

I am the younger of two Maryland-born boys. Growing up, Dad traveled to Pennsylvania for work, coming home every few weeks. Mom handled a lot of parental duties on her own, but Mom and Dad provided essentials for the household. They kept us busy in the evening with after-school sports, namely baseball and soccer. However, as we grew older, our parents' marriage dissolved, putting extracurricular activities on hold. Our immediate needs had changed.

Shortly after my parents' separation, I entered junior high school at age 11. Everything around me seemed to be in turmoil. I had to deal with entering a new school and having to make new friends, all while maturing into a teen. Opportunities to participate in after-school or summer activities (outlets to "work off" stress) were a thing-of-the-past, so my feeling of being emotionally lost accumulated. Frustration consumed me.

My suppressed emotions erupted into disaster when I started high school. After only a few months in the ninth grade, I was suspended for 10 days pending an expulsion hearing for bullying other students. The 10-day suspension led to my grades suffering; I barely passed. I had to repeat classes and write apology letters to those I hurt. Realizing I needed better ways to keep myself busy, my parents and grandparents pulled together enough money to send me to summer soccer camp at the local college. I was shocked when they said I could go because the camp was very expensive. That said, my days and weekends of developing bad habits with neighborhood kids ended. At camp, I connected with other high-schoolers. I was finally around people my age that shared similar interests. Soccer camp was the only camp I ever attended in life, and it came at the right time in my life!

Camp was a welcomed distraction from my new life with separate. My mind was in the clouds as to where I belonged, but attending camp kept me grounded. I became independent at camp. Being forced to talk and work with complete strangers on a specific goal helped me grow. Camp became my outlet for stress, all while I was developing my soccer skills and making new friends. Aside from playing games in small and large groups, we talked about similar interests, colleges, and what we wanted to do in life. For the first time in my life, I was part of a community. I returned to high school with a newfound confidence that I belonged, also new friends from camp. I finished high school with honors and went on to college.

I often reminisce about my days at camp and wonder what my life would be if I had not been afforded that opportunity; I cannot imagine. With the help of family and friends, I started the Smith Foundation to afford underprivileged youth the opportunity to attend camp. I want every kid to have the opportunity to participate in summer camp because the experience could be life-changing. In order to reach our full potential, we just have to exercise our undiscovered skills. The Smith Foundation's goal is to plant seeds that grow continuously inside our youth.