showed my work was paying off. After my football season in the third grade, I got an award for MVP and I thought I wasn't good enough to deserve that award. After that, I moved to California. It was the nicest place that I have ever seen. I was looking for a football park to play at and I found the Bulldogs. I felt so at home and made a lot of new friends. I attended LI Middle School. The first day in school, I was scared to even go to class because I was the new kid. But everyone was so nice to me, so I thought that I was ok. I went to my first football practice and it killed me. I was so tired. We had an amazing year, going 9-3. During one game at the end of the season I was rushed to the hospital because I was hit and I landed in my neck and couldn't move. I got to the hospital finally and got the feeling back in my body. They cut my jersey off my body and started to check on me. Turns out I had whiplash. It hurt really bad and I couldn't move my neck. That is how I ended the season--hurt, but that is always how it was.

My second year in California I had made a lot of friends and I was so happy. Football kept me straight with my grades. I struggled a little but I was still able to keep my grades up because of AVID, which helped me so much with my classes and keeping organized. I got a 3.8 GPA because AVID helped me so much. And that made my football season even better due to the fact that I was OK with school. In the beginning of the year, I hurt my knee again. I had just gotten cleared and my doctor called my mom to tell me that I had cancer on my femur and I could break my leg. I was really scared that I wouldn't be able to play football ever again. I was freaking out and the fact that I was really hurt scared me.

I flew to Miami to go to my orthopedic and get an MRI of my leg and to get cleared. Three days after, I got a call from my doctor saying I was cleared and I could play under my own

caution. To me, that meant I could play. I got back to practice for the first day and I didn't get put in, and that really bothered me because I normally started on every side of the ball. So I asked the coach to go in and he laughed in my face and said no. I was really angry so I walked away from practice stomping my feet and told my mom. She walked to the president of the park and told him what happened. He went to go talk to my coaches and told them that it was wrong for what they said to me. But before they could say sorry, I went home and posted something on Facebook about how I felt and someone told the coach.

I went back to practice the next day and they called me out and told me that I couldn't play the first game because what I said and I had to say sorry to my whole team. At the end of the year I won defensive player of the year. I was excited. After that year I moved back to Florida and attended Miami Beach High School for the first semester of my freshmen year. It was really tough because at the end of my football season I broke a bone in my knee and could not put it straight. Then I went to MacArthur High School and finished my freshmen year. I started sophomore year there. During one of the last games of the season I hurt my back during the game and played the whole game hurt. I wasn't able to walk for two weeks.

Then I moved here to North Carolina and wasn't so excited because it looked liked there was nothing to do. But I made friends and summer hit. I finally had something to do: football. I couldn't stop thinking of it. Summer was really fun. I made more friends and had a good football season and broke all kinds of records. I now have all kinds of colleges looking at me to go and play football at their school. My dreams are finally coming true and that is all I can ask for. Playing football for 13 years was not a waste of my time. Neither is AVID. Student athletes really benefit from all AVID has to offer.

10. Friends are temporary; AVID is forever.

The thought of explaining my entire life is cumbersome. There are so many minor details to my life that make me who I am. Although, I'm not someone who has this incredibly troubling background. My life has had some experiences which were life changing. I will do my best to include all of the important things that make me who I am today, the good and the bad.

The place to begin is the start. Growing up was pretty normal as for my life. I have an older sister who is 4 years older than me. Putting aside the age and gender difference, she was and still is my best friend. We are exactly alike and I don't think that will ever change. But back on to the topic of my childhood. Of course I don't remember much of this, but when I was at the age of 3 my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. In a way, it was good she got it when she did and not when I was older. I don't really remember much about her having the cancer. I remember going up to Raleigh and Cary for all of her appointments every week. But other than those things everything seemed normal. I was too young to understand what cancer was or how it was affecting my mother. This is one of the enormous blessings God has given me throughout my life.

There are several things I did growing up that many people don't get the opportunity to do. Such as, I was homeschooled up to the 7th grade. I've been to several South American places such as Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Saint Martin and a few others. I've gone to Universal Studios. On the other hand, there are several situations where I have been rescued, such as being in two very serious car wrecks with deer, a boat fire on a gulf fishing trip, and being rescued by the coast guard. Just the fact I am living and breathing today with new serious health problems in a blessing in itself.

As for school, being homeschooled was an experience I would never take back. It was something completely different than public school. It brought my family closer together throughout the years that my sister and I were home schooled. My dad would do Math and History and my mom would do English and Science. I still learned like everyone else. But the way my learning environment was and the way I was taught was different than those in public school. Going to school in 7th grade was probably the hardest transfer I've ever done in my life. It was like having this completely normal routine you grow up knowing is flipped upside down. The whole reason as to why I even went to middle school was because of football. Football is a very big part of my life. But after my 6th grade year I was too old and too big to play the local Pop Warner football league. If I wanted to continue playing football, I was forced to face a decision; play football and go to school or continue being home schooled and not play football until I attend High School. My sister who had been homeschooled up until her freshman year of high school knew she was ready for school and went to Lee Christian School which is a private school for K-12 grade. With her going to school was another source of motivation for me to go to school. So ultimately, after several at home discussions with family and friends I made the decision to attend West Lee Middle School in my 7th grade year.

It was very difficult to have sit in a classroom with 20 other kids who require the knowledge I need but not having the one on one environment I was used to. Being home schooled, when I had a question I would just simply ask my parents. It was a different scenario in middle school though. I was social but always worried of saying something dumb whenever I opened my mouth. Bottom line, I didn't really know how to act in a classroom setting. Throughout 7th grade I had poor grades. All C's and maybe a B. I never did well on tests and therefore I was slowly giving up work altogether. Thankfully, I didn't fail any classes and did

well on my exams. That was the end of 7th grade and on to 8th grade I went. 8th grade was a different situation. I started off high and mid way through I completely fell back into how I was 7th grade. Getting poor grades on my tests and of course my over all course grades. I pulled everything together by the end of the year and finished fairly strong. Little did I know that there was a class designed for people like me, people who need a push and to get on the right track. This class is called AVID.

Looking back, freshman year is blur. What I mean by that is I didn't try to challenge myself in any fashion. The most memorable and important part of freshman year was football season. It was the chance for me to make an impression as a little fish in a big pond. I wanted to dress for varsity so bad and I tried my utmost to get the chance to dress for varsity.

Unfortunately, I never did dress for a varsity game my freshman year. But another important part of my freshman year was the athletic banquet for football. It was held at the Civic Center which at the time was the common location for the Banquet. It just so happened that on the same night there was an AVID informational meeting just across the hall from where I was at. My dad, being the person he is, was very curious as to what AVID was. So once I was given my award for football, my dad went and listened to the informational on AVID. That night my dad explained what the program was and how good it sounded. He was given Ms. Casto's (now she is Mrs. Perkins) information and the next day he called the school so I could have a meeting and talk with her.

I went to go talk to her and what I didn't know was that she would be my English teacher next semester. After speaking with her I had an absolutely positive feeling about AVID and having her as a teacher. So after that meeting I signed up to join AVID. I was very nervous

because I only knew about 2 people that were in the program and I felt like I might have been alone in the class; it was the complete opposite though.

Fast forward to the end of Junior Year; things have changed and I have as well. One thing that's stayed pretty consistent is AVID. Whenever I'm having trouble in my classes or personal life, I have my AVID class to turn to for support and comfort, especially in my senior year of High School. Having the support of my AVID class will help with the decisions I have to make.

11. I'm not patient; I hate waiting.

It's not easy telling a life story. How bad it sucks, how great it is. All the ups and downs. I don't want to give a sob story with a happy ending because it's never that simple. Not everyone has a Cinderella story from rags to riches. Pain, happiness and confusion pretty much sums me up.

I was raised as a hunter and brought up in church. My grandpa was the preacher so I was always expected to attend every service and Sunday School. We lived in the middle of nowhere; the only one around me was family. Fishing, hunting, and camping was our life style then and always will be. There were countless times where I fell asleep in a tree stand and dad had to carry me out on his back.

My grandfather and my dad expected me to be a big game hunter. I'm not patient; I hate waiting for hours at a time for something that may or may not show up. I was really good at it but it just wasn't for me. This aggravated my dad and grandpa. I ended up being obsessed with ducks and geese. I duck hunted every day that I possibly could. I love being in the outdoors; it's peaceful and I just hate being cooped up in the house all day. I started really late in sports; I didn't surround my life with it like most other kids did. I just started football in 8th grade and played until high school. It's not really my thing. I'd rather shoot a gun or pick up a fishing pole.

I don't want to be someone I'm not and act like others just to fit in with the crowd. I would rather do my own thing and have others accept me for who I really am. It appalls me on how hard it is to find a true friend instead of one that will befriend you just for convenience.

AVID has given me a family, people I can look up to and call them my true friends and not think twice about them giving me up or stabbing me in the back to help themselves. Some in the family are people I normally wouldn't hang out with or call them "friend." The people in this

group have become some of my best friends. They are trustworthy and loyal and I'm glad to call them my AVID family.

AVID plays a big part on starting your life, college, and career. It just doesn't help you in school; it helps you prepare for the real world. At first I just joined AVID because I had some buddies doing it and they talked me into joining and then it became more than just joining for friends. I enjoyed it and stuck with it and plan on sticking with it until the end. Mrs. Perkins has pushed me towards chasing my dreams and not letting anyone get in the way of that, and because of her I joined the Caterpillar program and found a career for myself that hopefully will put me into good finances when I'm older and move out into the world. I wouldn't trade these people for anything. They have helped make high school bearable. Waiting for high school to end has been a little easier for an impatient guy like me because I have found a way to make time speed up a bit through AVID, welding, and my time outdoors after school.

12. My life is a beautiful struggle.

I don't remember a lot growing up as a kid, but one thing I do remember is living in a house with two people: my mother and me. I always felt strange, wondering why all my other friends had a dad in their life, but I didn't. Not knowing how much a father can impact your life, my life was upside down while my mom tried to play the "mommy" and "daddy" role. I remember seeing my mom cry, praying to God that I didn't end up like the kids in my neighborhood. At this point in my life I was in elementary school. This period in time is known as the bad stage.

Heading into middle school I changed schools. I ended up at a private school where almost everybody was white. I really didn't care about that but everybody else seemed to. I felt as though I was being treated differently. I'm not going to lie: I was a bad kid and got suspended multiple times, but the consequences I received for my actions were far more brutal than my other classmates. I was in middle school finishing up my sixth grade year when I got saved during Chapel and that is something I will never forget.

My mother and I decided that private school really wasn't working out; she couldn't afford it by herself and I wasn't acting right anyway. I finished out middle school where most of my friends went. I decided to play basketball and football when I was in middle school. This is when I found out that I was actually good at it. I always liked basketball better than football. I became more responsible around the house and at school because of sports. I wasn't perfect yet but I was on the "come up" coming out of middle school.

The beginning of high school is when I first met Mrs. Perkins. I had her third block. I will never forget. I didn't treat her very well at first because I thought she was just one-eyeing me out of everybody, not realizing that she saw something special in me I didn't even see in myself. She reminded me so much of my mother, which balanced out because I never really knew my dad.

Within a few weeks of understanding how Mrs. Perkins actually felt about me, I finally got to visit my dad. That was the first time in a long time I remember spending time with him. It's a different feeling you get when you're actually with your other parent, but I had a good time. Going into tenth grade was the turning point in my life.

Currently I've made a drastic change in my life, to the point where other people have noticed. I did not change so that other people could like me. If it was really up to me, I would have honestly dropped out just like everybody I grew up with. I changed for my mom. It was the least I could've done for her. Nobody would have expected me, out of all people, to evolve into the person I am today. Now I am here, writing this chapter and contemplating on where my life was and where it is now. I'm so thankful for everybody in my life that has taken the time out to support and guide me in the right direction in life, because you know, "it takes a village to raise a child."

13. The cub finds his true pack.

My life has been a bundle of chaos. It's like a baby grizzly bear left alone in the arctic who is taken in by its distant cousin, the polar bears. Every bear the cub sees as a father or mother figure has or still is being taken away from him. For his sake he won't associate anyone else with those roles because he doesn't want to lose anymore loved ones. The young cub has been through and seen so much that his brain is far above his age. Because he is the only one who has experienced this, no one can relate to him; therefore they still visualize him as having a cub mindset. His mental state of mind qualifies him for the title of a well equipped bear, but his family still looks down on him. Misunderstood in almost every way he is forced to be sheltered in, only because his decisions cannot be trusted.

Back at home he catered to his mama bear. He hunted and defended her, because she was unable. Experiencing all of this quickly made him mature in a most unexpected way. Since his immediate family couldn't be there to see it all, they only know what they hear or what they see when they visit. Wiser than the average bear his age, he makes decisions that will benefit him in his future, and is punished for making these decisions for one simple reason: he isn't grown yet. He is very humble and doesn't fight against them, because he was taught to respect his elders. So, he is patiently waiting on the day he will be accounted as a bear so he can be free.

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Over the last few years I have developed a wonderful relationship with two entities: God and AVID. They have seen this grizzly bear through, from boyhood to manhood. I am only eighteen; therefore, I don't have a lot of wisdom, but I can assure you that I am far from stupid. My life has changed dramatically since I've been in AVID. Things are getting harder and harder, and that's the main reason I stayed in AVID and trusted Mrs. Perkins as my second mom.

Outside of school, everything gets looked at the wrong way because of perception. Let me give you an example. My best friend (I wish he joined AVID), who has been there and looked out for me since the eighth grade, was in need. He has been through so much in the last three years. His mother had surgery leaving her down for several months. His sister and him both worked while in school to pay bills in the house, because their mother was out of work. Now his sister just recently had a baby and that put him in a situation where he is the only one working, and still is. Even though his job has better pay he barely has money because of bills. They only have one car between five people, therefore everything has to be handled using that one car. The brakes were messing up on his car and he didn't have the money to fix them. Being the humble man I know to be, I gave him the money no questions asked. This is only right to do coming from a best friend who sees him struggle daily. This is the same person who is going to the military with me through the buddy system, so you can assume this wasn't just some random individual. Although others looked at this as a bad decision, I believe this spirit of generosity and family is something I learned through AVID. I do not regret helping anyone in need, and never will.

I might not be the flame that will change the world, but I will be one spark to ignite it. I could care less about materialistic things in this world because it's only temporary. I'm going to make sure my future kids, wife, and I are taken care of. My ambition is too great to lose sight of. There are too many people depending on me; that isn't my fault, but nothing I went through was my fault, so I just deal with it like a man. Times do get hard, but I don't worry because giving up on my ambition is way harder. I'm not perfect; that's why I'm not afraid to make mistakes, because everything in life is either a lesson or a blessing.

*The mind is a precious thing to waste*

*The soul is an easy thing to lose*

*The body is a hard thing to resist*

*and love is so impossible to choose.*

*There is always a battle between life and death.*

*You can call it yin and yang, rich vs poor, or segregation*

*but are they really separated?*

*See one can't live without the other*

*Would we know what the significance of night is*

*if we didn't have a day?*

*We would never know we have limits*

*unless we test them.*

*For that simple reason, nothing is impossible.*

*The key to your success is in between your ears...*

In my eyes I should be acknowledged or something. Being a young black man with no father in my life is a chip on my shoulder. Watching my mother go from being perfectly fine one moment, to being hospitalized for several months is another chip on my shoulder. Watching my mom helpless on the floor, unconscious, sweating, breathing hard and swollen will do something to you emotionally, especially when you are too weak to pick her up and clueless to what was wrong with her. Going through all of this is more than the average teenager has to juggle.

Mrs. Perkins was the only adult that would take time to try to understand me and she does. From day one, she has never given up on me. There were times where I had numerous assignments missing, but she still saw hope in me by pushing me. Somehow she knew what I

was going through before I was able to open up to her. When I did open up to her she never judged me or treated me any differently. She is the only one that has stepped in my life and taken the motherly role when my mother wasn't able to. She has loved and nurtured me for the past four years. I come to school to get away from where I stay, and I call her classroom home. I thank her for believing in me, and I love you Mama P.

After graduation I am joining the United States Army and will fulfill my dream of being a technician, accountant, and owning my own barber shop. I want to make my own place where young black men can come in and have a safe place to talk and get mentored by adults. Thanks to AVID and the many people who have come and gone out of my life, I am no longer just a cub. I am a man. I am a strong bear. I will succeed.

#### **14. My family deserves a future here.**

I live in a small town called Sanford. I'm a senior in Southern Lee, I am part of the AVID family and the most exciting part is that I am part of the 2015 class. I will be going to college in a few months and starting a whole new chapter of my life.

I was born in Celaya Guanajuato, Mexico and my life over at Celaya was great. I have everything that anybody at that age could wish for. I had a happy life, a lot of friends and cousins that I could go out and play soccer with, and the most important thing was that I had all my family that I could depend on if I had a conflict. Over at Mexico I didn't have to depend on having a car since I lived close to downtown and I was able to walk there. Over at my hometown there is a lot of public transportation and that is also a fact of not needing of buying a car. One of the things that I missed the most from my hometown is that traditional candy called "cajeta de celaya Gto" which is made with goat milk and this candy is only sold in my hometown and in the states of Mexico.

