

Hey!!

Writing and verbalizing our thoughts is a great way to further understand ourselves and it also serves as a good outlet to help us cope with different struggles and hard times in our lives. Sometimes just getting it out or getting the tough stuff off your chest can provide relief and lift great weights off our shoulders to help us proceed and grow. Here's some pieces that I've written about my life, myself, my views, important topics, my personal growth, my interests, people and things that I love, and other cool stuff :)

---

My Winning Scholarship Essay for Distinguished Young Women of North Carolina (Wayne County Division)

### Being MY Best Self

Mary Talton

How to be MY best self? That's a tough question because everyone is unique, however, the journey I've endured in the past year, mentally, physically, academically, socially, and morally, has grown to be MY definition of a leap of faith, a discovery of self, and an epiphany of purpose.

As I write this essay, tears form in my eyes. Not tears of sadness, regret, or reminiscence, but tears of joy and pride due to the progress I have achieved in the last six months of my life. I originally planned to address each element of the BYBS program individually by relating my personal experiences, but unfortunately, I ran out of space:) When pondering my ideas, I realized all five principles are deeply associated with the most evident and defining moral standards that I have established for myself: respect, humility, self-care, compassion, ambition, faith, awareness, and responsibility.

First, ambition, respect, and responsibility. I've surpassed my academic goals and beyond by raising my SAT score over two-hundred points, by myself: MY work ethic, MY determination, and MY desire to improve. I'm incredibly excited for college and ready to start a new chapter in my life. I'm ready to learn more about all of the incredible choices that life has to offer in my future as I

reach my full potential. My dream is to be whatever I want to be when the time comes and follow a value that my family has always instilled in me: you can do anything you set your mind to, little one.

Second, humility, faith, and compassion. There is nothing I love more than knowing I have made a difference in someone else's life. The feeling of accomplishment and success that I felt when I experienced the most pivotal turning point in my life thus far is able to be shared by continuously inspiring others to do the same. I love volunteering with nonprofit organizations, I love serving my community through mission projects, I love widening my perspective of diversity by meeting new people from all walks of life, I love to learn, I love to educate others on the power of Christ and more, I love to connect with people, I love to better myself, I love to do anything that will improve the quality of life for all of God's people.

Third, self-care and awareness. Recently, I've evolved into an individual who thrives on optimism, spontaneity, routine, strategy, and multi-tasking(quite the variety). My schedule is orderly, yet it has room for alteration. I eat healthy and exercise regularly, without becoming obsessive or developing unhealthy habits. I can accomplish multiple tasks simultaneously, without blundering in a single category. I make the best of troubled situations, without becoming disappointed by an unexpected outcome. I try my best to be a spark of positivity in a world with deteriorating hope.

"I want to help improve the world, and that begins with me."

That being said, I pledge to be: studious, healthy, ambitious, involved, responsible, and uniquely  
ME.

The original, unedited scrap of BYBS is below - if you'd like to see it's progress lol

Respect. Humility. Self-Care. Compassion. Ambition. Faith. Awareness. Responsibility.

I believe that the beauty in the five elements of Be Your Best Self is that all of these values are very similar to some of my personal attributes upon which I pride myself and strive to follow in every aspect of my life. As you most likely already know, the five elements of the Be Your Best Self Program are the following:

To be an involved and constantly connected citizen, to me, means to be actively engaged with my community and all of those who live, work, learn, and grow inside of it. My father has served as a local politician for the majority of his career and through this, I have learned a plethora of life lessons. In community outreach fundraisers, I have learned to have an open mind when forming opinions of others who are not like me or who come from a different background than I do. Through board meetings, I have learned how to maintain self-respect, respect for others, and proper professional business etiquette when it is needed. During election seasons, I have learned to accept the outcome of things I cannot change and make the best of what I have, even if it means resorting to an unexpected strategy. My father and I have very similar brains, therefore, I have learned so much from both his successes and his mistakes. I enjoy volunteering with my Girl Scout troop, multiple nonprofit organizations, my church, and my family. Some of my most memorable experiences have been with the Salvation Army. Working in their stores, organizing their donations, and meeting all of the underprivileged people who

often shop there has not only given me a more diverse perspective on life, but it has taught me to be humble and blessed in my own position to help others who are less fortunate. I am constantly striving to be involved in every community service activity that I possibly can because it give me the opportunity make new friends, help work towards a beneficial moral cause for others, and it pleases me to know that I am making a difference and contributing to God's work within his beautiful creation surrounded by all the individuals that are made in his image.

