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Professor Lewis

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The Profile

“I couldn't imagine being president with anybody else.”

“I really do strive to be someone like her, someone who’s that accepting of everyone.”.

These are just a few words from her closest friends to describe Lauren Garza, a graduating senior here at St. Edward’s University. She is the vice president of the radio station club, Topper Radio, and has a passion for baking cakes, despite already having so much on her plate with an additional internship at a juvenile center and a job at Nordstrom. Throughout her college career, the San Antonio native has struggled with dyslexia and mental health problems, which caused her to almost have to leave school for a semester. Lauren is widely loved by all her friends for her commitment to Topper Radio and everything else she does. Lauren is someone who makes you feel comfortable, no matter who you are. Her vibes are immaculate, allowing you to not be afraid to be yourself around her and making everyone laugh.

Her best friend Nicole Fierro-Ryan, is the president of Topper Radio, and has enjoyed every minute of doing it together. Before becoming the big bosses of the club, Nicole and Lauren both had to join like everyone else. Lauren and Nicole have a special dynamic, with Lauren’s bubbly and kind personality and Nicole’s sarcastic and dark humor, the two are quite a pair. They run Topper Radio meetings with respect and love and care for all the people in the club equally.

“I was like, ‘Oh, can I sit with you?’ And she literally was like, ‘No’ and she was like, ‘I'm just kidding. You can sit here’ and then after that, I didn't think we were gonna be friends. But look at us now.”, says Lauren, telling me about her first encounter with Nicole.

As someone who has been a part of Topper Radio for a year now, I have had the opportunity to watch Lauren and Nicole run the meetings. The two of them run meetings with confidence, kindness, and enthusiasm. When Lauren starts talking, the room falls silent as they listen to her words with respect and admiration.

Lauren is an intern at The Travis County Juvenile Probation Department and works with kids to help them become prepared for the outside world once they can leave.

“So I have like a kid that I mentor, and I go see him every single week. So some kind of goal setting to help them, you know, think about a positive future, or just talking through things that have happened to them.”

Although Lauren may seem like she has everything under control, she has struggled with dyslexia, which has caused her to feel academically insecure a lot of the time. “Dyslexia is a learning disorder that affects difficulty reading due to problems recognizing speech sounds and learning how they connect to letters and words. (*Dyslexia - Symptoms and Causes - Mayo Clinic*, 2022).

“I always felt like, ‘Oh, I'm not as smart as my friends are. Why is everything harder for me? Why do I have to try harder?’ And it did discourage me at times when I was a lot younger.”

However, going on to pursue a master's degree, she did not let that stop her.

“I have this learning disability, but that doesn't define me,” she said with a smile on her face.

Not only does Lauren have dyslexia, but she has also struggled with her mental health since about the age of 12.

“Last year in school got pretty bad, so I didn't know if I was gonna be able to come back. I take medicine for it and it's really improved my quality of life. So I'm a very big mental health advocate.”

Lauren recalls the times of her middle school days and explains that she would cry and beg her parents not to take her to school, but also told me that music is one of the things in life that makes her happiest.

“Going to a concert, listening to somebody's music in my headphones, and then like hearing the song live… it genuinely makes me feel like dang, I've waited for this moment and it's finally here and I could not be happier.”

Essentially, music saved her life.

Lauren says that without being medicated, she may not have been able to complete her college career. Not only is Lauren an advocate for mental health, but she has hobbies too. She runs her own cake business on Instagram, @laurengcakes, and has almost 800 followers on her account. Lauren says she has been baking since she was eight years old and has always loved it. Mostly cakes but cupcakes sometimes too. She watches a lot of baking shows, for example, Cake Boss.

“When I was in high school, I did culinary in high school. So it was two hours every single day we were in the kitchen.”

Throughout her high school years, Lauren made cakes for the teacher's birthdays if they signed up on a sheet she made. Every month she would check the calendar and make cakes for each of the teachers' birthdays.

“I was in charge. I was like ‘Okay, first period needs to have the cakes baked by the time I come because I'm going to ice them, I'm going to bake them and after school, I'm going to come decorate them.’ or something like that.”

Lauren has always known that she had an entrepreneurial mindset, she told me about a little mug she made in elementary school with a shelf of cupcakes that said “Laurens Cakes” on top and started taking actual orders through her Instagram account in high school. She even used to go to farmers markets and vendor events to promote her business and sell some goodies, but she decided taking orders would be her best route.

“I have an order form in my bio, so when someone wants to order a cake for me, they just have to go to the form and fill out the information and then that goes to the spreadsheet and I look at the spreadsheet and then I text the customer and I let them know if I'm going to be able to make the cake for them and like what the price would be.”

Now, you are probably wondering, what about Lauren’s other friends? What do they think of her? Well, I’m glad you asked because I got the chance to speak with Hanniel Berhanu who also goes by Hanni, one of Lauren’s former roommates and closest friends.

“I met Lauren for the first time sophomore year and it was actually a random roommate assignment. We didn't plan to live with each other, it was like a complete accident, which I'm very grateful for because I met a very nice person, like a very dope individual actually. I generally made someone I think is a friend for life.”

Hanni had nothing but good things to say about Lauren, highlighting the fact that she was not only nice sometimes but was always someone willing to be kind, supportive, and a good friend to everyone. Hanni experienced Lauren’s cake business boom while they were living together saying “She was involved with a lot of like pop-up events in the beginning, okay. And I remember this one is the first event I went with her and I remember her baking in that small kitchen and we would try to help her.”. But Lauren had not always been successful, experiencing some disappointment with her vendor experience.

“The first pop-up was actually very successful and I remember her getting really excited. And then the second pop-up wasn't as successful, it was like a discouraging moment. But she still pushed through that, and she kind of figured out what worked for her eventually.”

Hanni showed me that she is someone who supports Lauren no matter what and always wants the best for her friend. Lauren is a person who sometimes does not see her worth and would often push the prices for her cakes down, not making as much profit as she may have liked, but Hanni was someone who was able to show her that her work was worth more money. Hanni and Lauren are still great friends to this day and loved her living experience with Lauren saying,

“My experience living with Lauren as a roommate was amazing. I'm very grateful for it.”

As you can see, Lauren Garza is a person who is admired by people all around her. Lauren is the kind of person who lights up the room when she walks in, allowing people to be their 100 percent authentic selves. Even when the circumstances were not always in her favor, she preserved and learned that following your passions is more important than the outcome, because, in the end, everything will turn out alright. St Edward’s will truly be saying goodbye to a genuine person who cares for everyone around her in every way possible.

Interviewees

Lauren Garza: (210) 393-7883

Nicole Fierro-Ryan: (956) 909-0007

Hanniel (Hanni) Berhanu: (214) 684-0628