

Growing up in a Christian household, it was easy for me to fall into a lukewarm faith. I participated in Sunday School throughout my childhood and could recite Psalm 23 by the time I was 5. However, as I grew up and began to form my opinions based on worldly experiences, I started to stray away from God. I struggled to answer questions like “Why would God let bad things happen to good people?” and when I lost my friend Gabriel to suicide on January 22nd, I began to feel resentment towards Him. January 30th, a year and eight days later, my dad died, and my faith died with him.

As a 13-year-old trying to cope with the grief of losing my friend, I felt anger towards him for not thinking of others in his life, but as a 14-year-old who had just lost her father, the only thing I felt for him was understanding. After fighting for months, the week I was going to take my own life, I found myself at the altar on a Wednesday, reaccepting Jesus back into my life. Despite the times I blamed Him, He continued to love me anyway. In the dark of my room, when I felt consumed by loneliness, He was beside me, wiping my tears.

He gave me purpose through my pain when He led me to Teen Leadership, showing me that I could fashion my grief into something that supported and educated others. I found passion in using my voice to help youth struggling with mental illness. Serving on the Teen Leadership staff team has shown me the impact I have when I stand in the strength God gave me. Over the last 4 years, I have supported hundreds of teens and created spaces for them to realize they are worthy, simultaneously cultivating a passion for mental health and supporting youth.

By placing me in a family where education was put above everything, I developed core values centered around the importance of education. I now know that while life can strip material possessions or change the plans I make for myself, what cannot be taken is my drive to keep learning and growing. By majoring in psychology on a pre-medical track, I am continuing my

education and preparing myself to share knowledge that can bring hope to struggling youth. I will get to show youth that it is not their circumstances and struggles that define them, but their strength and ability to keep going. I aim to empower every young person I meet to work toward lasting change, not just temporary solutions.

By dedicating my life to equipping young people with the tools to overcome their struggles, I hope to honor Randy's legacy, whose life and values continue to inspire those he left behind. Continuing my education and sharing my knowledge on mental health is not just a career path, but a calling from God that allows me to use my story to help others continue writing their own.