Before you can love and care for someone else, you must be able to love and care for yourself as well. Of course, physical health is very important to living a quality lifestyle, however, many people underestimate the impact of mental health on our well-being. This, I have learned through my own experience of advancing, yet struggling, through school with undiagnosed ADHD. I won't go into the details of my long and strenuous journey, but finding the methods that worked for me was absolutely life-changing. Having motivation, investing in a gym membership, regaining my self-esteem, participating in group volunteer activities, reaching my greatest potential, being my true self, and reuniting my relationships with God, friends, and family, have all been crucial factors in improving my physical and mental health in the past year. Learning more about my own medical setbacks has encouraged me to work to inspire others who are most likely experiencing the same issues. This has taught me compassion and humility. Compassion and empathy for others, as well as confidence and humility for myself. The feeling that overwhelms my heart when I am able to inspire others to better themselves in response to my advice or sharing my own experiences to relate to them so they no longer feel alone is a deep personal connection like no other, it is absolutely inexplicable.

---

### My main Common App Essay that I used when applying to colleges

~ Losing My Mind, but Maybe It's Not All Inside in My Head ~

"I don't know why I want to make it even harder, I'm not the kind of [man] to take the easy road...So much to do and not enough time...So much to loose, I'm losing my mind"

Panic attacks. Body dysmorphia. Dissatisfaction and disappointment of my academic abilities and peers. Backfire of anxiety medications. Constant hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Inescapable disorganization of external life and internal thought processes. A life filled with distractions and uncontrollable emotions. I forced myself to hide it from everyone around me until I couldn't handle it on my own and crumbled into the realization of it's true cause. Nearly an inescapable and lifelong setback, sometimes I truly wonder how I survived the first sixteen years of my life with undiagnosed ADHD.

Before you fear this essay might take a depressing turn, I must inform you that these wise words I have quoted above are lyrics written by my childhood crush and musical idol, Charlie Puth. As I write this essay, you'll probably notice that I jump between different topics and stories...a lot :)

Basically my entire life has felt like an unending sequence of being underestimated and stereotyped. I have blonde hair, green eyes, tan skin, my father works for the government, I attend church every Sunday, I'm constantly involved in my community, I love surfing and travelling, and

somehow, I'm good at math. My point is that many people assume I have a model-like life from the outside view, however, nothing is more false. Married parents have struggles, siblings who attend prestigious colleges have faults, and girls with seemingly ideal families have disabilities. For the longest time, I assumed that I wasn't good enough, that I was just distracted and stupid, that I simply didn't have the ability to accomplish things that I dreamed being capable of, and that I couldn't do "smart people" things.

In addition to my self-esteem, this image projected into my social life as it caused others to form opinions of me that were far from my own truths. Just because something isn't on display doesn't mean that it isn't hidden far beneath the surface. During my younger years, my family just assumed that I wasn't as mannerly or intelligent as my older brother because I struggled to pay attention and attain priorities. As I got older, we realized that it was simply how my brain functioned rather than a lack of effort or motivation. I had countless aspirations and ideas, but couldn't pinpoint how I'd accomplish all these amazing things with such little time and my vivid imagination. Despite the stigma surrounding ADHD medications, finding my solution was absolutely life-changing. I discovered my ability to "hyper-focus", my SAT scores skyrocketed, my grades improved, I paid attention better than ever, and my mental genius was released. The common cliché of "you can do anything you set your mind to" was finally made possible for me.

We often hear "everyone has a little ADD/ADHD", but how so? Not only does this belittle the impact that the disorder can have on an adolescent's life, but it cannot be true because, although we all have distractions in life, not everyone's brain functions with ADHD. For many kids like me, it might take a while, but upon discovering proper treatment methods, we realize that we're brilliantly intelligent and innovative beyond our imaginations, it's incredible.

Of course, I've always found Charlie attractive. However, his song "Losing My Mind" makes it feel like a celebrity, who probably doesn't remember my friends and I screaming at his concert, understands the struggle of involuntarily internalizing mental illness. I love concerts and Charlie Puth was my first concert experience. He probably doesn't know who I am, but if I could express to him the role he played in my journey, I can only imagine what I'd say.

---

What Girl Scouts Means to Me (another common app supplement):

“I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, respect authority, use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.”