My parents owned two houses and a room that they rented to this pharmacist; one of the houses was located in the city where I attended to school and the other was in the country which my parents also rented. I attended to school in Mexico until fourth grade. I still remember one of my friends telling me to come to the US because I was the only friend that she had because not even her cousin would talk to her in school. My dad came to the US several times to give my family a better future. Before my family and I came to the US my grandpa died.

Then my dad and decided to bring my whole family to the US. I enrolled in school here in the US in fifth-grade and have been in ESL since then. Luckily, because of AVID, my English improved enough to exit ESL. Now I have taken Honors classes and am proud to go to Central Carolina Community College this fall.

### **15. I am sure of being unsure.**

I guess the whole point of high school is finding interests and finding someone you want to be for the rest of your life. But as the days countdown to senior year, I'm realizing that maybe I still don't have everything figured out like I thought I have these past three years.

When I started freshman year I only knew the kids I went to middle school with because our districts changed. I was lost and felt really out of place being in crowds of people I didn't know. By the end of my freshman year, my anxiety was in full fledge for the summer. With those last few months, I found my home for the next years to come: AVID. I admit, if you would ask my parents about that first year they would say I was smart, social, and very sure of myself, but it's funny how the people around you can see potential when you feel you have none. AVID made me sure of being unsure.

Throughout my life, college was never up for discussion. My sister and I were to go, no questions asked. My mother is a district manager for a company and she has a bachelor's degree from a college where she met my dad. My dad was a hockey player born into a small, conservative, German/Ukrainian/Romanian family. Two different people, they learned how to be productive and eventually got married 10 years after meeting. My parents lived in New Jersey and had their first baby, my sister. With my mom's parents close by, she continued working and my dad did also. Seven years later and a switch in houses, I was born in on Thanksgiving morning. My family made the move to North Carolina when my grandmother had leukemia in 2006. Moving here was a culture shock. We still haven't gotten the hang of Southern things but I do like still having parts of Northern culture in my everyday life. I grew up eating healthy foods



and doing things people in the South would never do. This move was the realization that there's multiple ways to do the same thing, something also prominent in the message of AVID.

School was probably the hardest thing to adapt to. School for the next two years was boring and I was never tested for AIG even though I would get grades well above average. This was the gap between learning and passing by for me. I could feel myself dumbing down. It wasn't until AVID that I felt my potential to be greater. The education opportunities you take are “make it or break it.” AVID did something for me that I couldn't do for myself.

I walked into sophomore year oblivious to everything going wrong in my social life and my family life. I focused on myself those first few months after my best friend moved to Virginia. I could tell my mom missed my sister after she moved and that my grandparents were growing older. I could see all these things but I focused on a quick way to get out: college. I had always been told that if you get good grades, you can go anywhere you want. This meant scholarships for my middle class family.

AVID not only helped me help myself, though. It helped me see how much I could help others. I fixed so many things throughout my sophomore year in high school. I finally started appreciating my background and my family's Ukrainian culture, my parents' efforts, and the people I was surrounding myself both in and out of school.

Those you surround yourself with can also make or break you. I chose to surround myself with hedonistic people who made me feel like I was living life to the fullest. I could do all these crazy and outgoing things and keep my grades up all the same. I was on a downward spiral without anyone knowing because my grades were just as great as they had always been. But there's always a bottom to every up. The summer of 2014 was my rock bottom. I worked all summer long, making and wasting \$200 a week. I tried to focus on working and getting myself

where I should be and surrounding myself with good people, but I went through the summer with a total of two friends. Over this summer, my dad's mother died and we went up to New York for the typical Ukrainian Catholic funeral. I never really knew my dad's parents because we moved to North Carolina and it's a long way between the North and the South.

I came back to school for my junior year focused on the sports and making new friends. AVID is where I found good platonic relationships once again. I guess after all this time, AVID is the only consistent thing in my life. Within those first few months of junior year, my mom's dad passed away, leaving my grandmother in a house they built together.

AVID is a place for family when you're losing all the family you have. AVID is a place for the lost soul, for the weak, for the average, the above average, the first generation, the third generation, the so-sure freshman, or even someone who has never had a doubt about going to college. College has been drilled into my head since I can remember. But this is my junior year. I should have it all planned out in a folder with my favorite college t-shirt and a smile, ready to apply. But this year has made me realize how quickly things change, and life doesn't wait for anyone. My mind changes quicker than I can keep up. My head knows what I want while the rest of me is still mourning over my last mistake. AVID is the only constant in my life at this point and I have no clue what I am going to do when I graduate next summer. I've learned that it's okay to sell yourself short. It's okay sometimes to do what is right and average rather than going above and beyond. AVID has made me realize that if you're happy and doing what is good for you, you should do it ten times over.

AVID is the push I needed to get through a gap. AVID is for those who need to choose a side, those who are indecisive, those who are lost. The world will change with or without you, and it's up to you if you want to stand still and be dizzy or change with it and hope everything

works out. As for me and my family (both blood and AVID), we will change with the world around us, hoping we find ourselves somewhere in between it all.

## **16. Being normal can be totally exhausting.**

My life has honestly been completely uneventful. I have not done anything special, I have not won any awards, and I have never been recognized for anything that I have done. The worst part of my life is something I cannot even remember. I was a small child born to two high school dropouts who were severely into narcotics. For a while, we lived with my grandmother then gradually got the money to send my father to college with my mother's three waitress jobs. After college he got a job, eight to five, and sent my mother to college. Being two twenty-five year old parents is a hard job to carry, especially when you have a son and a daughter. I am the oldest with a brother who is three years younger than I. After living in an unfurnished apartment for a year, my parents bought their own house. After living there for two years they bought their first actual house, one where we all got our own rooms; I have lived there since I was five. Since my parents have been mostly working, my life has been spent with my great grandmother. We called her Elmer. Elmer was my most favorite person in the world, she was my mom, my best friend, and my grandmother all wrapped in one raisin of a person.

My grandmother died last year in October after suffering severely with Dementia and Alzheimer's. That is the only loss I have ever suffered through. I have had parents with mostly good intentions and a brother who makes bad choices, but I know he still cares. I have a supporting boyfriend of four years, and he helps me make most of my good decisions. My boyfriend is one of the very few people I can look to if I want honesty. My boyfriend and I, like all couples, have been through downfall after downfall but always got back up, even after the truest tests of our relationship. My life has been just a bunch of tests. Testing relationships, testing, patience, and even testing myself by pushing my own limits.

I have been told everyone has a story, so here is mine. I have not been through a tragic event, I have not won the lottery and I have definitely not found anything that will last a lifetime.

I have lived the “American dream” and I am here to say it is not as glamorous as it sounds.

People are living just as well if not better in another country. My life can easily be compared to a bad movie where everyone is just waiting for the punch line so that they can get their money's worth. When someone tells a story, they usually have something exciting happen and gets the reader so into the book, they cannot even think about putting it down because they are so entrapped into the pages that they start to feel the emotions from the book as though they are the person in the book. Being normal can be totally exhausting. It is anti-climactic. That's why I am going to study photography after I graduate. I will make my life interesting by portraying other people's realities and even making some of my own. I am glad I stuck with AVID these four years. Otherwise, I would not be as confident in my middle nature.

### **17. AVID cheers me on every day.**

I was born here in Sanford, North Carolina. I wasn't planned with my mother being 17 years old and my father being 18 years old, but I was loved.

Before I get into my own childhood, I want to say a few things about my parents. My mom didn't make the brightest decisions during her teenage years, but what teen does? Hearing the story of my mother becoming a mother is always inspiring, every time. My mom faced the troubles and issues of people's judgment towards her being pregnant as a junior in high school. She became very independent and strong-minded. She worked two jobs, focused on school and planning of her future with her first child. Going through the pregnancy, she stayed at the top of her class and graduated high school. Luckily I was able to see one of the biggest accomplishments of my mom's life. My mom continued to go to community college and graduate there as well. Not only did I get to see this accomplishment, but my younger sister as well. Now today my mom loves what she does in the pharmaceutical field. I know that I have done nothing but tell about my mother's journey, but it has a huge impact on my journey. .

Going back to my childhood, I was lucky to have a big family that loved to place me in lots of things such as tee-ball, dance, gymnastics, modeling and cheerleading. With tee-ball we discovered that Kelly was not the athletic type, so I've stuck to cheerleading my whole life. Throughout my younger years I had no problems with my behavior. Believe it or not, I once was a very shy person. All through elementary school and the beginning of middle school I was extremely shy. In seventh grade, I started to get out of my comfort zone. I started to hang out with different types of people, do lots of school-related activities and form a social life. My social life was the best thing that I always looked forward to.

It was also a harbor that I would run to while dealing with having a terrible relationship with my father. Growing up, I had a strong bond with my dad but once he started to become a heavy drinker that changed quickly. It was not a great time for me, a girl living the life of a teenage girl, which means a whole lot of attitude and mood swings, trying to “bond” with my dad who woke up everyday thinking that the alcohol was the only cure to his worries. My family was tremendously broken apart once the alcoholism got worse. Physical and verbal abuse started to become an everyday thing. During this time, I had to step up to the plate of being the mom of the house. My mom would always work night shift and I was responsible to make sure the house was clean and my sister was ready for bed and school the next morning, dinner was made and that my dad was at home instead of running the roads while drinking and driving. During these times I found myself counting the days until I would be able to leave this mess and be on my own and never ever picture myself to be in my father’s shoes.

Coming into high school, I had a careless attitude. Again, my social life was by far more important than anything and anyone. Instead of focusing on school, I focused on boys, friends, partying and doing what everyone else was doing. There were many times where change was needed but no attention was given to those issues. Starting my sophomore year in high school, I wanted to change everything completely. I didn’t want a repeat of my freshman year. I decided to join AVID. I was a part of AVID in middle school, but once I came to high school my views had changed. Once I started my sophomore year in AVID, I began to grow close to people I would never see myself being friends with. I began to take school more seriously and started to get nothing but A’s and B’s. I started challenging myself to take college preparation classes. Even though I was doing well in the classroom setting, I was still struggling at home with bad relationships that I had with my family. My sister and I would argue 24/7, my mom and I

bumped heads often and of course my dad and I began to fall apart tremendously. I had the impatient idea of leaving home and never coming back once I graduated.

Going into junior year was exciting but I still faced the struggles I continued to have with family. Losing my great-grandmother really opened up my heart and mind with having my family put everything aside and just come together during the upsetting time. Flipping through photo books, we came across other photos of good memories and times where things didn't get so bad all the time. Change was difficult for all of us, but sometimes it's for the best and it was. Having bad relationships within the family was just going to continue to fall apart and keeping bad habits was not the solution to a positive change.

I decided to turn to God and put my faith and trust in him. Once I started to make these changes internally and externally, I lost friendships and healed broken ones. I was gossiped about, but I didn't show them satisfaction. My main concern was to focus on myself and healing my family back together. Setting high goals to accomplish and education was a big goal of mine and still is. As these changes were happening a lot of blessings came my way. First, my dad put the bottle down and other distractions that were ruining our family. Being clean for more than four months now has really brought good things to my relationship with my father and my parents' marriage. I thank God for leading my dad out of his darkness and into the light of positivity. Second, my mother was granted with a higher employment opportunity that was able to secure my family. Third, my sister and I created a bond that is special and closer than we have ever been. I was finally starting to get my family back to the good times. Having my family healed, I continued to set goals for myself. I started working as a waitress again and worked at all times that I could.



I honestly can say AVID has been a big part of my life. It's the stronghold behind my determination to things that I take on in my life. It has taught me that I am capable of numerous things and anything that I put my mind to. It not only helps my motivation, but also public speaking. At first, my voice would be lost; then it turned into only doing chants and cheers at football and basketball games, but now it's to my classmates and anyone who is there to observe my feelings and opinions to different topics. Now I am an individual that is determined to speak my opinion and thoughts on things. My voice has been found, and I can't wait to spread my message to the world.

Soon I will be taking on my senior year in high school. I want to take on this year with nothing but good motives to succeed and be accepted into the school of my dreams. My mom will get to see my first greatest accomplishment just like I got to see hers.

### **18. My past will not define me.**

Write down my life story, she said. Start from the beginning and just keep typing is the only way I know how. I was born six pounds, seven ounces, and for a while I couldn't keep the formula down in my stomach. So they switched my formula five or six times and then I was admitted back into the hospital to have surgery because my stomach muscle was weak. My stomach muscles being weak caused me to regurgitate all of the milk, making it hard to eat. After the surgery, the doctors came and informed my mother that I would have disabilities with my speech, I wouldn't be able to walk, I wouldn't have hand-eye coordination and would never be able to perform at the level of the kids my age, basically implying I would be mentally challenged. I was placed on feeding tubes in order to be able to hold food down. I came home weighing two pounds and 11 ounces. My dad had to wait until I cried at the top of my lungs to stick the tubes down my throat. I don't really remember any much more about having the tubes, just that without them I wouldn't be here right now typing this story.

My elementary school life was very miserable simply because I was always the "bigger" kid so I often got picked on. I had to learn at a very young age you can either be the joke or you can joke, so I think that's what helped me to become the biggest class clown. Starting middle school was horrible. I had to start middle school with the fact that my uncle had been sexually abusing me for over the course of my whole 5th grade year and it started to take a toll on me. I never chose to tell my mom because I didn't think anyone would believe me. I mean, back then, a little kid saying so and so touched me? Now you would believe them, but then I had an active imagination so I didn't think anyone would believe me. Eventually, another family member opened up about being raped, so I told what happened to me. Some of my family was shocked,

but others were so sad and apologetic. It felt good to know some of my family wished they could have protected me. We went through a lot of different stages, but the biggest thing I really remember was one day my brother was like, “I’m going to church today, you should come with me.” I had been to church before and it was in me to always attract all my friends, some would say that I have that charisma and could bring anyone in. Needless to say, I got hooked on church and am still finding ways to bring my friends in with me.

High school has been rather hard but interesting. I’ve seen how much I can handle all at once. My ninth grade year was okay; I was on the ball and made straight A’s. Then I transferred over to our rival school. I didn’t feel like I fit in at all. It was like one of those feelings where you go somewhere and you just know you don’t belong there. I finished out the year and there and when summer came I transferred back. I knew our school was for me, but I had to be hard-headed and leave. That summer was pretty fun honestly all up until August 1, 2013. I was on my way home when I get a phone call that my grandma was in the hospital and it wasn’t looking too well. I immediately rushed home to tell my mom where I was headed when I got another phone call saying she didn’t make it.

It was like my whole world had dropped. My grandparents were my best friends, so it’s like one has gone, what am I supposed to do? I yelled at the top of my lungs and was just like, “This can’t be happening, I’m going over to the hospital and I’m going to get to see her and she’s going to be fine, she’s going to come home and we’re going to plant flowers.” I guess this was the stage of denial because I didn’t want it to be true. My grandma had battled with cancer for so long and it was like she was just tired of fighting it. When my grandpa got home he called out to her and she never responded so he walked down the hallway to see my grandma on the floor with

blood all over the place. She was either trying to replace the trachea or just trying to take it out but it is what led to her death.

In March of that very next year my little brother was brutally shot and killed. He was walking home when a guy came up and asked him his name and he told him. The guy pulled out a gun and my brother took off running but it just wasn't fast enough. The guy shot him in the head and he fell; he went up to him and shot him in the hands and in the feet so that there was no way he could run or anything. I was on my way back from church when I got the phone call that he had been shot it was like everything just stopped.

AVID helped me tremendously. I am so blessed Mrs. Showalter made sure I was here at the end of my freshman year. The minute I walked into Mrs. Perkins' class sophomore year, I knew I was home. I was a part of a family instantly. At that time, I did not know my grandmother was going to die, or my brother was going to die, but I knew whatever happened, there were brothers and sisters and my AVID mom to get me through. Whenever I was lost with my school work, I knew someone in AVID would know how to help me understand. The time in AVID has helped me tremendously. Without it, I would not be prepared to take so many college courses my senior year.

Junior year has been overwhelming, and even though at first I thought it was cool to just hide out at home, I learned I needed to show up if for no other reason than my AVID family. My grandfather also passed away suddenly. I lost another best friend. Still, although these things have come over me to try and break me, they won't. I know I am not alone.

### **19. Quiet voices deserve to be heard.**

As a child, I believe I did not have my own voice to an extent of being quiet and a inability to making friends. In my younger years I never really went through a depression, but I believe it was a phase of sticking to myself and dealing with insecurities. As I grew older, I began to wonder why I felt this way and why others around me didn't seem to notice me as a friend.

