



2019 Scholarship Essay Submission- Angelica Lynskey

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In a small, quiet town, I had the most tragic experience of my life to date. I was 23 years old and had spent the last 5 years following high school honing my passion for the culinary industry through working in restaurant establishments and taking care of my family at home. I had a very active lifestyle and was making plans to attend college to continue my education at a local community college. This day, like my normal days off, were filled with outdoor activities and quality time with loved ones. My last memory of this day was heading home in the backseat of my best (at the time) friends car. Almost a month passes from that ride home until I awaken in ICU in Roanoke Memorial Hospital.

It's mid-February from what I can tell. The date and other facts are on a dry erase board to my right. It is very early in the morning and I am in a small hospital room with a nurse. As I look around, I am connected to so many wires, tubes, and machines. I am in a turtle shell back brace, a brace lay around my neck, and see metal rods extending from my body placed to keep my shattered bones in place. I am unable to sit up or move much as nurses and doctors buzz around me. Checking, recording, and questioning, they seem to be in an endless number of healthcare providers working on me. Staples were being cut; breathing tubes reattached, so much was happening and I was confused. Had I not just been waking up in my own bed? Unencumbered and free? I cannot remember asking the questions to figure out what had happened but I received a terrifying answer.

The person driving that night had been trying to text and drive while I rode in the back seat. In an instant, my life was going to change forever. Not paying attention to the road caused our vehicle to drift in the next lane while going down a stretch of the interstate with speeds posted 65 mph. She ended up over correcting when she looked up from her electronic device. I am grateful that I cannot consciously recall the horrifying events that followed. Her overcorrections hurled the SUV over through the guardrails and over a very steep embankment. When the car came to rest at the bottom, the driver looked around and could not find me, nor did she try to locate me. I had been ejected 60ft from the car some point in its tumble down the hill. I had landed out of her view and in a panic; the driver took off to save herself without reporting the wreck or calling anyone to help me. She was lucky enough to not have sustained a single injury. Had someone else not been around to witness this accident, I would have died there that day.

I had to be resuscitated and receive a lifesaving blood transfusion due to a mangled and broken arm. When I arrived at ICU, I had shattered multiple bones in my back and lower neck. I now have to metal rods secured by 10 screws in my thoracic spine. I had fractured my shoulder and my left arm. The gashes in my arm were so severe that skin grafts were necessary. The fractured ribs led to collapsed lungs and breathing tubes. The traumatic brain injury rendered me in a state that led to an induced coma for several weeks.

I am sure you can imagine the kind of shock such news must leave. All of this had happened and yet I still lay here alive in ICU. Pretty roughed up and on a long hard road to recovery, yet I had survived. I had and still have such a teary, overwhelming gratitude for this fact. Having this mindset allowed me to forgive the person at fault for the accident. This gratitude helped me keep my drive for life even as doctors told me conflicting news about how I was now going to have to live. Disabled and unable to dive back into my normal activities. Things like being on recreational sports teams, cooking, running or wanting to earn my degree in culinary arts. There was a choice to make in this moment. I could withdraw from the overwhelming amount of work the road to recovery was going to bring. On the other side, I could stare opposition in the face and declare, "I'm taking my life back". I chose the latter! I used my 6-week hospital stay to heal as quickly as possible before going home. I then spent the remainder of the year working my absolute hardest to be well enough to go back to work and eventually school. That year, and every year since, have been filled with numerous visits to therapists, doctors, and specialists. I am blessed to still be able to do the things I can within modified reason. However, it never gets easier and as my body ages, the injuries worsen and I still have to find the fight in me to not only survive but also thrive.

The hardest part is still having the memories of what living without disabilities feels like still so ingrained in my mind. It is hard to wake up one day, with no chance to prepare, and have to alter the course of your everyday in a permanent way. For example, wanting to just go hiking is a favorite hobby of mine. Almost anything, dealing with the outdoors, from camping to kayaking, brings so much joy to my life. Now to do these things is at a painful cost or has to be drastically modified. Sometimes I have to say no altogether and take my outdoors activity off the table for however long it may take to feel well enough again. I have to have help in ways that mimic the needs of those who are elderly in a demographic that usually does not have to call upon this kind of help. My finances struggle, as I am unable to work for months out of the year when the cold weather hits. Nevertheless, I push through. I draw on an inner strength that roared to life the day I was almost killed in a car accident. The day where my dreams were given a run for their money and the fight for a normal life began.

I have had to learn how to be ok asking for the help of others. People who have been willing to help and be supportive as I spend every day fighting to have a full life have surrounded me. I am excited that this includes earning my Bachelor's degree in Hospitality management. Having been accepted into this program at Johnson and Wales University Fall 2019, is another way I have overcome my disabilities. I know that I can still build a rewarding

career in the culinary field. My passion for this industry has been with me my entire life. I write this essay today asking that my hard work and determination be supported by receiving the Rosen & Ohr scholarship this year. I have some financial aid, along with working part time and other scholarships but still have need for help with my tuition now that I am enrolled in classes. Because an accident has not gotten in the way of me living my best life. Because, as your firm says, "an accident should never get in the way of one's education". I wish to use every gift I am given to build a platform for which I can in turn use to help others. I want to help and give back to the community that supported me as I recovered. The fight for my life may be closed but the fight to live my best life still wages. I take a step in that fight by earning my degree. With a little bit of drive that never wanes and the help of scholarships such as this, I hope to be well on my way.