Ever since the first day I joined as a junior scout when I was only nine years old, this pledge, known as the Girl Scout law, has been the foundation for an endless amount of my most treasured friendships, adventures, and unforgettable experiences. Girl Scouts, as a whole, has made an enormous impact on my life and I have absolutely no idea where or who I would be without my incredible fellow scouts and troop leaders that I have met, and bonded with along the way. I am currently an ambassador scout, working towards my Gold Award, and I can barely express my appreciation for all that I have learned and endured through my experiences.

I have learned perseverance from the numerous camping trips, and strenuous adventures as we worked together, striving towards an accomplishment. In the summer of 2017, Girl Scout troop 389 of Mount Olive, NC travelled to Savannah, Georgia, to compete in the international competition of “QuestFest-Savannah”. This event occurred in the most scorchingly hot and unpleasant time of the year. Little did we know that we were in for a long, sweaty, and seemingly unending course of events that none of us will ever forget. The “Busy Bees” of Girl Scout Troop 389 walked over 26 miles, collected over 3,000 “questpoints”, outshined every other troop competing in the competition, and created friendships with fellow scouts from all across the world. Thinking back on this experience, I was only thirteen years old and could barely comprehend this incredible achievement that taught me how hard work and loyal dedication produces honorable and glorious outcomes that I continue to remember for the rest of my life.

I have gained valuable teamwork skills stemming from group projects, unexpected relationships, unprecedented camping excursions, and improvising new methods to achieve our goals. On a trip to Kerr Lake, North Carolina, my friends and I decided to pack our knee-high rain and work boots so we could delve, nearly waist-deep, into the swamp that was located right outside of our campground. When one of us went too far towards the deep end, another one of us would venture out to save them, link our arms or hold hands, and grab the fellow scout before they had gone out beyond a salvageable point. It soon evolved into a teambuilding and bonding activity that was a competition to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses. Teamwork is an important aspect of

Girl Scouts because you can only accomplish so much without considering the opinions and perspectives of other people who are unlike you. Whether it is accomplishing your Gold Award, the highest rank of Girl Scouts, finishing a school assignment, or assisting another young girl in heightening her confidence or self-esteem, teamwork makes the dream work, no matter the tier of the task.

I have learned realistic things through my Girl Scout experience. The variety of business management, social, coping, mental and physical perseverance, and communication skills have blessed me with a lifetime's worth of success, hope, and knowledge. My Girl Scout experience has genuinely been a gift of memories, relationships, knowledge, communication, and many more extraordinary awards. Some of my biggest passions and interests have been inspired by Girl Scouts. The disposition on the faces of a group of shy, young, seven-year-old, Brownie scouts, as I approach them to explain our next project reminds me of how far I have progressed. It is one of my most prominent and desirable distinctions that I will never downplay or overlook for the remainder of my career and all that lies ahead of me in life.

---

Stuff I wrote for NCSU:

To be an involved and culturally-connected citizen, to me, means to be avidly and passionately engaged not only with the local community, but also with the people who learn, work, and grow inside of it. I simply cannot recall a moment of my life where I felt the need to be so selfish to the point of being completely careless, having no regard for others around me. Community outreach, humanitarian volunteering, and philanthropy, are some of the most essential aspects of my life that I will never outgrow. Raleigh, North Carolina, is what I believe to be one of the most diverse, picturesque, innovative, and beautiful cities in our state. From the mountains to the coast, North Carolina is my favorite state, but as a whole, the city of Raleigh encompasses all of the best aspects and values of our state. Growing up, my family frequently travelled to Raleigh to visit family, friends, go shopping, or find new places for a night out. Compared to other large cities, Raleigh genuinely feels like home to me. It's not too big, not too small, fairly safe, very lively, and the perfect place to "get involved". To be engaged and culturally-connected can mean so much more than what initially meets the eye. I have always believed that actions speak much louder than words, therefore,

