

Triumph Over Tragedy

Jessenia Kalstad Personal Statement

Coming to an ALC wasn't exactly my cup of tea. But because I had a lot going on in my life, I had no other options. During the summer after 10th grade, my dad passed away from a rare type of cancer and his passing destroyed me...I felt abandoned AGAIN. This clearly wasn't by choice, but he didn't get a choice about whether he wanted to live and we didn't get a choice about whether or not he died.

I still remember that day like it was yesterday and it still hurts just as bad as when it happened. My dad was my hero, one of my supporters since day one. We would have our moments, but at the end of the day I knew he loved me and had the right intentions. I still remember the day he said, "I need you here because I have cancer." His words still ring in my ears everyday.

I would have never thought in a million years my dad would be the one to lose his battle with cancer. He was always the kind of guy who didn't want people worrying about him, so he didn't tell my mom he had a limited amount of time to live- he told us all at the same time. I will never forget how hard we all started crying. I'll never forget how empty the house was the first night after my dad was gone. I'll never forget the lessons he taught me and I will never forget how he

protected me. There were so many things that my dad did for me: things that only he could do.

On my 18th birthday I went and got a tattoo. The tattoo has the lyrics of my song “Ho Hey” by the Lumineers and underneath the lyrics are the date my dad was born and the date that he died. The lyrics say, “I belong with you, you belong with me. You’re my sweetheart.” Every time I hear the song, tears come to my eyes and I think of my dad. And every time I see my tattoo, I know that my dad is right there with me. He is with me every day, all day long, and his lessons are with me, too.

After losing my dad, I couldn’t stay at home. I couldn’t stay with my mom because we did not get along and losing my dad only made my relationship with my mom worse. I began home hopping, school hopping and lost much of the hope I once had.

A year and one month ago I made the decision to take a leap of faith, stand on my own two feet again and move away from my mother, and I moved in with my oldest brother. I started coming to Ivan Sand after the weekend I first moved in with my brother and his family. I remember sitting at dinner with my mom one night and telling her how much life sucked and how miserable I was...when Dad first passed away I was 16, so as soon as Dad died, I didn’t want to start school in the fall because I had no motivation, so I asked if I could drop out of school, and I’m so blessed to have a mom who didn’t give up on me, even when I gave up on myself. My mom told me I needed to stay in school and

that I could not drop out. I was very mad at my mom at the time, but thank goodness she was watching out for me.

When I first came to Ivan Sand, I was so excited that I could go someplace where my name was not known and it was the best feeling I had had in awhile. I was supposed to start at the High School, but I then I found out that I was going to the ALC and I was not happy. Given everything my brother and I went through, I did not want to go to an ALC because all I thought was it was with people I didn't want to be around. My first day was nerve racking, but I saw smiles, got mean mugged, and the teachers greeted with open arms and promised to help me get where I need to be. They had field trips, I didn't have to be at school till 7:55, and and everything was perfect.

At Ivan Sand the teachers give you emotional, verbal, and any kind of support you need, and for that I'm blessed to have been mentored by them. I now know what it's like not to give up on someone even when they give up on themselves. I can't count how many times I've said screw it, but the teachers are right over my shoulder ready to help me. I'm really good at deadlines, emotional support, problem solving and English. I'm really book smart; everything I've been through has helped me help others, and it's also showed me what I might be good at when I graduate high school. My achievements are that I can catch up if I've fallen behind, I was half a year behind and now I'm graduating with my class, and if I'm motivated, I can learn to reach my goals or dreams. I've learned that

you have to put everything you have into what you want because success doesn't come to those who sit around and wait.

Triumph over tragedy is what it comes down to because what you go through doesn't define you. When they told me I couldn't do it, I kept going. Don't let someone sit there and tell you that you can't do something because if you want it bad enough, you'll get it even without their support. Because I kept going even though I wanted to quit, I believe everyone is capable of triumph over their own tragedy. I now will move on to a 2-4 year college. During that time I will figure out what I would like to major in. I was in speech in the 8th grade, so I don't mind getting up in front of a large group of people. I spoke at my dad's funeral as well. I'm looking forward to looking into more of the therapist/drug abuse counseling. I went through that with a family member so it would be extremely beneficial if I can relate on a deeper level. My heart breaks for families being torn apart because of substance abuse so I will do everything in my power to help. Social workers, therapists, and counselors have had the biggest impact on me and it's so crucial people know they have people who care and are willing to help.

I did what everyone said I couldn't do. I graduated on time. And I triumphed over my tragedy- losing my dad who I loved with all my heart.

When life sends you a very large, heavy curve ball made of solid concrete, you have to pull yourself up, brush yourself off, get mad, and then get going, take care of yourself, be grateful for the many people who are there to help you, and

get your life in order. That's the only choice. Life goes on, and we need to go on too, and we need to become the best that we can be.

“I belong with you, you belong with me. You're my sweetheart.” I love you, Dad. I know you are proud of me.