I was born in Virginia. I left Virginia when I was five to live in North Carolina. During elementary school, I didn't really speak to anyone; I just focused on my schoolwork and never got into trouble. While others had friends to talk to about things or do things with, I had no one but myself. At the time I felt fine with that decision, because I only focused on making my father and my teachers proud by being a top academic scholar. I would have played basketball at a younger age because I really liked the sport; I just never went through with the idea and the dream died out. I never really went through a major crisis at a young age. I believe having a strict parent and no friends to influence me to do anything bad or talk to, made me stick to myself. As the years went by I made a few friends here and there that were generally like me. Through middle school I grew bonds with them, but it seems as I got into high school I lost all of them but one. I believe the people you hang out with the most have the biggest influence on you. When you hang out with a person you tend to act or think like that person. It is amazing how one person can come into your life and give you an entirely different perspective. I saw myself changing slowly but continuously through AVID. Thank you, AVID family.

## **20. The best way out is through.**

Looking back on life can be so hard for many people. You have to relive the bad times but you can also celebrate the good times again. Throughout the 18 years that I have been alive, I have been through a lot more than anyone would even imagine. I'm very sheltered when it comes to sharing my feelings, simply because I have a hard time trusting people. That being said, I want to tell you to live your life, make mistakes, and do great things to tell others and inspire them to live a better life.

Ever since I was born, I have tried to keep up with my older sister. She's always been the one person I've always looked up to. I was walking at 10 months--running, as my mom likes to say. I was swimming by the time I was 2 years old. As a young child, there seemed to be no problems in my life. Children seem to be clueless to the world; they have no problems; they're free. We were once all young and naive, not thinking that any wrong could happen. When we're young, we all have a plan for how our lives are going to "play out". We're going to grow up, working a 9-5 job, have 2 kids, and be married. As years go by, we realize how out of reach and false our transactional view of life is.

When I was around 7 years old, I heard my dad stand up for my mom for the first time. Her brother came to our house out of nowhere and was just yelling. I thought they were going to end up calling the cops. My parents told my sister and me to stay in our rooms. I remember just sitting at my door in a ball just crying because I heard all the commotion but I had no idea what was going on. My mom and her brother always fought since their mother, my grandmother, died. The week my grandmother died, my mom found out that the man she always thought was her father, wasn't. She felt as if her whole world was a lie and she didn't know what to believe. She

found out her biological father died in a motorcycle accident when she was a baby. I've always felt like this is when everything within my family fell apart. I never really noticed any of the betrayal and fighting in my family until I was around 8 or 9 years old.

When you're young, you look up to your parents' relationship. You think they're very much in love and divorce never crosses your mind. In the 5th grade, my whole world stopped. I had noticed that my parents hadn't slept in the same bed in 2 years and they were very distant. I didn't think much of that though. I will always remember how they broke the news to my sister and me. I was sitting on the computer playing games when my parents said that we needed to have our first and last family meeting. My dad's exact words were: "Don't think I don't love your mom, because I do very much. I have been cheating on your mom for 3 years. I never planned for this to happen, but it has." My sister and I had babysat a boy we did not know was our half brother many times. I hated my dad for a very long time; I didn't even want to go to his new apartment. I refused to see him or his "girlfriend." No one wants to accept their parents' flaws, so to speak. In elementary school, they ask who your hero is, and I couldn't put my dad anymore because his actions tore my life apart.

My 6th grade year started and my dad and I had a better relationship. I was always at his house and loved being there. Middle school was hard for me, as it is for anyone. Anorexia was a big thing amongst my group of friends. This is how I found out that I have blood sugar problems. I barely ate and it was killing me. My blood sugar plummeted and I would pass out because of it. I'm very glad that I realized that anorexia wasn't good for me. In middle school, kids are put through so much more than their parents could even fathom. I felt happy but sad at the same time constantly because I didn't really know who I was or who I even wanted to be. I tried cutting myself a couple times but I could never find true satisfaction in doing it. I didn't really know

how to be happy but then I met someone, my first love. We met when I was in the seventh grade; I was enamored with him. He was so perfect to me, just hearing his name would give me butterflies. We were together a long time, and I learned this lesson I want to leave for you, reader: if you can't love yourself, you'll never be able to love anyone else.

I told my story to convey one lesson: "The best way out is through." This quote is so relevant to my life. Some people try to get out of the pain and the hurt of life by cutting, not eating, or even being suicidal. Those actions aren't necessary. Even though things seem so bad in the moment, if you push through the moment, the future is so promising. The bad of life comes and goes, but everyone has a purpose and not many people realize that. The best way out is definitely through, so push through and be the best person you can be, for you.



## **21. Determination will get you through it.**

The day my wild journey began, my parents were so excited to have a little girl. However, I wasn't the only little bundle of joy in their life. There was also my brother, who was two years old when I was born. He was excited as well to have a little sister in his life. I was blessed to be born into such an amazing family, but almost 18 years later, a lot has changed.

The first five years of my life, I can't quite remember everything that happened because of how little I was. But the one thing I remember most was my first surgery. I was only five years old and had a Tethered Cord Spinal Release. Something was wrong with my spinal cord. Because of this, I had to have the surgery to remove it. I can barely remember half of it because I was only five years old, but my parents remember it clear as day and when I was older told me everything that had happened, and of course the scar is still there. But when I came back for a checkup, they found something that made a huge impact on my life, and still does to this day. I was diagnosed with Scoliosis, which is an abnormal curvature of the spine. The doctors told me I had to wear a back brace until and if this curve was fixed. I had to wear the back brace for many many years. In those many years, a lot happened!

I started elementary school, made so many new friends, and learned so much. One of the biggest things in my life is dance. I started dance when I was three years old. I took ballet, and tap. Once I got a little older, I started to take jazz classes and more advanced tap classes and some hip hop classes here and there. I had annual dance recitals and attended some competitions as well. When I was little, I loved school! Kindergarten was amazing for me, I was the little girl that couldn't wait to go to school and I don't know why. First grade went by so fast that I barely remember it. Second grade was probably one of my favorites because of the amazing teacher I had. Next comes third grade, which was a tough year for me. One day while I was at Duke Children's Hospital getting a CAT scan for my Scoliosis, they noticed something that changed

my life forever. The doctor, who I loved so much, told me that there was something very odd with my right kidney. They had to go in and remove part of my kidney, and I started to bleed out so they eventually had to remove my whole kidney. That has been a little hard on me. Caffeine is something I can't have a lot of. I just have to keep my kidney healthy since I have to keep that one for the rest of my life. Fourth grade was a great year for me. I did very well in school that year! Fifth grade was the year that everything started to change. My parents got divorced that year, and it was very hard for me to get over. I made my very first F, and I will never forget that. I was so disappointed in myself. It's amazing how you remember the littlest things that happen.

Middle school started, and I have some of the craziest memories in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. My sixth grade teachers were two of the best teachers I've ever had. Seventh grade was a really fun year for me because I tried out for the cheerleading team, and I made it! I never expected myself to be a cheerleader, but I am so glad that I did tryout!

But something happened this year that was hard for me to go through. The doctor at Duke Hospital told me that my Scoliosis was getting worse, and that he needed to do surgery before it got any worse than it already was. I went in for surgery, he put two titanium rods on both sides of my spine, which was a very painful surgery and hard to recover from. I had to miss out on dance and cheer for a couple of months, I couldn't lift over 10 pounds, and I am not able to bend my back. Yes, there are a few things in dance and cheer that are hard for me to do now, but it definitely hasn't stopped me from doing what I love to do most.

Eighth grade finally came along, and that class is a class that I will never forget. I am still best friends with the people that were in that class with me. One of the hardest things in my life, happened while I was in eighth grade. April 16, 2011. I was at my dad's house one Saturday morning with him and my brother, and we had really bad weather that morning. There was lots

of rain, hail, and wind. We were watching the news, and there were tornado warnings for the whole city. I remember lying on the couch, and it said there was a tornado warning where my mom's house was. I stayed at my mom's house most of the time, but I happened to be at my dad's house that weekend because my mom was at the beach with her friends.

We got a call a few minutes after the tornado warning, and it was my neighbor from my mom's neighborhood. She said, "You need to get here fast, the tornado came through and destroyed your house, and you need to expect the worst because it's bad." I didn't know what to expect. My dad, my brother and I got dressed and rushed over to my mom's neighborhood. We had to park a block away because of all the damage, fire trucks, and policemen. I walked down the street, looked at my house, and I just broke down. I could see my brother's clothes everywhere, my baby pictures were strewn all over the road, our mattresses were thrown blocks away; the whole roof to my house was gone. My childhood was all gone.

My uncle grabbed me, and he told me that God did this for a reason and he promised me that the good was going to come out of the bad. And boy was he right! We had so much help from everyone, people brought us food every day, they helped us get as much as we could out of our house, which was only a handful of stuff. I was so thankful for everyone that helped and I still am. We lived with my uncle for a few days until we could get an apartment. They started to rebuild our house and it was ready just a few months later.

That day impacted my life forever. I hate storms, and I especially hate wind. Even so, I know God was with me that day. He made sure my brother, my mom and I were not home because, if we were, I know I wouldn't be alive right now. My friends and my teachers at school were so supportive; they always had the right things to say. Eighth grade came to an end. We had

an eighth grade graduation and it was amazing, even though we lost one of our classmates to a senseless murder.

I loved middle school so much, but nothing can compare to all the memories I made in the next four years of my life. High school: the best four years of my life so far. The memories I have made here are memories I will always cherish. I made the JV cheerleading team in ninth grade! I was so excited because cheering for the football team and the basketball team was so much fun, and I did it with the people that I love most. The very first day of freshman year was a scary day for me. I got through my first three classes that day, and I got to my fourth block class: Ms. Casto's freshman English I class. The moment I walked in, I knew something special was going to happen. Ms. Casto (now Mrs. Perkins) made a huge impact on not only my life, but everyone else in that class as well. We shared things with her that we didn't share with anyone else, and she shared her story with us too. Freshman year started to come to an end, and we did not want to leave her. She was like our second mother and she understood us better than anyone else.

Our wish came true! Mrs. Perkins told us about something called AVID. AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination; it helps you prepare for college and helps you have that college mindset. My whole fourth block class joined it and Mrs. Perkins was our teacher. We got to have her not only freshman year, but sophomore year, junior year, and we are now in our senior year, AVID English IV honors. The past four years with her have been amazing, but we all have struggled along the way. We have overcome many obstacles in our life. Each one of us has a different story, and Mrs. Perkins understands each one of ours like nobody else does. My class has a bond with her that will always be cherished. Our final days as a class are coming to an end, and it is very emotional because we have been with each other since the first day of

freshman year. Mrs. Perkins is very emotional about us leaving her, but she knows that we are all moving on to bigger and better things and she is so proud of us! The encouragement we get from her is what gets us through the day, and some people in my class wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her.

Even though Mrs. Perkins, AVID, and my fourth block class are the most important things to me in high school, there were other things that happened. I cheered for JV my freshman and sophomore year, then I cheered on Varsity my junior and senior year. Cheering for our teams is what got me through a lot! All of us got along so well, we were one big cheer family. I still dance! But at the end of my junior year, the studio that I have danced at for 15 years was shutting down. My dance teachers were my mentors, my role models, and I love them so much. My dance teacher wasn't quite ready to give up dance, so she started a teen tap group! I love being in front of a lot of people doing what I love to do most.

I have a lot to thank God for. My faith is growing and I hope I can lead others to love God the way that I do. This chapter I just shared with you is my whole life so far: everything I have struggled with, the things that I've had to overcome, the positive things, and the negatives. As I finish up my last days of high school there are a few things that I want you to share with you. When you feel like you are nothing, when you feel like you have nobody but yourself, know that God is always with you. There is always a light at the end of the tunnel, and after every horizon there is always a new horizon. Determination will get you through "it," whatever "it" might be. I am graduating high school in a few weeks, and I can't wait! I have worked so hard the past 13 years for this moment! I am going to Central Carolina Community College for two years, and will be transferring to NC State University and majoring in Elementary Education. I am very excited to see what God has in store for me.

## **22. Being the youngest means high expectations.**

I am Mexican-American born in UNC Chapel Hill Hospital. I am the youngest of seven children but technically it's eight so second youngest. My only childhood memory is pictures I've seen and stories I've heard in living in a trailer park neighborhood named Dreamland or in other words "Little Mexico." I slept with my parents while my other siblings had to share the other rooms.

Fast forward in time, we move to another home; it was a little bit bigger, three bedrooms and one complete bathroom and half. I grew up more in this house than my two previous ones in "Little Mexico" and another small little white house which I particularly have no memory about except my one childhood best friend down the street.

Throughout my life I was a thin child and a very happy child as well but the years of life began to change with my parents but I guess that was because I was getting older as well. Middle school was the year I was being picked on by all types of people, it was like the movie Mean Girls but with guys involved too. I felt miserable and felt so damaged that the time my life became dark was in eighth grade, I remember it all so clearly. A classmate threatened to kill me and I was constantly bullied for my weight.

I figured out that society would only accept me when I lose weight and I did by leaving to Mexico that year too. I lost the weight and got new clothes then when I had come back to school it was like everything that happened before never happened. It was like it all disappeared and they actually communicated with me and became my friend as well. I knew it was wrong but I didn't want to be alone. I was being separated by my best friends that year since we never saw each other and I made another close friend. During the summer, I met a guy and he was my first boyfriend in high school. During summer I also wanted to experience things since I was such an innocent child and always felt trapped at home so I had bad influences at the time. We would

sneak out at night and go to the park or go to the pool in town. I met one of my dear friends. She was a cool person I met online through Facebook and she was more amazing in person with full of energy and laughs. I knew they were bad influences and I got caught then decided not to do it anymore, I just decided to go to parties instead with my parents' permission for two hours the most.

My friend I met on Facebook passed away in October 2011. I was crushed and full with sorrow but when I saw her in her coffin, everything froze like it wasn't even real. It was a mistake when she snuck out at night with two of her friends and her boyfriend. They were on their way to the movies and the car lost control; it could've been prevented if she wore her seatbelt. She flew out the front window and hit her head with a tree and she was there dying while one of her friends had no damage, but her boyfriend did as well as the driver.

The classes in high school were not the best (or so I thought at the time). Algebra 1 in the morning, World History second, A computer class for third, and English 1 for fourth block. I had English 1 year long; I really wasn't sure how that happened but it just did. My teacher was Ms. Casto and I heard she was a new teacher at our school (she had taught in NYC before) and I was a new student to high school so I guess we were both considered as "Freshmen." I did make friends that I had in middle school and new ones from that year. One thing I did keep a secret for the longest from people was that I was a suicidal person from when my friend passed away and things at home were not in the best conditions; my sister found out through Facebook because I was apparently giving "hints" and all three of my sisters came to school including my mom worried about me and got the guidance involved which I personally didn't like because at the time, I was very timid. I wasn't the person who would like to talk to anybody about my

problems. I didn't do it though; I wanted to see what life had in store for me in the future and I kept questioning myself I was going to meet "the one" and have a life.

Second semester came around and it was time for new classes except one; it was kind of a relief. Our class did get closer at the time and we were all friends so we considered it our "home." At the moment school life was okay even if last semester wasn't so great but I was ready for the school year to be over with. I did have motivation in being close to a sophomore; maybe that was the only reason why I wanted to go to school. I didn't have anyone special in my life except my friends that I currently made with at the time. My general life was alright, friends and somewhat family time. I just knew I was ready to be fifteen at the moment and leave to California for my birthday.

School was out and I only had two of my senior friends I met that year leave which wasn't that tragic until later on in the school year. Now my summer was pretty boring and the only thing I looked forward to was in August which came to my birthday and the plane ride to Anaheim, California. People were asking me why I didn't get one of those big parties like other girls had for their fifteenth birthday. Well at the time, I wanted to explore different places and I really wasn't into that dancing or big dresses but that changes on later on in my life. California was an amazing place although it was extremely hot and I sort of didn't like it, I was also going through a phase where I wanted to dye my hair different types of colors. I guess you could say I was experimenting at the time because when I was California, I had blue streaks in my hair and it changed every time it would get wet with water so I had purple, and pink and then orange. I kind of loved it; I also loved the day of my birthday. It was the first time I met all my cousins for the longest times and finally saw my aunts and uncles as well as some I've never met.



The day of my birthday we went to the place where everything was “magical!” Disneyland. Hey, I was a happy child at the time but things went downhill because I lost my ring that my uncle had gave me and of course I was in tears. The ring had the day of my birthday when I exactly turned fifteen as well it was a shape of a crown and had the number fifteen. I do remember the day after my birthday we were at my aunt’s apartment; you would imagine she would live in a house but apartments are expensive and she had to share a four room apartment with my uncle, her husband and little son, and two older sons. I remember there was drama going around because of my cousin had gotten his girlfriend pregnant and he hasn’t finished high school. There was tension in the room and my aunt just decided to tell them to stop since it was my special day as well as that I never came often.