acts of kindness, philanthropy, and self-discovery should never be considered a competition. Constantly learning new things about yourself and others challenges you to consider new lifestyles, cultures, and viewpoints that you may have never been exposed to beforehand. Being a successful student is a prideful quality on its own, but to pair that with additionally being an involved and culturally-educated individual, can simultaneously open a new door of possibilities and experiences. It's more than just achieving high grades and pursuing a rigorous education because, contrary to popular belief, it's not all about the numbers and statistics. Creating deep personal connections with other people and organizational groups in the Raleigh community, to me, exceeds the value of any academic ranking or standardized test score. One day when I was volunteering with the Salvation Army in Greensboro through my favorite youth leadership camp, "PassportChoices", I met a woman shopping in our center who told me that she had never felt safe in her hometown and how she wished that the atmosphere of Greensboro could be more like Raleigh. Coming from one of her background and experiences, it was clear that she only wanted the best for the community that she had watched grow and evolve for many years of her life. Upon attending NC State, I will strive to attain special personalized relationships within and outside of campus, even beyond students, employers, and administrators. To bond and connect with underprivileged individuals that acquire a unique background offers new perspectives to students who have often been raised in a sterilized environment. I believe that these connections benefit students and their peers both inside and outside of the classroom and campus social circles.

I believe that academic enrichment through an expansion of knowledge on multiple topics is crucial to a well-rounded learning experience. Albeit technology, business, and marketing statistics are all subjects that interest me, having the opportunity to learn about things outside of my usual realm of interest are also important because, at the end of the day, all of these departments impact each other in one way or another. For example, learning history as an economics or industrial engineering major would aid my understanding of how certain policies, sustainability methods, and business tactics have failed and succeeded in the past. Subsequently, having this knowledge will greatly benefit my primary educational focus by providing awareness of what not to do and the certain mechanisms that have already proved unsuccessful in the history of my field. Understanding and interconnecting vastly different ideas requires research, critical thinking, and thorough analysis. From what I have observed, these "HON Seminars" challenge students to research and create educated opinions from what they have learned to display how they have consociated various studies into a constructive argument and a direct conclusion. Maintaining a smaller class size also

creates a more personal and intimate environment for both students and professors. I come from an exceptionally small, private high school and prior, another small, private Catholic school of ten years, extending from preschool to eighth grade. So although I have been accustomed to smaller classes, it does not bother me in the slightest to be involved in a class of any size, large or small. Exploring how different fields of study are interconnected often impacts the ways that students learn to solve problems and discover new methods to accomplish a certain task. My junior year of high school, I decided to take an anatomy and physiology class. Even though I had completely thrown out the idea of medical school, this class ended up helping me to explore different health conditions that are induced by voluntary, environmental, and self-controlled factors. We also dissected cats during this class, which proved that I would not make the best career choice in becoming a medical surgeon either. That being said, experimenting with new subjects is very constructive whilst weighing out the pros and cons of your interests and discovering the things you like best. Being involved in such "HON Seminars" would allow me to have exposure to new perspectives, people, and ideas that I might have never explored or pondered before in terms of educational freedom and excursion.

As you have probably seen, I addressed my main struggles in my personal Common App essay, however, this topic is more so a moral issue, rather than a mental or physical struggle. Politics.

The second I mention my father's career to anyone I meet, the assumption is made that my family life revolves around an extremely divisive subject that is forbidden to be discussed outside of our household. Recently, through social media and regular election seasons, many people have become more comfortable with sharing their political views, only enhancing this obstacle. My father has been a local politician for his entire career.

From being the mayor of our town, county commissioner, senate advisor, campaign manager, etc., he has been very successful in his field. Now, you might ask, how is this a struggle or an obstacle in my life? Good question. For everyone else in my family, it's not, however, for me, it is. It restricts my opportunity to a "fresh start" wherever I go.

Everyone knows my family, making it easy to form presumed opinions before getting to know me as an individual. Truthfully, I'm not usually what people expect.

Unfortunately, I've lost many close friends and connections due to my father's views and continuing success, but that will never stop me from supporting, promoting, and being proud of everything he has accomplished and how far he has come because our brains function similarly, almost as if we connect to each other on a secret wavelength of father-daughter telepathy.



---

Personal etc.:

My mini-sermons - "There is Nothing Holding You Back" ; "I've never been Happier"

Good Morning everyone, I hope everyone is having a nice Sunday!

Most of you probably know me as the shorter teenage girl who helps out around church, the quiet child who used to be so scared to talk to anyone, or honestly, the majority of you probably know me because of my dad, but that's okay too.

While my story might not involve as much solemnity or experience as some of the others that you have heard during this series, however, I feel like it probably offers an equally important amount of gratitude, happiness, and praise to our lord, Jesus Christ.

A few years ago, actually more like within the past 8 months or so, I was super shy and uncomfortable with sharing any part of myself with basically anyone other than those who I was very close to. Most of my insecurities stemmed from fear of what others would think of me and how I would stack up with everyone else who was supposedly "in the same boat" as me.

