

Contribution Essay

How will you make a difference in our world?

For many years I have been asking myself, what's my purpose in this life? Why am I here? As I've tried to figure this out, I have come up with a few things that I want to accomplish. The first one is to finish a Ph.D. program. This one is very personal to me. I love learning, and the fact that I even have an opportunity to pursue this path is crazy to me. However, I also want to do this because neither of my parents had the chance to finish elementary school. I know that by getting a Ph.D., I will be an example of what's possible for the members of my family and other people like me. I have a lot of girls in my family, and I want them to see that if they wish to pursue higher education, they can. Once you see someone that has done it, it's easier for someone else to see themselves there.

I once heard a TED talk about a person that worked in creating parks for cities that were more inclusive. Since then, I have been thinking about the importance of our environments. I took a Women Gender Studies class, and I learned a lot about the systems of powers that are in place to keep people in their hierarchal places. It also helped drive home for me that where we live in a city does make a difference in terms of crimes or access to necessary services. Because of this, I am leaning towards getting my Ph.D. in Urban Planning. I want to be able to advise cities and towns in how to set up services, parks, buildings in a way that encourages and promotes the inclusion of people of color and other marginalized groups. When the community you live in is built with you in mind, then you will feel part of it and are more likely to participate in it.

The second thing I want to accomplish is to open a school of trades for people of low-income. I think the education that's useful and provides a skillset is invaluable. In order to help those that are in need, we need to provide practical and feasible solutions that can be sustained long-term. Of course, there are a lot of barriers to entry at the societal level, but providing useful skills can be one step in the right direction. Although I want my school to start online, I hope to one day open many in Mexico and South America where young women and men can have options other than to follow the path that society has laid out for them.

How have you made a difference in my community?

For a while, I was very involved in my community. I tried to be at every club and event. But at some point, that burned out. I started to pull back and focus on a few things. I was the president of a nonprofit that served the immigrant community, and I even had a radio show in Spanish for over a year. However, I now only participate in the Parks and Rec Commission. We cover all things related to parks and spaces that are open to the public. Through this organization, I established with my husband a Badminton Club for the community. It is held at our local rec center, and it is a place that is open for anyone to come to play and to have fun. We have had excellent success through the three years we have had this program in place. Every year, at the end of the season, we hold a fundraising tournament and the money we make goes back into a local cause. We have teams from out of town come, and it's really fun.

We have a few Latino families that play, and I love being able to provide them with an option that's active and allows them to bond as a family. It is also a place to meet and talk to other cultures without

having to worry about anything other than we are all here to have a good time and get a good workout in.

Besides this, I run a social media page where I post all the events that are going on in Webster City. I just started this at the beginning of the year this year. I want to create a website where the community members can find events and places within the city of Webster City, but I do want to use this a platform to promote community and local stories down the road. Social media does this very well, but not everyone has social media access or is interested in it. Part of fixing problems for cities or communities, is making sure that everyone has a seat at the table or access to that seat.

What do you think our country should do to foster community?

I think that our country should start sharing stories. I believe that is so important to start speaking from our humanity rather than the things that divide us. As individuals, we should also be open to the fact that everyone experiences reality differently and that some people are born with more privilege than others. I think we should also have more conversations about privilege and how having it does not take away from one's hard work and effort. The work to foster community is hard, but it is possible, and we need to start small — individual by individual, group by group, town by town.

I would also encourage us to become more educated on how societies work and the importance of individuals in the larger scale. It's easy to believe we are alone in all we do, but that's not necessarily true. Mother Nature has a ton of diversity because they all play a very important part in the cycle. In the Western culture, that seems to be something that we are starting to miss out on. Keeping up with the Joneses is not the way to the top. It's a race to the bottom that no one wins, but those already on the top.