My mother was upset with my father that day of my birthday because he didn’t call me to say happy birthday and of course it did hurt me a little because it was supposed to be something big in a girl’s life. Then again, I knew he wouldn’t since my dad and I never became close as I grew up. All I knew at the time is that I had family from a different state that loved me and wanted me to be happy that day. I wouldn’t blame them; I hadn’t seen them in years or never seen them but only in pictures. I just wanted to cherish the moment with them. I just wanted to get close to them before it was too late; we did not know the next time we would see each other. May be years, may be never again since things are expensive with tickets and wanting to tour around as well as shop. I knew I wanted to shop in California. Leaving California was the saddest moment ever, I felt so close to them and I never wanted to leave because I wanted to grow up with my family members but it was time to go back and finish school like I wanted to. After all, only two more years since I was basically a sophomore already.

The only thing that caught my attention at the end of freshman year was that my second mother, Ms. Casto had met the man of her life and got married this year of 2012. She went from Ms. Casto to Mrs. Perkins; I remember because we were so close that year and we actually threw her a bridal shower which was fun and we were all telling her future husband to take good care of her because we would share our lives together. I guess it was a way we had gotten closer together by showing our own personal experiences. We felt so lucky having her as a teacher again for another year in a row. For me, I had her for Advanced Composition as well mixed with AVID.

I got my quincenera dress a summer too late but I did not care; that was beautiful to me and I had my best friends involved with it to dance as well as other people's sons. That day, I still didn't get a father-daughter dance because at first my father didn't want to be part of it because we weren't as close like I said before. I did have a moment where I cried to my mom because she did make that day possible as well as my sisters and other people along with that. There would be days where she would be in both positions as a father and mother and I am thankful for her. That was the highlight of my summer and probably the only memory I'll never forget since I had the most important people in my lives there as well as people I've never met until that summer. The summer was finally over.

School was back in session which meant Junior year and the year my friends graduate. The ones that have been there with me through my first three years of high school including junior year of course. Junior year was sort of insane, people coming back in my life and as well having my nephew becoming a freshman this year. I do remember junior year so clearly because a bunch of things had happened in this period of time, things that I wouldn't expect to happen in my life. This guy I met in 2011 was a freshman that year and we connected again. My second

mother, Mrs. Perkins had a baby our junior year. I was happy for her and the baby was the most precious baby I've ever seen. Ironically, I also got pregnant last year and had a miscarriage while Mrs. Perkins was on maternity leave. I know I made a mistake but that's how you learn from life; how else would learn from your mistakes without making a mistake? That day, I was crying and scared because I didn't know how to handle it. I called the guy crying explaining him the situation and he did support me through that, when the clinic called me the other day and told me that I had a miscarriage because of my blood; I was relieved and kind of sad. My mom, I felt like she was relieved from the situation, because she didn't know how to tell my dad at the moment and I knew deep in my heart he would probably hurt me from that. We were still together but we became distant after him being such a jerk and cheating on me, so I knew he was also a mistake in my life.

Second semester came around which meant the time was closer for my dearest friends to graduate. Class wise, the only two things I did enjoy was probably having Mrs. Perkins again for AVID and her honors class for English three, year round like always since I always want her class for my second home. I was told you can have a "home away from home" and believe it or not, her class was my home away from home because like I said probably millions of times that she was like my mom. The AVID family is so wonderful. Even if we don't specifically talk about things, there is a shared understanding of hardship and acceptance you feel every day. Everyone needs that, especially in high school.

My other class I enjoyed was in first semester with music. I decided to join orchestra and I did because I was so inspired by a YouTuber who plays the violin. She is an amazing violinist with her music and covers from different games so I did it but I didn't end up playing the violin.

I ended up playing the viola; most of people don't even know what that is. If you don't, you can always search it up on Google and on YouTube.

The end of school year came to the end and my friends finally graduated which meant I was a senior and my very last summer was finally here. At the very end of June, I met another guy and he meant so much to me. Summer was a great one, even though I didn't do much but I did get into another music program. I joined marching band, which meant band camp over the summer and it was blazing hot but I learned another instrument, it was the vibraphone and I was pretty excited for the season, especially our show which was mysterious and creepy. What I loved about it the most was probably that my music teacher composed it himself, which was great because most of the people did covers or did not compose it themselves.

On my birthday, I had band camp of course but my sister came to give me lunch with balloons. Turning seventeen, made me feel a bit old but I was happy. My mom made my day while my boyfriend kept saying happy birthday and how much he cherished me throughout the day to keep me happy. I was thankful for that day, even if it was just spent with my mother and me.

Summer was almost over, which meant my senior year was about to begin. I knew I was alone at first because most of my friends had already graduated. The only thing I enjoyed at the time was probably marching band with music family as well as my AVID family. I would be having Mrs. Perkins for English IV Honors and it was for fourth block just like freshman year; I started off in English I for fourth block and would be ending my high school year with an honors class combined with AVID for fourth block as well. It seemed relieving. The thing that got me excited the most was probably my senior events; it made it seem so surreal. Cap and gown pictures, being called a senior as well with all the senior benefits such as going to lunch five

minutes before the lower classmen was kind of cool because most of my friends really loved that and now I see why.

The day for filling out college applications made me wonder if I was really smart enough to go to the school. It's like you never know what you're capable of and what you really wanted to do in life. I had my perspective change so many times but that's because I kept my options open; I knew what I wanted and that it would make me happy for the rest of my life was to either become an astronomer, graphic designer or become a professional pastry chef. There was this thing I didn't mention with my family that runs and still does, it's this thing were we all have gift in a certain type of food for cooking. I know, this seems off topic. Everyone has a gift but my mother has it all and she passed it on to us and I loved to bake pastry. I was always in charge of making desserts when it came to family events to get-togethers as well as birthday parties. Extra desserts, I mean who doesn't love that?!

Now, back to the topic of college application, I filled out at least five applications and even to community colleges because you always have to have a backup plan with things. I got accepted into a college and a university. I am telling you now, if you are a senior you need to fill it out super early I mean SUPER EARLY. My colonel in ROTC always told me, the early bird gets the worm and he isn't lying! I filled mine out so early like in September or October. Spots get filled out so fast because you're competing not with only in your town but in the whole state including outside of the United States. I also got accepted in Johnson and Wales University and at that school, I was awarded a twelve thousand dollar scholarship for four years so basically I was covered with that amount and all I had to do was pay the rest.

I was excited and I felt so proud of myself that the entire four years I had worked my butt off because I knew ever since my freshman year that I wanted to be one of those that gets recognized for all their hard work.

I wanted to make my family proud because they never got to do these types of things after events came or they just didn't have the money for it. I was the last one and they had very high expectations. I did want to be a successful person in life because around this time my mom would always come home and tell me how her friends' daughters were going to college in Greensboro or how much they were earning in their job. I wanted my mom to show me off to her friends, I wanted her to speak about me because in the past she never got to do that with my other siblings.

I made so many mistakes in life in the past but I still wanted to pursue what I dreamed of since freshman year, and that was to make it this far, to graduate and go to college. I know if I didn't make any mistakes or had any fun in life and shut myself off from the world, I wouldn't be able to type this chapter right now. I'm not saying go out in the world and party for your life. No, things come and go as well as people. Those are lessons from life, those are your mistakes. The bad influences with bad relationships, the people who screwed you over are the ones that are your lessons as well as making you a stronger and better person. If you're going through depression, don't end your life. You don't know what life has in store for you; always look for the positivity in life, even if you think you can't find one. Look around; look in a different perspective!

Going back to when I got accepted into these colleges, my parents would not co-sign loans for me to go to either one of them; my mother said it was too far because they were in Charlotte and she wanted to me stay in my hometown and go to the community college. I was

devastated, working my butt off for four years just for nothing? I wanted to make my future happen. I wanted to go to a college and sleep there like a freshman because my whole life I dreamed of that: meeting new people, living on my own and just living campus life. It broke my heart in two. I still wanted to finish high school and walk out with a diploma because I would be the first girl to actually get their diploma on time and the first to get a college degree.

My family always expected the best out of me, and I thought to myself how was that even possible if I didn't get to live the dream I wanted to in the first place. Many things happened throughout senior year; marching band was still going on and I loved it so much. I've been to other schools that had such passion in music as I did with it. We won trophies, not to mention we got to dress up and wear makeup on our faces which was cool, but it wasn't when it was extremely hot in the beginning of the season. At the end of the season, we won a first place trophy overall our class and we were a small band. We also went to Florida; our marching band went to Florida!

Florida was an amazing experience and that was the best thing about marching band. We were bonded with other schools around the United States. There was such passion and well we got along together and we all played together in a football game. Coming on television for the halftime show being in it with other schools was an experience you could never forget. We also got to be in the Macy's parade in Universal Studios. We got a two day pass of being in Universal Studios and getting to ride all the rides; it was more magical than Disneyland! I guess I liked it because I was away from the family but my mom was also in Florida with my two sisters attending a wedding. At least we both got to enjoy the weather but I got to be on rides and on television.

Second semester started, and the days were going by quicker than I could ever imagine in my life. This was the period in my life where things were developing fast and quick; studies were coming for final exams, more events for being a senior were coming quicker. It's kind of an emotional topic, knowing we went through so much in just two classrooms and just one teacher with almost everyone we had in the beginning. Through AVID, we shared our lives. Mrs. Perkins got married, was pregnant, and now she has her own son. Now as we're in our senior year we get to watch him grow up like she's watched us grow. We knew from the end of the first semester in our freshman year, we were going to be family until the very end.

I knew from the very beginning, I wasn't going to let anything get in my way of pursuing my dreams, that I was to finish at the mark of graduation and closing one chapter in my life that I will forever cherish throughout the years as I get older in life. I want to thank Mrs. Perkins for keeping in me in AVID and in her class for the past four years we've been together. It's been an amazing experience in my life as well as a life changing event. I want to thank every person who always doubted me throughout the years because now I am a stronger person than I was my freshman year. I want to thank all the lessons in my life because now, I learned from my mistakes. I want to thank my mom for being like both parents throughout my life. Some good times we had and some bad times we had together but I knew deep in my heart she was going to be my mom no matter what.

I want to thank the people who made it possible to get this book published even if it's not something big. I also want to thank the people who have been with me throughout my four years in high school of the same class as we grew up together and watched each other grow because now, we're all going our separate ways but we will always be family in heart after sharing so many personal things in those two classes at Southern. Lastly, I really dedicate my entire chapter



to Mrs. Perkins because without her in my life, who knows where my life would be right now. So, thank you Mrs. Perkins for everything.

To everyone who reads this book; life has so many things that is either a blessing or a lesson, perhaps maybe even both. Although it may not come out the way you want it to in the end, don't ever let anyone tell you that just because you made one mistake or several doesn't mean your future isn't bright. As Mario Andretti said, "Desire is the key to motivation, but it's determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal - a commitment to excellence - that will enable you to attain the success you seek." Don't ever give up because I certainly haven't. Thank you for the wild and crazy experience in high school. I am pregnant again, so I will be going to Central Carolina Community College with my soon to be husband. Then we plan to move to Charlotte so I can use my scholarship to Johnson and Wales. I am here to tell you, if you are determined, nothing--I mean nothing--can stop you.

### **23. I'm redefining expectations and social standards.**

I was born in Missouri. Up to this point in my life, I have lived an easy life. I had parents that cared about me, kind of. Basically the generic, my dad left when I was a baby and my step-dad only likes me some of the times. I have always felt bad for my mom because she is the one that actually has to stick up for me. None of that has really affected me though, because of who I am.

My entire life I have known my expectations and for the most part I have followed them. I was expected to go to college, although I am breaking that and joining the military. I will eventually get there. Even more so, I was expected to be a decent human being. That one about being a decent human being feels half-accomplished. I feel like I act as though I am supposed to around everyone else, but really I have no idea what I am. I do not act like normal people my age and I have no idea why. Yeah, we could go back and I could tell you my whole life story as a kid and someone out there somewhere could read this and try to figure it all out, but I do not think that is the case. I spend hours of each day around people my age and I see how easily they are influenced by the things around them, their interests, their lives, their emotions, but I see it all coming from myself. I do not feel I am influenced by many things. All my influences are internal, my drive, my career choice, everything. People who are negative or positive do not influence me either; when someone is negative towards me I brush it off, my feelings do not get hurt. That's another strange thing about me; I do not feel that I actually have feelings like normal human beings. When tragedies happen I do not see it as a tragedy, I just carry on with life. I have a hard time with sympathy.

People joke all the time that they do not have friends. I legitimately only talk to two people because I cannot make a connection with anyone else.

I will be joining the military within the next couple months and I think it is so weird, because they are heroes but every trait surrounding me seems villainous. I feel as though I have a hero complex but villain traits. It confuses me and makes me wonder where I actually belong. I belong with America's most elite psychopaths. Just joking. What I am referring to is in Special Forces; these units are composed by the "rough men who stand prepared to do violence on your behalf." I feel like being around a bunch of sociopaths all working toward a positive goal would be great for me.

Life is about making yourself better, every minute of every day. I currently am not at my best; honestly I am nowhere near it. The only thing here that I think actually makes me better back here is my girlfriend. She accepts me as I am, no matter how intolerant I am towards everything. She helps me hate everyone less, and when it just is not possible she hates them with me. We have similar mannerisms and that helps me wake up every morning and push forward. She motivates me; she reminds me life begins after High School.

We are both in AVID. I guess we are good examples of how AVID is for anyone, even if you seem completely odd.

## **24. So, I could have been famous.**

I was born in Pinehurst on Thanksgiving Day, which is pretty cool. My mom told me they wanted a picture of me after I was born for the newspaper, but my parents said no. So I could have been famous from the day I was born. I am the oldest of four kids. I have two sisters and one brother. After my brother was born, we moved to Mexico. We lived in Veracruz, Mexico, where my dad's family lived, for about four years. Then we moved to Michoacan, Mexico, where my mom's family lived, and lived there for about a year.

When we lived in Veracruz, I had to walk to go to school. It was only half a mile away though, so it wasn't bad. I only went there for kindergarten and some of first grade. I remember my little brother would follow me around, so when I started school he wanted to come. Since the kindergarten class was like a log cabin, my parents asked the teacher if my brother could come to class with me and just sit and listen. The teacher said yes, so my brother and I would walk everyday to school. It's probably the reason why he's so smart! But on our way to school we would pass a huge soccer field. It was one of those Kendale-type of fields though, but bigger. My mom told me that I would spend countless hours on the field running around with a soccer ball. She said she remembers it so well because usually I'd be the only one out there when no one else was. My dad played for some teams there, and he loved soccer. So it was all I really knew growing up. Some days after work he would practice with me.

When we lived in Michoacan, Mexico, my parents left to the U.S. to find a place for us to live. So we lived with my grandma for a year. It was really fun because my grandpa had a ranch. So he would always let me ride this white horse. The best part was that this horse could "dance." It's probably one of the coolest things to see. I still played a lot of soccer except it was more by myself since my dad wasn't around and none of my cousins lived nearby. So I was always

excited when we'd have family parties because everyone played soccer. My grandma was really nice to us and would always give my brother and me money to go downtown and buy things. It was pretty cool because we'd have to stand at the end of the road and wait for the red cab. This was back when kidnapping wasn't common or anything bad like that. We would always go to my aunt's store because she would always let us have a bag of chips for free. We would spend some nights at her house. She was so sweet and nice to us.

When we finally moved back to the U.S. we arrived a week after Christmas, so we had a lot of presents waiting for us when we got there. We lived in Rockingham for about a year. We had to wear uniforms to school which was actually pretty cool. After that, we moved to Montgomery County and lived there for about a year and a half. I made a lot of friends when I was there because my English had gotten better. I also started playing organized soccer that year. I remember it because I went to tryouts and impressed everyone. That same year one of my sisters was born. After that we moved to Robbins in Moore County. I still played with the same team and we won two championships and had three second place trophies. During the time we lived in Robbins a lot of my cousins started moving to Florida or other places. It wasn't until after 5th grade that my parents decide to move one last time.

When we moved to Sanford, I liked it the minute we got here, mostly because I had grown up living in really small towns. I never really had trouble in school. Everywhere I went everyone was nice and friendly. I was really good at math. I loved when we would get multiplication problems and would get timed to see who could do the most in a certain amount of time. I won a lot of those times.

After a couple of months in Sanford, my mom had my other sister. After she was born a couple months later my family noticed that she seemed to have problems breathing. So my mom

would take her to my sister's doctor but she would say that it was normal and that soon she would breathe easily. My sister would get sick easily so my mom decided to take her to the hospital. That is when we found out she had a hole in her heart and a vein that went to the heart that was too small. It was very tough on us. My little sister was sent to Chapel Hill where she stayed there for about four months, I think.

During that time we received another horrible news from Mexico: my mom's mom had passed away. It was the hardest thing on my mom. The only reason why I know my mom did not go to Mexico and just be completely destroyed was because of my little sister. She had to be strong for my sister. I remember not crying and just being there and hugging my mom but not crying. I held everything inside me. It wasn't until I would lie in bed and just let it out. It was really tough for us. But after my sister's surgery things got better. We supported her strongly through it all. After a year after the surgery she had a therapist come every other week to help her walk and see how she is doing. She recovered quickly and is so energetic. It's crazy to even think she ever had any problems. She loves being outside. So things took a right turn for us after those terrible months.