After an unexpected journey of growth in self-discovery, maturity, knowledge, self-esteem, confidence, and awareness, I have learned so much about myself and the things and people that truly matter in my life.

So today, I am going to tell you about 3 specific aspects that have contributed to my growth and realization throughout this journey within the past several months of my life.

First, was when I began to take better care of myself.

Got a gym membership, started to eat healthier and maintain a stable daily routine, I strengthened my time management skills and began to really focus on how I could live my happiest and most grateful life. It ranged from everything from walking my dog, taking a full gym day, establishing effective routines and relationships with food, my body, and my self-image. It's really

just a great feeling, at least, when you “seemingly” feel like you have your life together in this aspect I’d have to say.

Second, was when I began to expand my social network.

If it was not obvious, I definitely began to make more new friends when I finally started to open up and talk to new people. This could honestly be one of the most important shifts in my life because it began an incredible journey of discovering the things and the people that truly matter and are worth playing a role in the story that Jesus has specifically written for me as an individual. At the end of my junior year, I was a bit fed up with many of the entitled kids at my school, so I absolutely could not wait for summer break. Little did I know that this past summer was going to be the best summer of my life yet. Just to start off, many of you probably know that I seriously cannot say enough good things about Passport Camp. This year's passport was extremely special because the timing was just perfect. As soon as I began to really discover my purpose in life, I had such an incredible opportunity to share it with so many other people that I met at camp who, still to this day, are some of the most caring people and my best friends that I can trust and confide in on a daily basis, even if we don't live close by. Usually, we meet other kids from far away places, most of the time, from different states, but this year, mainly due to covid, the groups were much smaller, the atmosphere was a bit more quaint, and the churches we were grouped with were in closer proximity with us, in Wilmington and New Bern. Now, I'll just stop here with how amazing this year's passport was because most of you are aware that I will totally go off on a long tangent if I try to explain my experiences any further. In addition to passport, I honestly just started talking to people who I had never noticed before, being kind to everyone I meet, and sharing the beauty of life that God has created for us to live in. Through community service, school, Girl Scouts, other service groups and projects, and especially from a great program called the Distinguished Young Women of North Carolina, I have come such a long way from where I once was and I could not be more thankful for the development of these skills and how it happened at the time that it did. This has served me well in so many ways because now I basically have demolished my social anxiety and I'm super comfortable whenever I need to talk or make connections with other people.

Third, is letting go of negative expectations and unrealistic standards that have been instilled in my generation, many of which others are unaware of.

Many people my age are typically stereotyped to be apathetic, dependant, or just known to “find the easy way out.” I believe, however, unfortunately, it is going to become very difficult to succeed and even live a genuine life if you never take responsibility for yourself and take charge of your own life. I just think it’s nearly impossible. If someone becomes so accustomed to not caring and putting in very little effort just to “get by” or “make it through” a certain situation, how will they learn from it? How will they grow from it? And most importantly how will they feel to know that they did not try their best and perform to their best ability in that particular situation?

If we spend our whole lives trying to be like everyone else and doing whatever the heck other people tell us to do, people are never going to truly know who they are, what they want in life, or how they want to fulfill God’s plan for them as long as they are so continuously stuck up in society’s distorted view of how they “have to be”.

I mean, seriously, If you spend your whole life following the rules and adhering to what everyone else expects you to do, how are you ever going to know who you really are and how are you ever going to change the world?

The answer is: you’re not.

My family always taught me that I can do anything I can put my mind to. And through this journey that statement is very true because once I figured out how to do it, there was absolutely nothing holding me back.

I believe that the creativity of the human mind is one of the most powerful and important abilities that we have been gifted with as a species. Creativity is just absolutely life-changing because not only does it promote our human individuality, but it encourages the release of shame and disapproval that many people feel when they discover that they don’t think the same way that the majority of their peers do, aka the “typical” person of their age group etc.

Overall, as a closing, as I’ve probably spent a good amount of time up here already, I would like to encourage and remind you all that regardless of what you may think or believe, God has a plan for you to advance his kingdom and live the best life that you can with the help of his guidance. So the next time you start to overthink or doubt yourself, please remember that God totally has your back and there’s absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

## The Digital Divide

We've all heard of economic and financial equality, but what about digital equality on the internet? This concept is commonly referred to as the Digital Divide. In our growing modern society, the gap between those who have greater access to the internet and those who do not continues to grow due to a variety of factors.

