

Unexpected Score

I raced in the house and hollered up the stairs at my twin sister to relay the good news to her. “Our ACT results came! Come quick!” Sammy bolted down the stairs in disbelief. Mom hurriedly pulled out her camera to record the moment we had been waiting for. My siblings filed into the room to see what the excitement was about. I turned towards Sammy and eagerly said, “On the count of three, ready?”

My junior year was coming to an end in the spring of 2020 when quarantine began from the Covid-19 outbreak. The world felt full of chaos, sadness, and confusion. I frequently went on walks to check the mailbox secretly wishing something new and exciting would be in there to kill the time. I always came home unsatisfied due to the fact the mailbox was only filled with bills. On the morning of Friday April 3, 2020, I stood barefoot on the toasted pavement down the street from my house as the aromatic smell of spring filled the air from the eye-catching blossoming trees. The birds were chirping a melodious song as the sun was beating on my face. I carelessly cracked open the rusted tan mailbox to distract myself, not expecting to see anything new. With a sigh, I carefully placed my hand on the eight crisp envelopes stacked neatly on top of one another. To my surprise, I came across two thick envelopes with the ACT logo stamped on the top. I knew instantly they were for my sister and I.

I first heard about the daunting ACT (American College Testing) in the beginning of my high school experience. The ACT is used as a measurement for colleges to determine a high school student's preparedness for college by testing students' performance in English, math, science, and reading by scoring them between a range of one to thirty-six. One is the lowest score to receive and thirty-six is the highest score.

My ninth- grade English teacher, Mr. Brockman, never seemed to stop yapping about the ACT. He always spoke with a hoarse, intimidating voice by telling us the test defined our future, college, and career. Over time hearing the same old conversation became overwhelmingly exhausting. I slumped in my seat each class period because he seemed to only be talking to himself--every student in my class appeared to be uninterested, including me.

My friends and I immaturely joked and laughed about how he was an old man who did not know what he was talking about. I turned over to Lauryn who was slouched in her seat, “Did you know he taught my mom in high school? He has been around forever!” We both chuckled and decided to tune him out for the rest of the class period. I had three years before I needed to pile on the stress of a college test. We did not understand why he was trying to pressure us while we were still young.

As my junior year rolled around, I felt confident and prepared to take the ACT since the test was drilled in the back of my mind at a young age--thanks Mr. Brockman. The only difficult part I struggled with was the mental motivation to sit down and be tested for a long period of time. After I finished the test, I felt I had done better than I anticipated. The test was not as bad as people cut it out to be.

Sammy began to count slowly, “one. . .two. . .” She then glanced at me for reassurance. Together we dragged out the last number, “three!” I immediately interrupted our countdown with confidence, “Wait! Whoever has the lowest score owes the other one their favorite drink!” Without hesitation she said, “Deal!” Competing against each other with motivation was our thing. Suspense filled the room as we tore open our individual envelopes.

Sammy began jumping up and down beaming with joy. She was thrilled to see the results at the bottom of her letter. On the other hand, my shoulders began to slouch while tears streamed down my face. I broke away quietly to the comfort of my room keeping my eyes fixed on the paper trying not to make a scene on camera. I was devastated. I wanted to celebrate with Sammy, but how could I feel the same for her when I was disappointed in myself?

I never wanted to see my letter again. I thought crushing the letter violently between my hands and burying it deep in my closet would make me feel better. Turns out, I was wrong. I began to sulk and feel sorry for myself. I thought there was no hope for my future. I was doomed; I had set myself up for failure. I was too embarrassed to reveal my result to Sammy and my mom, I felt as though I had not only disappointed myself, but I had disappointed them. This is what everyone had been talking about since the ninth grade, and I blew it.

For Sammy, testing has always come easy to her without studying. This made me question myself. How could I have failed something I had been preparing for since the ninth grade? In fact, my whole school career. I always held myself to a higher academic standard by working hard to earn straight A's each school year. I even ordered a forty-dollar book to study with. I found my test result unfair and undeserving. I expected my score to easily come back in the high twenties. Unfortunately, I did not even reach the twenties scoring range. After I told Mom my score, she embraced me in a big hug with an affectionate smile across her face to tell me she was proud of who I was as a person and my accomplishments.

Her hug was comforting and motivating, so I made applying to colleges my top priority when senior year came despite my low score. I knew my future was up to me. I decided to apply to the four different universities I had considered attending. I learned to have low expectations this time because I did not want to be discouraged. I kept my eye on the mailbox for the next few weeks after applying to colleges.

Unexpectedly, I received responses from each college, with all four of them offering me scholarships. Sam and I opened our last letter together from Southern Utah University--the college we both dreamt of. With a deep breath we did our countdown as usual, but with no competition this time around. We wanted to support each other either way. I shredded open the envelope privately and scanned the letter. Happy tears streamed down my face uncontrollably--I was speechless. I made it! I was awarded a Presidential scholarship, regardless of my ACT score.

Looking back now, I realize Mr. Brockman was deeply concerned about each one of his students and their future. If I could have traveled in time to see my outcome, maybe I would not have had such a dramatic reaction. I am not defined by a silly score, mom reminded me there is so much more to me-- I am still worthy to achieve greatness.