We never really struggled economically. I mean we didn't have the newest toys or the newest things but my parents always made sure we had everything we needed. For that I will forever be thankful. I am also thankful for joining the AVID family my junior year. I know it will help me finish strong with playing soccer and all of the difficult classes I have.

## **25. We cannot live in the past.**

When I was born the umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck and the doctors had to cut it quickly because it was pinching my neck. Due to that, on my neck there is this spot that I call my birthmark because, I mean, it was there when I was born, right?

I was a good baby. I had no problems growing older compared to my sister. My nanny baby-sat me while my mother and father were at work. I was potty-trained and walking before I was a year old. I had a good childhood up until I was five years old. I started kindergarten and the very last day of school I broke my ankle. My brother was outside with me when I got hurt on the trampoline and he carried me into the house while I was screaming and crying.

A few months after this accident, my brother was at the house by himself because he did not want to go to YMCA. A guy broke into my house with one of his friends. My brother was sleeping on the couch when the guy broke in. The guy busted our sliding glass window. My brother jumped up and ran to his room to get his baseball bat to protect himself. The guy did not know anyone was home but he ended up murdering my brother. He started by punching him, causing him to pass out. He then threw him over his shoulder. Behind our house was a trailer like ones that transfer trucks drag along. He put him on that and beat him up and killed him. The guy ended up coming back and taking all our jewelry and other items.

My brother was only 11 years old when all this happened. My mother and her sister found him behind our house on that trailer and were devastated. My dad blames himself for this because he said he could have stayed home, but we all know it was not his fault. I do miss my brother dearly every day. He was my best friend. We played ball in the yard and did things little kids did together. I will never forget all the memories we had together and the love we shared

while he was still here. I know he is in a good place now having a blast, watching over me every day, seeing me living life and accomplishing things I know he would want me to do.

Growing up, my parents put me into tee-ball, and I have grown to love the game and I have been playing softball to this day. I went from tee-ball to baseball, the only girl to play with boys, to now playing softball. I have played since I ever learned how to walk. Both my parents played ball so they wanted to continue it. I remember the days playing almost every night or having practice becoming better every time I stepped on the field. I was the child with a lot of energy and wanted to do everything but was clumsy and accident-prone. I did tee-ball/baseball, gymnastics, and cheerleading. I loved life and doing everything I could possibly do.

I have broken a bone every year since that day I broke my ankle on the trampoline. I have a total of 20 broken bones. Fourteen of them are my ankles/foot/leg, everything you could think of in that area. I broke my nose once, and the last was when I got my hand broken in five places while playing softball my sophomore year. One of the times I broke my foot I had to have surgery. I had broken my fifth metatarsal bone in my right foot in half and they had to go in and put a screw in to put it back together. This surgery was horrible. I will never forget the day going into surgery and the nurse not being able to get the IV to go through. My mom at one point said, "Let me just do it," because she is a nurse and does that kind of stuff at her office for her doctor. They eventually got the IV through and gave me the medicine to put me asleep for the surgery. I am not sure how long the surgery went but I woke up in a recovery room with a cast on and my parents, papa and granny beside me. The doctors gave me some saltines and a Sprite to sip on to see if I could keep it down. I could not keep it down at all. I was in recovery for 10 hours (more like years) straight. My mother was so tired of me throwing up that she told the doctor to give me some medicine, and, what do you know, it worked. One of the times I threw up, it got in my cast



and they had to give me another one. It was pretty gross. I hated being in recovery for so long but afterwards my papa took me to go get something to eat because I couldn't eat all day long. I remember going to Subway, getting a foot long, finishing it and wanting another because I was hungry. I was the happiest girl that day.

Throughout life, I've always been a busy person. I enjoyed playing sports one after another. I kept up with my grades while playing sports. Sometimes it is not easy becoming a student-athlete. You have to do double what a normal person does, but that is OK with me because I like the challenge. Being a student-athlete in AVID has taught me to be more organized and to manage my time better.

Life teaches you a lot of stuff. Everyone learns from mistakes and we know that it makes us stronger from overcoming those mistakes. We cannot live in the past. We need to live for each day, make the best of it as if it was your last. Nothing is guaranteed. I know I am blessed to have the life I am living, having parents who love me, take care of me, feed me and buy me things. Not everyone is fortunate enough to have the things some do. We need to be thankful for what we have and go on, and I know I am thankful for the life God has given me. I am also thankful for this AVID family I can share my story with and know they understand me.

## **26. The light's waiting at the end.**

Throughout my life, I have had people doubt me and have faced challenges that would pause my plans for the future or would usually end them. But even with all these challenges, I've found some ways to maneuver over them. These are the ways that I was able to overcome.

I was born in California. Once we moved to North Carolina, I was diagnosed with rotavirus. I was frequently dehydrated and I had to be quarantined from my parents and family for weeks. Doctors tried their best to feed me, but I kept getting skinnier and skinnier, to the point where you could see my bones. By the time I was two, the rotavirus had left my system and my parents thought the worst was over. But little did they know that the next five years were going to be worst five years of our lives.

When I turned three, my parents had to hire a babysitter for me because they were working the same shifts and really couldn't get another shift. While I was with my babysitter, she would physically abuse me every time. She would rarely feed me or give me anything to drink and there was one time she tried to drown me in a bathtub. It took about five months before my parents figured out that I was being abused by my babysitter. So they took me out immediately and my mother decided to enroll me into preschool that following year. Because I had rotavirus and the doctors took months trying to diagnose me, it caused it to mess up my development stage, so I had the brain of a 17-month old at the age of three. When doctors diagnosed me, they told my parents that I was never going to be able to learn at the capacity of my classmates without disabilities, forever.

Because of that, I was placed in the Floyd L. Knight Children's Center for two years. If you don't know what Floyd Knight is, it's like a school for mentally disabled kids who aren't

ready to enroll in kindergarten yet. When I first got to Floyd Knight, I had to go through a lot of speech therapy and mental rehabilitation. While I was going through this, my parents had decided to split and it was very difficult for both of them to support me. I didn't understand what was going on; all I remember was seeing my mother upset from time to time and how I had to see my dad in another apartment with his friends. Even though my parents were struggling in their marriage and I was struggling with disability, I always had this one teacher, who I will never forget, who didn't give up on me and continued to push me out of Floyd Knight. By the time it was to sign up for kindergarten, Floyd Knight had dismissed me from their school, saying that I was somewhat ready for kindergarten. Once I was enrolled into kindergarten, I still had to keep up with my speech teacher because I had trouble speaking, but I was improving. By the time I was in third grade, I was reevaluated to see if I was still slowly developing. I had extremely improved to the point where I didn't need a speech teacher anymore and I had better grades than more than half of my classmates that had regular development. From then on out, I was smooth sailing in my classes and excelling.

When I got to middle school, I tried to fit in with other group of kids. I was that type of kid that hung out with one group of kids one day and another group the next day. I wouldn't say I was a popular kid, because I wasn't at all. I was more of the kid that everybody knew if I had them in a class before. I was like that for pretty much my whole sixth grade year. When I got to my seventh grade year, I wanted to do something more with my life, so I decided to join AVID, thinking that would help me with my grades and organization. I cared a lot about school and my grades up until Labor Day of 2010. After that my life just went downhill from then.

On that day, one of my friends that I looked up to and brought me up into our church's youth group drowned in a lake. I really wasn't the same after that. This was a person I looked up

to in the youth group and showed the ropes of middle school and hoping to the same with high school. I slid away from our church's youth group and just didn't give a crap about anything anymore, so I thought the best option was drugs. I sold drugs to a group of people and I made money out of it, and at one point I started to smoke. I continued on with this until the midpoint of my eighth grade year. I was asked to go on a mission trip to Nicaragua with my youth group in March 2012, and I was very hesitant to go, but I went anyways. After living through what those people go through, I really took a step back and realized that I didn't need drugs or money to make me happy. So when I came back to the States, I quit selling drugs and just lived.

Now I'm in high school where everything shifts gear. Everything from here on out I knew it was going to be difficult, drama-filled, and stressful, but with AVID, all of that was cut to a minimum. Freshman year was hard to swallow because I had never been given that much work before, but it was a challenge. That year taught me a lot and I was able to grow from that and mature. Sophomore year was a little easier than freshman year. I continued to stay in AVID because it helped me grow academically and put me into place. Now I'm in my junior year, taking on more challenging classes than ever, and it feels great. My determination to get into college is greater than it has ever been before. And with the help of my AVID class and AVID peer tutoring class, now I want to go on and get a career in business education and go to a big name school after high school. I'm going to be the first person in my family to graduate from college and I can't wait to see what opportunities that will bring me.

So are obstacles hard to get over? Yes. Is it tiring? Yes. But everything is worth it at the end. Determination is the only way to get through it and to go after what you want. There's always a light at the end of the tunnel, but it's up to you whether you're going to reach that light or not.

## 27. Success does not have one definition.

My story probably needs to start out from a negative point of view and end with a positive resolution. Sorry, this is not the case. Everybody is asking me to figure out my life because it is my senior year, but at the same time, how can I whenever *they* are not letting me make decisions on my own? Life is tough but sometimes you have to be tough in life. Don't get me wrong, I'm truly happy with my life but it is stressful to figure out your life on your own. So this is my story.

I was born in Veracruz, Mexico, in 1997. As you can see, my story will be about the struggles as an immigrant and the language barrier. However, that is part of my story but not what defines it as a whole. A couple weeks ago my dad said, "Life is not hard on teenagers, teenagers just make it seem as 'if' they have so many important things going on." Well, I have news, teenagers are still trying to find themselves. I myself am still trying to find my voice.

I have attended nine different schools and have lived in 16 different cities in 20 different houses. I am only 18 years old. By the age of 18, normal people should be anxious to move out from their first house, but me, I am already independent. I have been for a long time.

Moving to the United States was the hardest decision my parents had ever taken. I was almost three years old and I would still remember everything I had lived. From that point on I would always remember the authenticity of *El Elotero* and the smell of my grandmother's *mole*. I would miss the Catholic church's *Posadas* and *El Dia de los Muertos*. Unlike Mexico, the United States seems to have traditions without the spice of their originality. And that spice would soon leave me as I set foot in the new country. However, the first true memory of my childhood was in kindergarten, when my grandmother died. At that time, I did not understand what death

was or why God took good people. Neither did I know that I was going to become immune to death from that point on.

I remember the day I found out what ESL really was. It was for individuals who did not know how to speak English or just did not fit in with the “white” people. At that point I realized everything I knew about my identity was worthless. I started to hate being Hispanic. I started practicing more English. I started making white friends. I stopped watching Spanish shows. I stopped liking Mexican food. I stopped loving myself.

At the end of elementary school, I had already accomplished being taken out of ESL and being accepted to the AIG program. I was the only Hispanic in my class; however, I knew I was meant to be white. In consequence, I envied everything white people had. They had nice cars, potential to go to college, big houses, white boyfriends, monogrammed clothes, and country club memberships. I wish I had white parents, but mostly I wished that I was born in the United States in order to attend college and earn the benefits of being white. Unlike white people, my parents never had the money to buy me more than seven outfits. They never had the money to buy more than one car. They never had the money to buy a house. All throughout my life, we would always live with other people or in warehouses. This had to stop. I knew I had to marry a white boy.

At the end of middle school, I had finally achieved having all white friends. They were all smart and had successful parents. At the time, I did not know what my parents had actually gone through in order to give me an almost decent life, and at the time I did not care because I was not happy with what I had. I wanted more, and yes, I did try to achieve my goals, but because of my age and immigration status I could not meet them.

Change. That is what happened during high school. I joined a program of change, of determination. The best thing was that not everybody was white. Not everybody was the same. Everybody came from different backgrounds and life stories but they all had the same purpose: to succeed. And success did not have a specific definition. It could mean falling in love, a four-year college, a community college, or even just a decent job after high school. That changed my whole perspective of life, but unfortunately not for too long.

During my high school years, I was doing everything that made me happy. I was reading the scriptures, attending church and seminary and preparing for my brother to go out on his church mission. We had just been sealed in the temple of God as a family. It was one of the happiest stages of my life because I was doing everything the Lord asks us to do. My brother went off on his mission and we kept in touch and read his many testimonies through email and listened to his experiences on his mission. He was such a strong person, an anchor to our family.

Months passed and I stopped reading my scriptures, my dad had to work on Sundays, and I stopped saying my daily prayers. I still attended seminary and church but did not take it seriously. I was not doing the right things and before it got worse I should have asked help to our Savior and gotten back in the straight and narrow path but sadly, I did NOT. In December of 2013 I fell into depression and at the time I did not know why. I thought I was doing everything that made me happy, everything that made everybody else happy; going out with my friends, having a great boyfriend, getting straight A's, playing sports, and many other things. I was so depressed. I did not know what I was doing wrong. At the time, I made a list of things which made me happy because I have heard that thinking about the positive things make people happy. Now that I look back at that long list, they were all worldly things I wrote down, all temporal happiness. I didn't write anything about going to church, going to church dances, attending

seminary, reading my scriptures, going to the temple, or hearing from my brother's experiences on his mission.

I wanted to be happy but I did nothing to get out of depression, in fact, I did the opposite. I sunk deeper into it and on March 4, 2014, I went as far as to trying to commit suicide. I overdosed on pills, exactly 25 pills in one dose. That day I slept for many, many hours but thankfully the Lord had other plans for me and my attempt failed. Yes I was sick for many weeks and it hurt my body tremendously, but at the time, I only wondered why I was still alive and why I was given another opportunity when I had done nothing for him. I hadn't read my scriptures in 5 months, had gone as far as making excuses to not attend the temple or avoiding conversations with others in embarrassment of people judging me. So why, I asked myself, would our Savior have a plan for me to help him in his work when I did not have the willingness to do it? I had never had the willingness.

After my attempt, I finally tried to get help. Surprisingly my prayer was answered so fast, that same day. I went to youth night and one of the leaders had the prompting to speak to me. It was hard to get back into the daily routine of reading my scriptures and praying before I went to bed and when I woke. Furthermore, I stopped envying others and focused on what I had. School ended and we attended Young Woman's Church Camp. Every year I looked forward to Camp because it was a stress reliever and such a great spiritual event; however, this year was different and I had decided I would not be able to go to Camp but at the last minute I attended. That camp along with AVID set me on the right path toward my future. Even though I still do not know my purpose as a whole, I know I will succeed, whether success comes through going to a four-year college and having a wonderful family of six children and an amazing husband or something completely different. Whatever happens, I know I am prepared.



## **28. We became a kind of family.**

Life hasn't always been a walk in the park for me; I dealt with a self-esteem problem and an anger problem. I was born with both my parents but it seemed like I lived the single parent life. My dad was in the military for most of my life. He was always gone. Birthdays, holidays, and special occasions, my dad wasn't there for many of them. So my mom had to take care of us. My mom has four kids and since I'm the oldest I had to grow up and take on responsibilities to help out my mom, be the "man" in the house. As a kid I believe I had a great life, no worries. I just loved to have fun and enjoy being a kid. I had great grades and didn't get in too much trouble.

During the summer before my third grade year my mom got us workbooks. It helped us to not get behind in school over the summer. One day my teacher did a multiplication challenge. You went to the board, she gives a problem and you solve it against another student. The winner stays. I beat everyone and never had to get off the board. I started having a love for math! Then kids started picking on me. I was a little kid with a big head and I wore glasses. It wasn't very hard for them to pick on me. They called me "peanut head." I remember one day I cried so hard under my desk because the kids were picking on me that I passed out. I believe that's when I developed low self-esteem. I started doing things that made the kids pick on me, so they stopped picking on me and laughing. Basically, I became a class clown.

In fourth grade it got better. I met a friend who was my partner in crime. We did everything together. We stayed in trouble. But I had a friend, so I didn't care about it. We could never be separated; when you saw me you'd see him right after me and vice versa. My mom thought he was a bad influence or something like that. I thought differently. During this time my dad was deployed to Iraq. I also developed a hate for what my dad does. Every time I went to my

friend's house his dad was there, and he would always ask where my dad was. I'd say I didn't know because, honestly, I really didn't. I just knew that he wasn't here because of his job. I also hated that my dad was never home or even a phone call away. When he did call it was only for a couple minutes or sometimes hours, but he mostly talked to my mom. He would say hey to my siblings and me. We had some conversations but they weren't very long unless we were in trouble, which was a lot for my little brother and me. He was always gone and I hated it so much.