In an article written about information systems research, the factors contributing to this issue are quite similar to offline inequalities such as socioeconomic resources, physical and mental abilities, and level of education. Although these factors can be easily identified, improving the status of them may not be as easy. Not everyone can afford certain devices, how do we change that? Not everyone is taught how to use the internet in school, how do we educate them? Not everyone knows how to properly protect their information by cybersecurity principles, how can we help them?

I believe in terms of this Digital Divide, its disadvantages surely outweigh its benefits because it's nearly impossible to achieve overall digital equality to ensure that everyone has equal access to the same resources on the internet. However, one positive aspect of the Digital Divide may be that those who pose dangers on the internet, do not have full access to what they can use to hack and/or spoof other more vulnerable users. Stanford Computer Science states "Widening levels of education seem to magnify the digital divide; households with higher levels of education are increasingly more likely to use computers and the Internet...those with college degrees or higher are 10 times more likely to have internet access at work than those with only a high school education...the gap in computer usage and Internet access widened 7.8% and 25% respectively, between those with the most and the least education".

My main concern is how we can work to close the gap in the Digital Divide. In an article by Howard's Business Review, their research initiative: IDEA (Imagining a Digital Economy for All) separates their analysis of the Digital Divide into four specific categories. These categories consist of: infrastructure, inclusivity, institutions, and digital proficiency. Focusing mainly on achievable and in-reach goals, this research initiative, unlike other technical equality missions, maintains very realistic expectations for our digital society. However, these factors vary in different geographic locations. A PewTrusts article states "Like Colorado, Maine and North Carolina provide planning and technical assistance to aid communities in identifying local solutions. California and Virginia have provided grants for middle mile infrastructure to help decrease the cost of deploying last mile service to homes and businesses...Tennessee and Minnesota have technology neutral grant programs that can provide funding to any technology that delivers internet service at broadband speeds, and either encourage or require that grant-funded networks are built in such a way that

they can be upgraded to significantly higher speeds". Although certain governments in specific areas work towards this initiative to close the Digital Divide, certain regions only have access to limited resources, therefore, bridging the gap may be difficult, however, it is not impossible.

Overall, I believe that this digital inequality issue is just as justifiably important and relevant as any other social or economic inequality that we are currently facing in society, even though it may not be as popular or visible. Due to certain independent variables, this gap is not as evident as other similar inequalities, but it contributes to the well-being of our societal equity and equal opportunity as any other that may cause a different variation of divide or segregation in our growing and innovative world.

When you walk into any setting, he's the first person you would notice and most likely the tallest structure in the room. Characterized by his striking height of 6'5" and bright strawberry blond hair, he never fails to make every situation fun. I've known my good friend, Ryan Smith, for as long as I can remember, since our fathers became best friends when they were only seven years old. Growing up, our families did everything together and he never missed an opportunity to make everyone feel included and welcomed into our group. Although he has very strong opinions and a love for everything regarding his favorite color, red, I can truly say that he's one of my best friends who has helped me with anything and everything that I could possibly need. In his fraternity, he's the life of the party; at our church, he talks to everyone; he's my brother's best friend, always helping him persevere with his overly stressful schedule; he's travelled to over ten different countries, learning the customs and lifestyles of them all; his mother passed away due to leukemia when I was nine years old and not only have we grown closer, but our lives have never been the same again. He's nearly a direct replica of his mother, who always made me feel like one of her own. There isn't a single situation that I can picture where Ryan would not be having a great time and encouraging others to do the same.

### A Time to Speak

I think we would all have countless regrets if we never told the truth, never said what needed to be said, or were never truly honest with ourselves and others. I interpreted this as not only is there a time to remain silent, but there is also a time to speak up and speak our minds, honestly and truthfully. Just think about this, if you spend your whole life listening to what everyone

else says and following the rules, how are you ever going to change the world and make a difference in the lives of others? The answer is: you're not. Therefore, at least at some point, you have to discover who you really are, what you really want in life, how you prefer for the world to perceive you, and you just have to SPEAK UP. Sure, everyone says that it's admirable to be bold and brutal, standing up for what you believe in, without a care in the world of what everyone else thinks, but in reality, it's actually a fairly diligent task. "Speak now or forever hold your peace" also applies because there is a time and place to speak your mind, depending on the specific circumstances, however, when there is a time that change needs to be made, it is time for your voice to be heard.

"Go to school, follow the rules, and do what you're 'supposed to do'"

From a young age, we are taught to listen to and adhere to what everyone else tells us. If we look a certain way, people will judge us from our outer appearance. If we don't give our full effort to school or sports, we will end up a failure and mean nothing in life. If we have abnormalities, uniquenesses, talents, quirks, or special abilities, we are told to hide them far away because we are unusual or it would make others uncomfortable that we are "different" from everyone else. If we don't follow the 'rules' that society has set for us, we are told that nothing will work out for us, we will not be successful, and we will never be happy or have any recognition to our name.

The truth is: if someone spends their entire life, or even just their adolescent years, adhering to and striving to be "perfect" or "the prime example", how in the heck are they EVER going to know who they really are? Because that's the scary part. If you only follow clothing trends, how do you know your own personal style? If you only take the classes that you are told to take, how will you discover your academic interests? If you attend a university simply due to its prestige and rank, how will you find your niche socially, academically, and mentally? If you constantly alter yourself in response to criticism, how will you define your own personality or passions?

While many people may view politics as a polarizing and dividing subject, in my father's branch of the family, it has always been a source of bonding, thriving success, and a topic for open discussion.

From a very young age, I've always had a passion for politics and assisting other people through government works and nonprofit organizations. Beginning when I was four years old, my father began to run for political positions as our family supported him in campaigning through the ups and downs of wins and losses. Working and participating in political campaigns with my father has always been a very important aspect of my life that never gets old. Although it was not always easy growing up as the child of a controversial public figure, my older brother and I never failed to support our father in every step along his journey.

My parents raised my brother and I to be ambitious and compassionate. Growing up, we were nearly inseparable as we participated in scouting, camping, surfing, Indian Princesses, and attended countless "daddy-daughter" events together with our family friends. Not only has campaigning created an unbreakable bond within my family, but it has also helped me to discover a newfound interest in different aspects of government that I would have never known beforehand. Without the influence of my dad's side of the family, I wouldn't have found my love for economics and politics.

Despite popular misconceptions, the hidden and unseen underground lives of many politicians often consist of much more than what meets the eye. Growing up with my father running for different government offices and having our family life being documented to the public was difficult as it took a toll on our family dynamic as well as our relationships with others. It was always interesting meeting new people through my father's career, however, I never truly had the experience of being the "new kid" because everywhere I went, there was some sort of past connection. Throughout our childhood, my brother and I have dealt with both the positives and negatives of our father's political party, occasionally controversial views, and being presumed a certain way for things we cannot change.

In addition to having a role in my family's campaigns, I have also had the amazing opportunity to work with many senators, house representatives, and soon, newly elected Lieutenant Governor, Mark Robinson, in the North Carolina Legislature. As long as I can remember, I would constantly urge my dad to help me send emails, make phone calls, and mail letters, searching for volunteer options in the legislature. It has always been a dream of mine to participate in state and federal elections, even beyond our local area, and having my father's aid to initiate these opportunities has made it a million times worthwhile in the long run. Working with elected officials

in the state government has graciously opened my eyes to the reality of the lives of lawyers, politicians, and everyday individuals. Not only have these encounters allowed me to pursue an interest of mine, but it has opened many new doors for other opportunities that I will strive to experience in my future.

I generally like to consider Election Day one of the most exciting and eventful occurrences of the year, especially when I am fortunate enough to work with some of my favorite candidates. When I was fifteen years-old, my dad decided to run for mayor of our hometown and was sworn in during early December of 2019. During one memorable weekend on his campaign trail, we hosted a “canvassing the community” event where we, and the remainder of his campaign committee at the time, travelled to every home and occupied building within our city limits to deliver election pamphlets that contained a list of all his proposed goals and policies if he were to win the election. I particularly enjoyed this day because I was legitimately able to speak to just about every single citizen in my community and it was also the first time I met Senator Jim Perry. It is experiences like these that remind me that in order to participate and be successful in a government profession, it is crucial to develop relationships with both elected officials and their respective voters, regardless of their political party or affiliation.

Campaigning and participating in election protocols with my father is one of my most cherished memories because whether it consists of positive or negative attention, there is never a dull moment in local politics. Growing up with the benefit of this political exposure has provided me with a plethora of incredible experiences, however, I also understand that I have so much more to learn about my interest in government works and public policy lawmaking.