When fifth grade came around, I was still getting in trouble but for different reasons. It was mostly for attention, attention of my mom, my dad, and anyone who I felt like cared. Was it right? No, it wasn't, but with my dad not here and my mom had all four of us to worry about, I didn't feel like I got paid attention to as much as my younger siblings. I still had my best friend. We both got into a fight that year and it was with the same person. The bullying came back too. Yeah, I was still called "peanut head" or "four eyes" but this time I was called gay. My eyelashes were very curly and my teacher noticed them one day and said I was supposed to be a girl. One of the kids heard him say it and called me gay. So after everyone stopped laughing I went to my desk and cut my eyelashes off! Not completely off but cut them enough to try to make them look straight.

The summer before sixth grade was very good. My dad surprised me on my birthday and he was home for a good while. I got comfortable with him being there he hung out with my siblings and me. Then the first day of school came and he saw us off. The first day was cool, seeing all my friends and everything. Since I was the first one home I saw it first. I got home and I was excited to tell my dad how my day was. I call his name "Dad...dad?" So I called my mom on the house phone and I asked, "Where is daddy?" She told me he had to leave again. I was devastated. I hung up the phone, fell to the ground and started crying, saying, "I didn't even get

to say bye, I didn't even get to say bye." Thankfully, in addition to my mom I had an English teacher, Miss Smith, who helped me and always had my back no matter what.

Seventh grade was my worst grade ever. I didn't give care about anybody. I started playing football this year. But my grades started slacking so I couldn't play anymore. That same day, my friend and I sprayed powder all over the football locker room. I got in trouble because "my friend" snitched and said it was just me who did it. I got a lot of referrals. I got so many referrals that I was kicked out of school and sent to alternative school. This is when my anger grew and my heart became hard. I didn't want to listen to anyone. I was always angry. I felt alone. I gave my mom so much pain. My dad was disgusted with me, which I honestly didn't care about because he wasn't even there.

During that time I found out that I was moving because of my dad's job. We moved to Sanford, North Carolina. Moving to Sanford forced me to start over, find a new way to identify myself. I came in wanting to change but it didn't work out that way. It was a process. I dealt with more low self-esteem. Everyone called me ugly. At first I would just laugh it out but sooner or later when someone tells you something you eventually start to believe it. So I started believing I was ugly, an ugly kid, with glasses and a big head. I started liking my best friend in eighth grade. Sad to say she didn't feel the same way. I told her I liked her and she just ignored my comment like I was a pesky mosquito. I was still hanging out with the wrong crowd. The kids I hung around were in gangs and always were fighting. I remember one day the school was searching kids for weed and it just happened to be the kids I hung around. So one of my friends was like, "Aye, hold on to this for me." It was a bag of weed. Being the friend I was, I held on to it. I didn't know what to do, and I could smell it in my pocket. I thought the teachers would smell it

too. I was so paranoid. I couldn't eat or anything. That's when I realized this life, this lie I'm living had to change.

On the path to change there are people who mess up your path. My eighth grade English teacher was getting upset with my class. We were making jokes, playing games, not really caring about what she had to say until one day she told my whole class that we wouldn't graduate high school. That's when I realized that I now have a goal to meet - graduating high school. I didn't care who was in my way, I was going to graduate.

During my ninth grade year, my self-esteem boosted. No more glasses for me. I was excited! My self-esteem boosted even higher when I met this girl. She liked me...like, she liked me. Also she was cute. Basically I was feeling like the man. I had a girlfriend and I liked to dance. The girls liked that I could dance and liked that I had curly eyelashes, which made me wish I never cut the curly ones in fifth grade. No one could tell me anything. But with that, I was more worried about girls instead of my schoolwork. I stayed in ISS. It was my home. I stayed in there and kind of didn't mind it. My freshman year I met this lady Ms. Casto. She was my fourth block English teacher. I felt like she hated me, but that wasn't true. I was always dancing, talking and not paying attention. I had her class all year, so I kind of knew that we were going to clash heads. At first we did, but then one day after a terrible day in JROTC, I was angry and crying, and she came to see what was wrong. I didn't have a teacher care about me how she did since my sixth grade teacher Ms. Smith. That made me try to change the way I approached Ms. Casto.

Eventually she began to like our class and our class began to like her. We became a kind of family. We would come in class and tell stories of our day and we enjoyed it every day. We had some kids who tried to mess up the family, but they didn't last long. Ms. Casto became my mom at school. I could tell her anything and everything and she had my back. She even got

married, so we threw her a party for her engagement. We read a book called “The Freedom Writers” and liked how their teacher got to move on with her students, and my class wanted to do the same with Ms. Casto; she didn’t think it was possible until the end of the year when she was assigned AVID. She tried to get me to join but I was supposed to be moving that summer, which bummed me out, so I didn’t join.

But I didn’t move. My sophomore year, I was still at Southern Lee and I also got my favorite teacher again for English II. I only had her for half the year but I enjoyed that half of the year. Even during the other half, I would always talk to Mrs. Perkins. She got pregnant this year too. I was so excited. Her AVID class threw a baby shower and I was invited. I even got a new teacher who I enjoyed: Mr. Benfield. He was down to earth and very chill. But I also had this teacher who I butted heads with, who didn’t like me and I didn’t like her. She always got on me for everything. When the end of the year came and Mrs. Perkins pursued me to join AVID, I said why not.

Junior year I played football again where I met one of my best friends/brothers to this day. As far as school goes, at first I thought AVID was just a class to study and chill. It wasn’t. AVID was combined with my Honors English III class. But AVID was more than a label; it was saying that, “Through everything I go through, I will still be successful.” AVID gave me a chance to be me. I met my other best friend/ brother through AVID. He was in my freshman class with Mrs. Perkins but we weren’t as tight as we are now. Junior year was a hard year; I dealt with a lot of emotions. I wanted to drop out. My brother just started high school and I didn’t want to leave a bad impression on him. My grades dropped. I became depressed a lot too. My emotions were up and down throughout the day, and throughout the week. It was difficult staying on task. I kept to myself too. I put a fence up because I felt that, if you fake a smile,

people will believe you're happy. But your eyes tell the real truth. Even so, I made it to my senior year, which is the best part.

Senior year I played football with the boys and then became the school mascot. AVID had my back and was my family. Senior year tested me the hardest, socially and mentally. I dated this girl. We talked for a long time. She even thought she was pregnant at a time, which would've changed my life forever. My AVID family helped me out through that situation. They told me to always stay calm and don't let things overwork me.

Soon my classmates and I are going to be deciding our futures. I'm going to the Army, as an Operating Room Specialist. I'm graduating and Momma P is sad. Mrs. Perkins has had my back for four long years and I wouldn't trade her for the world. She believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. She always saw the best of me and she showed that I needed AVID, AVID didn't need me. Without her, I honestly don't think I could say I'm graduating soon. You can't talk about an organization without talking about the leader and she is just the perfect person to run AVID.

My life wasn't perfect. I struggled. I met friends. I made enemies. And I found a home in the AVID, c/o '15. Graduating for me means more than just walking across the stage. It means that I have the determination to never give up. I will always have someone in my corner to back me up. Okay, life: ready or not, here I come!

### **29. In life, endings are new beginnings.**

What can I say about my life? For one it's not perfect, I'm not perfect, no one is. Being perfect is like being fake, I never wanted to be fake, I've always wanted to be my own person, to create my own journey in life. The things I have been through in life have made me grow in so many ways. I'm a better person today and today as I reflect on my entire life, I write this for remembrance because I have a voice and my voice is here to be heard.

To understand my journey for my voice, you must first understand my story. Sanford, North Carolina is a small contemporary town in the middle of North Carolina where I was born in 1997, to an unconditional loving mother whose beauty shows within her daughters and to a devoted loving father. My mom always said I was a quiet child, but I had my dad's extroverted, sarcastic personality and her introverted personality, beauty and heart. My name was given to me by my mother. My name came from her middle name and it's a tradition in my family that won't be broken. I've always wanted a place in this world, to find my purpose in life. To this very day, I still have the biggest imagination, when I was growing up my imagination took over my entire life. I grew up with two older cousins who completely ignored me; I was the only girl, the only one who had the imagination I had. So, I created my own friend and his name was Barney.

Apparently I blamed my little best friend Barney for everything. Of course I don't really remember that, but from what I do remember, Barney and I did everything together. I created this whole entire different life with him. My whole life was with Barney. One day Barney never came back. My best friend had left me, and for some reason it was like my imagination stopped, and so at the age of six my new best friend came into my life. My little sister was born 6 years and 1 day after me. I remember my dad opening the door to my mom's room for the first time and held her to me. This little bundle of joy was my whole world.

My life has felt like it has flown by in the past couple of years. I can still remember being in middle school and meeting my best friend. Middle school was where I met my “walking diary.” My best friend helped me through so much and to this day she has helped me find my journey. In middle school we were nothing but two girls just wanting to have fun. Nothing mattered to us in life but having fun. That’s what all kids think about, having fun and enjoying life. We both joined AVID when we were in the eighth grade. When we first heard of this program AVID, we thought hmm, maybe this is a program for us. I think back then I didn’t really appreciate AVID as much as I do now.

The summer before high school, my best friend moved to Colorado. This was one of the biggest steps I had to take. If high school didn’t already seem so scary, I had to start high school on my own. When I first got into high school I was already nervous and to make it worse, they messed up my schedule. I was supposed to have AVID, so I spoke with the guidance counselors and they helped me fix my schedule, but then they told me I had to take an English 2 Honors course. That day I felt like I was going to cry, I wasn’t good at reading courses and they were going to put me in an even harder one. So, it was already a week into school and they had already started reading this book called Gilgamesh. It was confusing to understand at first, but when Mrs. Harvey (who eventually also became an AVID teacher like Mrs. Perkins) compared it to the story in the bible of Noah, it was a little bit easier to understand.

I was in AVID with Health/PE my freshman year, and then I joined Mrs. Perkins’ AVID/Honors Advanced Composition class my sophomore year. To be honest when I first met Mrs. Perkins, I didn’t really like her. I don’t know why, but it was a feeling I had that made me think badly about her. Never judge a book by its cover, because Mrs. Perkins was nothing like I had ever seen in a teacher. When my mom and I first came for open house, Mrs. Perkins told my



mom and me that I reminded her of who she was when she was in school. At first I was like really, what makes me like you? Who are you to be like me? She told me I was a lot like her because of my determination. Boy was I wrong about her.

Today I am proud to look up to her. She is my inspiration. I was finally starting to like AVID, I understood my goals in life and I understood what it really meant to me. My sophomore year was going great. I was finally finding myself; I was beginning to bring my imagination back to life. That year I created a story called "*The Invisible Girl*;" it expanded my imagination and made me realize that I loved to write. Writing made me happy and people liked my stories.

I did not realize how quickly things could change. People never imagine their life could be altered by a single event. Not many people like to think of change at all. It scares them. I'm one of those people. I didn't think it was possible for my life to be altered by one single life changing event, but my life changed on April 11, 2013. That day changed my life forever. My body began to attack itself. First, it started out as a little rash, and one of my fellow classmates noticed a large welt on my arm. How could a little rash create something so big?

One day I couldn't move my legs. It was like my legs were made of stone and hammers were banging against them. I was in the hospital for several weeks and no one understood what was wrong with me. I was a mystery, and that was what they called me. The doctors did several tests and still they couldn't find what was wrong with me. I never understood why this was happening to me. I remember going on Ibuprofen for awhile and returning back to school, but after Mother's Day, I went back to the hospital. This time they figured it out: I had juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Arthritis? That's for old people; I couldn't believe it. They put me on 1000 units of steroids that day and that wasn't the worst part. Steroids make your face blow up like a balloon; they called me moon faced.

I didn't like steroids; they made me go on a diet so that the steroids wouldn't make me gain so much weight, but how can you go on a diet when the worse side effect is weight gain. One of the ways I got through the fact that I was on steroids and I had arthritis, was that Mrs. Perkins assigned us a summer assignment where we had to pick a book and research it. I chose this book called *Sick Girl*, and in this book, a young woman had to go through a heart replacement surgery. We may not have had the same medical problem, but both of us felt helpless. This was a true story and by reading this, I learned to accept who I am. No matter what disorder I have, it's a part of me.

In August I went to Alaska and I learned that the people there have it way worse than I do. Many teens run away and go to Alaska. I got to meet a lot of new people and help a lot of kids feel like they weren't helpless. By going to Alaska I turned my life around and learned to be closer to God. Each child I met still has a place in my heart. Many of those kids are very talented, but they never get the chance to express who they are because no one believes in them. I thank God for my second chance and for allowing me to experience this memorable trip.

When I started school the next year, it was hard for me to understand some of the classes I had. I felt so behind because I had missed so much the year before. Summer school helped me catch up, but you can't understand knowledge without being taught it. Even in AVID I felt so out of place. Mrs. Perkins had her baby and she was on maternity leave for a while. I was a peer tutor for her sophomore class and it was horrible. I loved being a peer tutor, but I hated being in that class. Everyone in that class had their moments, but being in a class with kids that aren't in my grade was tough. I stuck with it and things eventually improved, as they usually do.

In English 4 I had to write a story for an assignment and I realized I could write a sequel to "*The Invisible Girl*." This sequel was called "*The girl in the shadows*;" writing made me happy and it made me think about how AVID helped me develop my writing skill.

I still have problems with my arthritis and it's always been a challenge for me going to Alaska. I went back to Alaska in the summer of 2014 for another trip. This year was different. I met this family who made me realize life is full of miracles. In Alaska we would always have free time to explore our horizons and there were a couple of places where we had to walk up an incline hill. The year before I was barely able to walk it because I was so weak, and this time I went even farther. I've made a new goal in life; my hopes for this goal is to one day walk to the very top and also one day climb to the top of Hatcher's Pass, so that I can prove to myself that I can make it.

I don't know where I would be without my senior AVID class. Today, as I look around I realize this will be gone soon. We'll all be moving on to do greater things and no matter how annoying they may be, I will miss them. Not just because of who they are, but because of the memories we have shared. Everyone in my senior AVID class has touched my heart in some way. I am their peer tutor and when they need me I'm always there. I have been inspired by those around me and those who have faced challenging things like I have. I have learned a lot through other students' experiences and I have found that in our AVID class we all have a purpose. I honestly believe I have learned more from them because of how creative and inspirational some of them are. Even though they love to joke around a little too much sometimes, I still feel like they learn more from interactions in class and just watching them puts a smile on my face.

Senior year is very stressful. Even thinking about college makes my stomach hurt, but I am ready. I'm not ready to leave everything behind, but it is my turn to take a leap of faith and follow my heart. I'm ready for my next challenge in life. I will be ready, because I have learned from so many people and I have learned that we all have to give up the things we're used to in order to take a step into our future. Lately in class we've been talking about this one quote, "A ship is safe in harbor, but that is not what ships are for." Our assignment was to write what this quote meant to us and I wrote, "I need to abandon my fears and bring all my faith into my future harbor of God's plan for me. I must now let go of the things holding me back, so that I must bring my voice out, for that one day my life will begin a new harbor of my future."

I really took this quote to heart and realized that I must follow by this quote and leave my comfort zone so that I can become who I was meant to be. Graduation scares me because it is even closer and as I realize that life keeps pushing on, I become afraid because I know I won't be able to have my papa there with me. I lost him on March 18, 2015 and even though I know he'll be watching over me, it is still hard. The only comfort I found was when I found a little blue butterfly dead in his truck. I found out that when you find a butterfly after someone has died, it usually means your love one is sending you an angel down from heaven. Some say a butterfly is a symbol of resurrection and for me it was a sign letting me know that he is okay and that I believe he is watching over my sister and me.

When I think of college, I think of all the things I can do. I have made it and I am ready to take on this next adventure at Catawba College. When I stepped foot onto the campus at Catawba, I just had this feeling that my life could actually be here. Everything about Catawba made me want to go there even more. In just a couple of months I will be living in a dorm with a roommate and it scares me to think about it, but my life is ready to take on this challenge.

College is an experience for anyone who is willing to take on the challenge. I am ready to take on my next challenge and expand my knowledge beyond.

I've always wanted to be a veterinarian and now lately, I'm thinking about becoming a veterinarian and a physical therapist for animals. I want to one day specialize in animal arthritis because by me having arthritis can understand the pain they go through. Even though they cannot speak to me, I can still understand why they hurt and try and help their owners understand. When I go to Catawba, I know I will be majoring in Biology, but I also want to double major in physical therapy so that I can understand the basics. Most of the stuff there will be dealing with people, but any experience is better than none. I do not know how my plans for my future are going to play out. In the next four years my dreams may change, I may decide a new path, no one knows where they'll be in the future, but what I do know is, I have to follow my heart to find my way.

Lately I have really been thinking about my future and how stressed all of it makes me feel. I have so much good in my life right now and so much pain as well. How does one person balance all of that at once? I have found someone in my life who takes the pain away. This person is very special to me and has allowed my pain of stress and arthritis to disappear. No one will understand how special this person is to me. Today, I realize that to find my balance I must, "be happy, be myself, if others don't like it, then let them be. Happiness is a choice. Life isn't about pleasing everyone." I can't please anyone but myself and God. The only people who matter are the ones who love me enough to let me be happy in my choices.

Every story has an end, but in life every ending is just a new beginning. Today we look back on the first day of high school and realize we made it to the end. We take this moment to look into our past and see the mistakes we have made, the people who have put us down and the

past that haunted the person who realized that their past is no longer a part of them because today we can say that we did it. We have proved to those who doubted us that we can make a difference.

As graduation becomes true, our hearts begin to sink into our stomachs because we realize that next year we'll be in college, in the military or wherever life takes us, but what really scares us, is the fact that someone won't be there to tell us how to do it and we may never have the kind of support system AVID has given us for the past couple of years. But Thomas Jefferson once said, "When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on." As we move on from high school and even AVID we must realize that we can still hold on to those sweet moments in class with Mrs. Perkins, because even if you don't remember every single concept she taught in class, we will always remember the memories we shared throughout the years. I can tell you one thing: there will never be another AVID senior class like ours. We all need to realize that we have to accept what is, let go of what was, and have faith in what will be so that we can accept the future.

### **30. Ships do not belong in harbors.**

AVID is one of my fondest memories of high school. I have been beyond blessed to spend the past two years in Mrs. Perkins' AVID family. I often set up walls that hold me back from my true potential; however, AVID has enabled me to see endless possibilities when the walls I have created are knocked down. There is a magic built through our time together that has created a safe haven within the walls of our AVID classroom. It is often said that "time is a gift," and it is completely evident when reflecting on my AVID family's growth.

My personal story begins as being born and raised in Sanford, North Carolina. My dad is from Lee County and my mom is from Chatham County. That is where I come from, and I literally mean, both sides of my whole family. Both first generation college students, my dad attended Community College (first generation) and pursued an associate's degree; my mom was a first generation four-year college student, graduating with a degree in education. Staying in Sanford, my dad joined his family's boat business and my mom taught kindergarten until I was born. My parents are my two biggest fans and never fail to show me how much they love me. I have a younger brother who is one of my biggest role models for dedication. His true passion lies in being active in sports. You can find him in a gym, on a field, or with a fishing pole. Even though he is naturally athletic, my brother's work ethic is beyond his years.

My education began in preschool where I mostly remember crying and a few crafty art projects. I did make friends, and will always have fond memories of the "lunch bunch." I attended Tramway Elementary Year-Round School, along with most of my pre-school and Sunday school friends. Since Tramway is a school of choice, the diversity was limited. The people I had always been with were with me. It just so happened that the year I went to middle school was the same year that the brand new middle school opened, San Lee. However, very few of my friends lived in the school district that would attend San Lee. I thought, negatively, that it

was just my luck. However, three years later, I realized, positively, that it was just my luck. Breaking away from my comfort zone of friends was actually a gift. Middle School was my first step to realizing my individuality. I made great new friends, some of which are in my AVID family, and became involved in Cheerleading, Golf, Student Council, Peer Mediating, and BETA Club. Graduation at San Lee was so memorable; it showed that we were truly a bonded and united group. Our hearts were broken that summer with the tragic death of our classmate. As a rising ninth grade class, we knew the value of the Class of 2015.

Entering Southern Lee High School, I was as timid and scared as everyone else. Since I entered high school with three credits, I was placed in classes with mostly sophomores and juniors. Instinctively, I was intimidated and wanted to retreat to my San Lee comfort zone. Soon I realized the beautiful melting pot of Southern Lee High School. The whirlwind of driving, Cheerleading, Track, Ballet, Student Government, DECA, FCA, NHS, NTHS, and not to mention the social explosion of high school, became the fastest four years of my life.

The fall of my sophomore year was definitely the hardest workload of high school for me. The combination of AP US History, Honors Chemistry, AP English 3, and Honors Sports Marketing created an unbelievable amount of work with my already tight schedule. Ironically, this was the semester that I met Mrs. Perkins and had the honor to be one of her AP English students. Being one of the youngest in the class, my wall was pretty high. I rarely vocalized my opinions, however, through my daily journal and essays, Mrs. Perkins saw a Maggie that I didn't realize was there. Mrs. Perkins' introduced many AVID strategies to my AP class that were the key to my success in her class. From the More Love Letters writing campaign to individualized reading assignments, Mrs. Perkins' class was the highlight of my day. Although I wasn't one of her AVID students at the time, Mrs. Perkins' took time out of her planning period and lunch to



help prepare me for the AP exam in the spring. Because of my hectic after school activities, I was not able to attend the regular study sessions, but Mrs. Perkins did not give up on me. Looking back, I realize that Mrs. Perkins was living out the true definition of an AVID teacher: despite my hurdles, she helped me make a way to prepare. It was during one of the study sessions that she asked me to be an AVID Tutor for the upcoming year. Besides my relationship with Mrs. Perkins as teacher, I was drawn to AVID because of the consistent extra study time it would give me.

My first AVID experience was at the end of my sophomore year. We made a cardboard testimony video, which was the first step in bonding with this awesome family. Reading everyone's cardboard confession showed me how we were all so different and yet the same. I still have my piece of cardboard that says "anxious, scared, insecure, overwhelmed" on the front and "independent, fearless, confident, leader" on the back.

Fast-forwarding to my junior year, I was beyond excited for second block because it was AVID. Just as I was thrown into the new middle school, I was thrown into new leadership in AVID. Again, I thought it was "just my luck" that Mrs. Perkins was going on maternity leave in September. But it really was "just my luck" that the leader in me stepped up without having Mrs. Perkins to rely on every day. My job as the tutor was to make sure Mrs. Perkins' lesson plans were carried out, as I knew she would have wanted it. Because she is so much more than just a teacher, it was so much more than just normal lesson plans. We happily welcomed Mrs. Perkins' back to school in November, where I truly engaged in the benefits of AVID.

The first day of AVID senior year will be a forever memory to me. AVID was the last class of the day, which caused a great deal of anticipation to return to our "home." As soon as we entered the classroom and visited with each other, we retreated to the same seats as the previous

year and everything felt so normal. Mrs. Perkins played us the song “Brave” by Sara Bareilles as encouragement on our big idea for the year: “VOICE.” The lyrics that stuck out to me the most were, “Say what you wanna say, and let the words fall out. Because honestly, I wanna see you be brave.” It was a song that we could all take our personal struggles and relate to. As senior year progressed, we became even closer and began finding our “voices.” I was introduced to the movie “Freedom Writers” which was the inspiration for this book. One of my favorite team builders in AVID was our own rendition of the line game that Ms. Gruwell played with her class. The combination of an open yet safe atmosphere created the opportunity to take our relationships to a deeper level. With everyone participating, I was able to see the reality behind everyone’s individual voices. This team builder would not have been the same without the time and trust that has grown through AVID.

AVID encouraged me to think about the reality of college. We created a “College Crate” for our summer project which consisted of SAT and ACT scores, Financial Aid information, potential colleges, scholarships, extracurricular activities, and a resume. This prompted me to do early applications in the fall. Applying to five different colleges was very difficult and time consuming, which made AVID tutorial time crucial for me during the fall of my senior year. Being in such a college-readiness atmosphere urged me to be more of an advocate for myself. After several college tours and much deliberation, I chose the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to be my future school. Not only did I get the most supportive celebration for my acceptance, but I was also able to visit the campus with my AVID family. I know that next year as I walk through campus I will find comfort in the remembrance of that day. Everything from one classmate casually breaking ranks for a moment of sunbathing in the courtyard to taking our picture in front of the Old Well will remind me that my AVID family is with me.

Approaching graduation, I am realizing that I will miss AVID most of all. When Mrs. Perkins asked us to write about ourselves for this book, I began to reflect on the best way to show who I truly am. There is no better way to show my true personality than observing who I am when I am with my AVID family.

To my AVID Family: Words cannot express how thankful I am for each of you and how incredibly proud I am of the mountains we have moved together. These past few years have had their ups and downs but I couldn't imagine being able to go through it without you all.

### **31. Keep going. Keep growing. Keep running.**

*“Oh I’m a mess right now, inside out, searching for a sweet surrender, but this is not the end. I can’t work it out going through the motions...”* - Ed Sheeran, “I’m a Mess”

And now for the AVID tutor’s voice in addition to the student voices. Truth: I deal with depression and anxiety on an almost regular basis. The depression has kind of waned a little bit recently, thanks to some medicine I’m taking. But dealing with the stage of life I’m at right now is a little difficult with all that silent mess going on in my head. Not that it’s ever been easy. Let’s take a look at my life in five phases.

Phase 1: Elementary school. I don’t remember a whole lot from this phase. However, I do. Growing up, I was pretty shy. I’m not the kid who’s going to walk up to you in the park and say hello or tell you that your shoes are awesome. Now I think it’s adorable when kids do that, but I never thought that was a good idea when I was younger. I remember my parents taking me to events and introducing me to people, and I would shake hands as firm as I could, but I would mutter a “hello” or “nice to meet you” under my breath.

I think this is just a part of how I was made, part of my personality I can’t change. I still have moments like that today when I meet new people. Ask any of my friends who have introduced me to their friends; they’ll probably tell you that, except on the rarest of occasions, I don’t warm up to the idea of meeting or hanging out with new people.

Phase 2: Middle school. When I was entering the fifth grade, I moved to a new school, a private school. It’s a fantastic school where I basically prepared for college from the time I got there until the time I graduated. Nothing about college academically threw me off. But socially, my private school was a nightmare, particularly in middle school. My naturally shy personality

led to me trying to do everything I possibly could to get people to think I was cool, girls to have a crush on me and not to get ignored. I got in two fights in fifth grade trying to “defend my honor.” I was really just being shy and insecure, trying to show off and get people thinking I was cool.

Case in point: I remember playing basketball at recess one day that year. A couple sixth graders were standing just off the court and were talking about me. “You see that kid?” one said, pointing at me. “He gets angry and wants to start fighting people.” I heard him say that and started looking for an opportunity to get ticked at somebody. I found it, and shoved someone. Nothing really came of it, but it’s an exemplary story of where I was in fifth grade. I wanted people to know who I was, talk about me, etc.

As I progressed through middle school, my need to fight diminished but my need for attention and affirmation rose. I don’t think I was any different from any other sixth or seventh grader. I wanted girls (particularly the cute ones) to like me, guys to think I was cool and to get good grades. That last one is just one example of where my Christian upbringing had an interesting impact. I wanted to fit in and I wanted to be cool, but I didn’t want to do it at the expense of being a “good guy.” I had to be the “best kid” in the whole school.

When it came to girls, it was especially complicated. I wanted to look at girls the “right way,” not going around comparing which one was the “hottest.” I also didn’t want to scare them away, which happened in the eighth grade. Long story short, I freaked one girl out, in her words. Not exactly my brightest shining moment.

So I left middle school and transitioned to high school trying to get people to like me, all the while not trying to freak out girls and be a “good Christian kid.” As if algebra and chemistry didn’t give me enough to worry about already.

Phase 3: High school. I went to high school and found myself resorting to a lot of the same patterns. I still wanted people to like me, particularly girls, and I wanted to do the right thing. Those things often collided. Let me go ahead and throw something in here: my parents and my home life were great. I have nothing to complain about there. The issues all came at school. The thing about being at school when you're that age is that's where you spend the majority of your time. From 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, you're surrounded by the same people, doing the same thing, in the same building(s), for four years. That's at least 35 hours a week, minus the summers, for four whole years. Add in extra-curricular activities, and it's more. You feel a need to prove yourself.

Things got a little better during my sophomore year. I got into filmmaking and made a short film that won me an award at my school's small film festival. There was some recognition from people and some friendships that were really blossoming. I had my first girlfriend the summer afterwards. Things seemed to be looking up.

Then: depression. For some reason, my junior year was the hardest year of my life up to that point. I had girlfriends during that time, things seemed to be, on the outside, going quite well. People liked me, I was getting along with girls. But something just turned in me. Looking back, I can't seem to explain why. But at school, things were awful. I felt that no one at school liked me or cared about me. I didn't think I had any friends. The people that I loved hanging out with the year before didn't seem to be "caring enough" for me anymore. Again, I can't explain it.

I would spend all my free periods and sometimes lunch periods sitting away from everyone else. When I started driving to school in the November of that year, I would take those periods in my car, watching episodes of "The Office" and just generally trying to stay away from

people. I didn't think people liked me, so I figured it would just be easier for me and them for me to stay away.

Let me remind you: I had no real logical basis for this. I had no empirical evidence that people hated me or didn't want to hang out with me. I'm sure there were people who wouldn't choose to hang out with me, but you get that everywhere. Anyways, I imagined all or most of it. My anxious desire for people to like me led me to take the slightest probability that someone didn't want to talk to me and run with it, believing that that person didn't care if I was alive or not.

During this time, there were occasional moments when I wrestled with thoughts of suicide. I never got serious about it, planned anything. There were just brief moments when I would consider it, consider what it would be like, then shake myself and realize that was not a good idea.

Life continued like that throughout my junior year. As senior year rolled in, things continued. The relationship I was in was not healthy, and that just complicated matters as I spent hours a day trying to figure out what to do. Deciding to go to Elon University didn't take a lot out of me as most students' college decisions do; I applied early decision and found out October 31st I was in.

My depression began to fade as I made new friends, enjoyed life, had some fun. I went into college with a little bit of anticipation, but mainly just looking forward to what was ahead, learning how to be a filmmaker.

Phase 4: College. I haven't really gotten much into the depression part of things, but it was mainly my anxiety that fed my depression. I would get anxious and over-think something, and then I would get sad about it. Depression is awful. I can't exactly put into words exactly

what it is but here's a shot: a condition where you fall very easily into a crippling sadness. The key word there is "crippling." The Mayo Clinic staff define depression as "a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest...it affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. You may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and depression may make you feel as if life isn't worth living."

I'd say that's pretty accurate for me. Sometimes the littlest things could set me off into a stretch of depression. It could be a stray word in conversation or a certain look someone gave me, or a life-altering event that threw my previous plans in a tizzy or a serious losing bout with sin and temptation. And it's not something you can simply "snap out of," or just quit.

It's so easy, when you see someone who is at that very moment depressed, to just say, "try smiling" or "just push forward" or "let go and let God." But it's not that simple. It's not that easy. If it were that easy, almost no one would still be dealing with depression. Most people don't want to feel sad. But for some, it just comes. And it's not something we can control.

For the most part, I held it inside. There were a couple times I did say something about the anxiety and depression, but I felt, for the most part, people didn't know how to handle it. I remember one time being super honest and transparent about all the things I was dealing with, but the person just told me to change myself, do something different. I wanted to yell "It's not that simple!" But I didn't have the guts to.

Phase 5: Now. I've gotten to the point now where I've learned how to control my anxiety and depression for the most part. It's a cycle. I think that cycle will be a recurring guest star in my life as long as I live.



But I've learned this: My first priority should not be to get rid of my problems, but learning how to live through them, especially the problems I can't get rid of. I can diminish and perhaps outgrow my anxiety and depression, but there's no guarantee. So what's most important for me is learning how to live through it, to grow stronger in dealing with the anxieties of life, to find joy in the depressing moments. I can't run away from the problems. I can't quit because of fear. I can't quit because I feel like I don't offer anything.

Keep going. Keep growing. Keep running the race.

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Don't be ashamed of what you've done, 'cause we're not perfect, but we swear we are. So slow down, slow down. Let's run this race together... - Hearts Like Lions, "These Hands"

If I could go back to my senior year of high school, and I was still trying to figure out my college major, I'd consider two things that I didn't consider when I actually went to college: education and sociology. In education, you have a real, tangible impact on people's lives, kid's lives. It's something I've always wanted to have. It's something that brings me joy and satisfaction, to affect people's lives in a positive way. I'd say it has a lot to do with my religious upbringing and my continuing faith, but there's also something so effective and life-fulfilling about reaching kids. In sociology, you get to study people. You see why people are the way they are, you try to understand how their backgrounds influence their decisions. There's a lot of sociology research that can be done in the field of education, so it seems almost natural that these two would fold together well. Add in my actual degree - journalism - and you have what I'm writing for you right now: a reporter's perspective on my time in the AVID classrooms.

Ever since I graduated from high school, I think my heart and my desires are geared towards helping high school kids with whatever is going on in their world. Mostly that falls in the religious category, but as I've spent time working for Lee County Schools, there's a broader motivation and a wider purpose that I've gained.

I first stepped in an AVID classroom when I was tasked with making a series of videos detailing the AVID programs in Lee County. My first interview was with Joanna Perkins, an AVID teacher at Southern Lee and one of AVID district director support people in Lee County. "It's more than just a program or an add-on to good education, it's really the intuitive way that teachers can teach and students can learn and do the best that they can do," she said in our interview. If I must be honest, and I must, I didn't think much about it at the time. It was just another video. As a journalist, you must be careful to not get too attached to your subjects. You're supposed to be objective and almost unemotional about what goes on. If there's something to be sad about, you can be sad, but it can't affect your reporting. So I just made the videos and turned them in, thinking that nothing would come of it. I've found that oftentimes the things you thought you'd care little about actually have the biggest impact.

It's not that I avoided AVID. I just kind of got thrown back into it. I had mentioned to my boss possibly wanting to transition into teaching, so he gave me the opportunity to shadow a teacher at Southern. Surprise, surprise, it was Joanna Perkins. A few months later, I'm still hanging around every now and then. I went from simply observing to participating in class activities and helping students as a tutor with their writing assignments, particularly the ones you're reading in this book.

Working in the school system presented me with a perspective I hadn't had. I went to private schools my entire life, so this is my first in-person interaction with public schools. Mrs.

Perkins has said multiple times that public schools are a microcosm of society and culture, and I've found that to be true. The good of society comes out, but also the negatives.

Education is for the betterment of the whole individual, not just getting them to learn something they spit back out and then forget. I think of the many classes I took in high school and college in which I learned the material, spit it back out on papers and exams, and then forgot everything I learned.

But education is not about submitting to every temptation to take the easy road; it's not about ambivalence (for students or for teachers).

True education opposes willful ambivalence, that "lukewarm acceptance" that looks at things the way they are, sees that there's some kind of peace and just accepts it. A lot of people seem to find an "order" in the way things are, the "negative peace which is the absence of tension," and are committed to keeping things that way. We are, after all, most afraid of what is most unfamiliar to us. Unfortunately, it's that fear of the unknown which holds back not just people, but whole societies.

True education is dedicated to shaking the pot, stirring the conversation. Education should be about much more than academics; it should be about truly reaching the heart of a student and changing them from the inside out. It should be teaching them how to handle conflict in their friendships, not just how to memorize the names of elements. It should be teaching them what to do when their parents divorce, not just how to solve a math equation. It should be teaching them to think for themselves and be original in their ideas, not just write a formulaic five-paragraph essay. True education is teaching the whole student, the whole person.

And that's an awkward thing to do because it's messy. I don't want to sit here and say that it's easy. As someone who's been in the classroom, I admit that it was scary the first few

times. It takes a lot for kids to warm up to someone, to trust someone. We're dealing with kids who are the same age we once were, the same age we got our driver's license, dated our first serious boyfriend/girlfriend, had our first heartbreak, dealt with the death of a loved one for the first time, or even more drastic.

As I've started diving into helping, I've had tremendous opportunities. I've sat in classrooms helping students write their life stories, digging up deep and personal emotions and crucial events. I've helped a student deal with a particularly stressful situation and the medical effects. I've been in a tutorial circle where students wrestled with the influence that evolutionary theory has on religion. These are conversations that have come out of being in AVID classrooms, where the student is more than a student, but a person with thoughts and feelings and questions to answer and answers to question.

We should be the Clooneys and the Pitts, the Jolies and the Swanks, taking a stand and leading the charge in investing. AVID is doing just that. AVID teachers are making a difference, and you can see it in the students you're reading about in this book.

32. Dreaming is a teacher's first language.

Mrs. Heather Harvey is an amazing colleague and has become instrumental in AVID at SLHS. She will be the site coordinator and teach the AVID elective class along with Mrs. Ashley Braxton and Ms. Jordan Carter starting in 2015-16. Another important milestone in any AVID school is the necessity of a strong site team. I (Mrs. Perkins) can only do so much. It takes the support of peers, supervisors, and district level administration to make AVID really succeed. Most of all, the AVID family should connect with students' blood families wherever possible. Teaching is social justice at its finest, and the speech Mrs. Harvey wrote captures how dreaming is a teacher's first language. We dream of everyone coming together for the sake of student success, and we work each day to restore shattered dreams or even mold those dreams that have not yet been formed. I saw the dream gene in her big time, and I am so proud that she has fostered it into a wonderful career in education. Here is her story.

I am a fourth year teacher from Southern Lee High School in Sanford, North Carolina. I have been heavily involved in AVID as both a Site Team member and an elective teacher for two years, and have had the privilege of attending AVID Summer Institute twice. AVID changed my life, and my perspective on teaching. It reminded me of why I became an educator. At each Summer Institute, there are two student speakers and one teacher speaker chosen from hundreds of applicants to speak in front of the thousands of educators in attendance. This year, I have been given the immense honor of being the teacher speaker in Tampa, Florida. I am beyond grateful and excited to share my story with other educators, and use my voice to advocate for a system that I believe works for children from all walks of life.

Dare to Dream - Harvey's Speech for AVID Summer Institute Tampa, FL - June 2015

I have always been a “dreamer.” I was convinced at five years old that I would someday be a famous singing sensation. At twelve, I just knew as an animal lover that one day I would be a veterinarian...even though science was not my strong subject in school. Even now, I have hopes of someday becoming a best-selling author. The day I decided I wanted to pursue a career in education, however, was the day I stopped simply dreaming and decided that I was going to make a difference in the world. My young mind instantly flooded with ideas about what an amazing teacher I would be, and how much I was going to change the lives of the students I taught. I was convinced that I would not only teach my students the content but also life lessons and how to love learning as I always had. Walking across the stage to receive my college diploma was my first step towards making those dreams a reality. Unfortunately, once I actually stepped foot in my very first classroom, reality hit and the daydreams dissipated almost instantaneously.

During my first year of teaching, these ideas and hopes were replaced with nightmares of testing, data, meetings, discipline, lack of work ethic among students, and countless other variables that slowly but effectively drained my passion for my job. The extra obligations outside of my classroom duties continued to pile up, and thus I was unable to focus on bettering my teaching. I felt like a failure, and started believing that the test scores my students received was the sole reflection of whether or not I was an effective educator. I felt beat down, underappreciated, and overworked. I panicked at the thought that maybe I had chosen the wrong profession. It wasn't that I did not love my students; I was just overwhelmed at the reality of public education and the current teaching condition. I was slowly losing the hope that had always

been a part of who I am; it was not until I discovered AVID that my optimism and love for education began reappearing.

Halfway through my second year, I was asked by our site coordinator if I would be interested in being an AVID elective teacher. Although I had never heard of AVID, I was extremely interested and curious about it; I did not realize its power, however, until I attended Summer Institute in 2013. My outlook was forever changed. Summer Institute was an absolutely amazing experience. I was exposed not only to wonderful strategies, concepts, and activities, but also the positive energy, excitement, and ways of thinking that the educators around me radiated. The S.I. experience really influenced me, and the attitude that I'd had when I first became a teacher was restored. I also gained the right tools to make those original dreams a reality. AVID is infectious, and it has changed my perspective completely.

Since I started teaching the AVID elective, my ability to see the bigger picture has reemerged. I dream again, and I have learned that encouraging my students to dream big like I always have is one of the most important parts of my job. AVID allowed me to remember to focus on who I am teaching, not just what. I transferred my energy to building relationships and trust with my students, and everything else fell into place. I still teach my English and AVID elective content, but AVID methods have completely transformed my teaching style in every class. I not only tell my kids to use their dreams to set goals, but I actually teach them how to reach those goals. AVID provides them with tools that are invaluable, and they now know that where they have been in life will not determine where they will go.

Let me give you a little insight to where they have been. I come from Southern Lee High School in the tiny town of Sanford, located in Lee County, North Carolina. A little over half of our student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch, and half is also made up of minority

students. Many students came to Sanford from other countries and speak little to no English. Unfortunately, due to boredom and bad influences, there are a lot of gang and drug-related activities that many young people get involved in. I tell you this to also say that it is often difficult for teachers to make all students understand the importance of their education when many of them are facing life-and-death situations when they leave our care. That is one reason why AVID is transforming our school and our community, even if it is a little at a time.

True to AVID's roots, most of our AVID students will be first-generation college students. Many of them come from low income families, and some of them are undocumented because their parents brought them here to give them a better life. I currently teach AVID students who have experienced physical and sexual abuse, drug- and alcohol-dependent family members, gang violence, and homelessness. A handful of my students have been told throughout their entire lives that they will never amount to anything in life; that they have no chance of bettering themselves or making it to college. For some of them, I was the first person to ever change that echoing voice in their heads from "no, you can't" to "yes, you can." And if I can be a catalyst for change, then any AVID educator can too.

My students have overcome so many obstacles in their short lives—more than any child should be forced to overcome. Yet, despite all of these reasons for them to disregard their education, AVID has given my students—as well as thousands of students around the country—a light at the end of their tunnel. They have a support system in place with their AVID family, they receive encouragement, they are shown how to utilize the AVID strategies to be great students, and they are dreaming of and working towards a better future. They are going places, and realizing that all of the voices that told them they couldn't do not matter. The only voice that matters in regards to where they will go in life is their own.

Our focus in the AVID cohort in my school is voice; we are using this essential question to guide everything we study: How do you find your voice, and inspire others to find theirs? Strategies like Socratic Seminar, Philosophical Chairs, and Four Corners enable my students to find their voices, and reassure them that their opinions do matter. Learning the basic curriculum is key, but teaching soft skills—or hidden curriculum—helps change the way a student sees him- or herself... and that is the ultimate dream of an effective educator. My current AVID students have come so far, have gained so much confidence, and are doing things they never thought they could. They are taking more rigorous courses, joining extracurricular clubs and activities they had never given thought to before, and volunteering outside of school. They are not only dreaming about college, but researching and getting excited because they now know that they can and will go if they stay focused and work hard. It is truly inspirational to see because they have finally found their voices and are speaking loudly for all to hear.

Now, my dream is bigger. I hope to utilize the AVID system and mindset to transform schools, to transform the lives of students, and—ultimately—to transform the communities in which those students live. AVID is not just a “program” for underprivileged kids who will be the first in their families to attend college. AVID is a revolution within our current public education systems. AVID is the tool that will enable educators around the world to remold how students view their education, and—most importantly—themselves.

33. What kind of extremists are we?

Just like Martin Luther King, Jr. asked in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists are we? It is not an insult to be called extreme. I wonder why so many people are not passionate about their callings.

For us, we have chosen to be extremists for love, like those we admire most: Mary Catherine Swanson and her first AVID class as well as Erin Gruwell and the Freedom Writers, MLK, Gandhi, and the Transcendentalists.

A few examples of being extremists for love have been our faithfulness to each other as AVID family no matter what, service projects such as More Love Letters, mentoring younger students, and helping others without counting the cost.

Thank you for reading our stories. For more information on AVID, please email Mrs. Perkins at joannacperkins@gmail.com.

APPENDIX

During second semester of Addie Gonzalez's junior year, something radically changed.

Here is her story of becoming a national AVID speaker.

I entered the AVID Student Speaker Contest after hearing Mrs. Perkins talk about it during class one day. I remember not having any homework and deciding this was a good option. So I filled out the online application and copied and pasted a short essay into a box. A couple months later I received an e-mail informing me that I was a semifinalist for this contest. I was extremely thrilled. However, I made sure to not get my hopes up because I did not want to get disappointed. I had to have video conferences to read my essay to the organizers of the event, and fortunately for me, they loved it! I was now a finalist. What I had not realized was that I would get an all expenses-paid trip to Philadelphia in July. I got the chance to speak to 2,500 educators about the immense impact AVID had on my life.

Itziri Adanely Gonzalez-Barcenas' "Addie's" Student Speech (our catalyst for change):

AVID Summer Institute 2014 in Philadelphia, PA

View her speech here: <http://tinyurl.com/nfazx8c>.

Motivation, hard-work, perseverance...these are all familiar words which can lead to an even more familiar goal: success. However, amidst the first three, there is an even more daunting word: obstacles. Throughout my life, I have been doubted by numerous influences such as peers, family members, coworkers, and even a few teachers. Whether it is due to my racial background, or my economic and social status, people think that these factors will hold me back. However, despite these, something from deep within encourages me to keep going; it is like a constant

burning flame that never dies out. I have AVID to thank for pushing me to keep that flame burning even when dark storms approach and their winds attempt to blow my flame out.

Before joining the AVID family, my life was confusing and my past ruled my view of the future. My parents did not have an adequate education. My father dropped out of school when he was in seventh grade because his father needed him to work, and my mother dropped out before she graduated high school. This has limited the opportunities they could provide me. I was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico a year after their marriage. After a couple of months of them struggling to make ends meet, my father made the life altering decision of coming to this country to provide a better lifestyle for his family. I have been here since I was six months old.

Throughout my life, I have faced adversity because I was not a native born citizen, such as prejudice, not being able to get a job easily, or having to turn down the opportunity to do missions with my church. It is heart-breaking to me to think that I have had so many difficulties in my life over something as simple as not being born here. This was something I had no control over, but it has been the ultimate struggle in my life and one of my biggest insecurities. Because of AVID, I have started looking at different components in my college search, like the size and location. Without taking the time to really explore different universities, I would have not been aware that a lot of public universities will obligate me to pay out-of-state tuition due to my lack of citizenship, or they will not grant me scholarships whatsoever. As a result, private universities are my only alternative. Nevertheless, I have not allowed this to bring me down, or stop me from working hard. AVID has helped me realize that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Without AVID, I would not be the strong, confident, independent young woman I am today. Growing up, I have heard the phrases “You can’t” and “Your hard work will never pay off” more than anything else. These two phrases never cease to leave me alone; they have

haunted me for eighteen years. They are such short and simple phrases, yet have such long and lasting effects. Over the years, I started to believe these words, because after hearing something so many times, even if it is not true, you start to believe it. AVID helped me realize my worth.

I was in AVID in eighth grade and then rejoined as a sophomore. I recognized the impact AVID really has on students. AVID helped me come out of my shell through building trust with my classmates and teacher. I am stronger and more confident as a result. Moreover, I have learned independence through the AVID organization skills, the responsibility of being a high academic achiever, and even tutoring underclassmen. I want to be the first in my family to graduate high school and attend a four year university. In short, AVID has been one of the biggest blessings in my life.

I know that my AVID family makes all the difference, specifically, AVID teachers. They possess characteristics that make them unique. AVID teachers are approachable, kind-hearted, helpful, inspiring, and loving. This is one of the many reasons why I love my AVID teacher, Mrs. Perkins. She is all of these things and more. I agree with something she once said about teaching. “You have to get to know WHO you are teaching, not just WHAT you are teaching.” Many teachers of today lack the patience to get to know the different personalities in their classroom. Each individual student has their own story, and it is important for them to have a teacher they are comfortable sharing it with. Because we know we are safe, Mrs. Perkins takes us to new levels with our English and AVID curriculums.

In my school, AVID revolutionizes the way students learn and interact with everyone. It has been said that AVID can “inspire a new generation to fight for change from the bottom up.” I agree. AVID has taught me essential skills that I will be able to use for life. I have also learned how to communicate more effectively. Socratic Seminars are used in AVID classrooms

and help you really understand a concept or idea. Therefore, when I am getting interviewed for a position I have applied for, I will be prepared. Organization, proper MLA format, and the Cornell Way are a pain, but I know they will help me be successful. One day when I am sitting in a college class, I will be able to take good notes to pass the class. I will also know how to work with my peers and ask for help after years of experience with AVID tutorials.

Some people hear the word “tutorial” and have a misconception about AVID; they believe it is designed for “bad” students; however, that is not the case, I assure you. AVID is a group of people that I have come to see as my family. AVID helped me believe in my dreams and work towards fulfilling them. My AVID family helps me stay motivated when success seems impossible. Because of AVID, I know my burning flame—my desire to outlast obstacles—will never die out. What advice can I share on how to advance via individual determination? Perhaps Edmund Lee said it best. “Surround yourself with the dreamers and the doers, the believers and the thinkers; but most of all surround yourself with those who see greatness within you.”



AVID on a college trip to Duke!



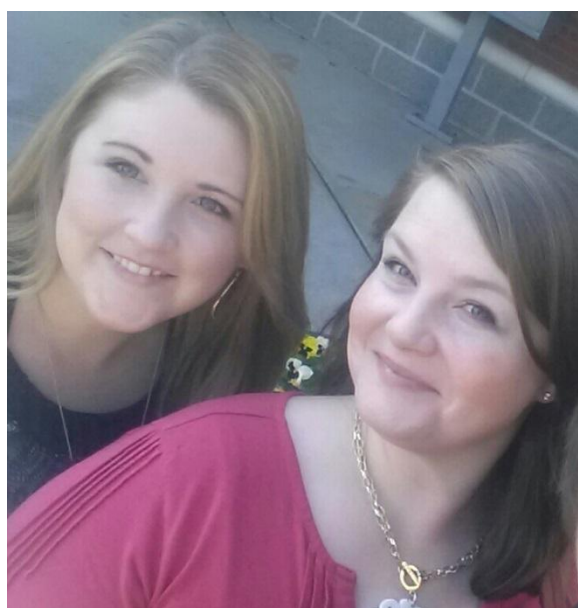


AVID Juniors' Selfies with the Perkins family





Perkins, Braxton, Brianna, Harvey, and Carter



A few teachers from the
all-star AVID site team:

Perkins, Harvey, Cochrane, & Strickland



Beginnings





Gatsby Party



A few of us with Mrs. Brogan from the BOE – AVID supporter