



MY JOURNEY



John Paul Campbell

University of Puget Sound
Bachelors of Science in Business

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I would like to start off by saying, my story isn't told for sympathy, but for everyone around me to learn a little about who I am and to teach people that we should never give up on life. We should stay true to ourselves and understand that sometimes it is okay to ask for help.

My journey begins in Guatemala. In 1994 Guatemala was in the middle of a civil war. I was born in Guatemala City and shortly after birth I was left in the middle of the street. An orphan, from the very beginning. It was only by the grace of someone who picked me up off the street and placed me with an orphanage that

I am alive today. Orphanages are very common throughout Guatemala and filled with children. Out of hundreds of babies, at 2 months old, I was taken by plane from Guatemala to Los Gatos California where I was placed with adoptive family.

I grew up a normal child, or so I thought. Unfortunately, the single mother who had adopted me had chosen to neglect me severely. By age of 9/10 I began to understand I was being treated differently at home. School became my escape. I wasn't given meals, rides to school, or allowed to see my friends. Anger slowly built up inside of me because I had no one to turn to. Without a father, real parents, or the courage to talk to another adult about what was happening in my adoptive home, I let my mom dictate my life. I was labeled crazy, angry, and violent by many of the top psychiatrists in the Silicon Valley. Every meeting I sat silent, let them prescribe medication after medication. I was unable to speak up and defend myself.

My life changed completely in August of 2007. My first day of eighth grade. I strapped up my Nike shoes. They had holes through them and had been my shoes since the end of elementary school. It was my younger brother's first day of 6th grade and I was excited to show him around campus. To my dismay, I wasn't given breakfast or lunch. I fumbled for some change I had been collecting, hoping I had enough to buy myself something to eat. I attended first period, but before second period I was called into the office. There were police there. They had come to arrest me. It turns out, my adoptive mom had called claiming I had attacked her and was dangerous. I was told all would be figured out in a few hours, but I ended up in juvenile hall for 128 days.

I was finally released on January 2nd, 2008 and was taken to a group home in Marin County called St. Vincent's. I lived at St Vincent's for about a year and a half before I was placed in a foster home. It was a tough transition living in a home after being in juvenile hall and a St. Vincent's. My life had been consumed by rules and finally I felt freedom with my new foster family. For the first time I felt loved and supported.

It was not easy to get used to a new family. I spent most of high school trying to learn what a "family" really was. I had never experienced a family bond like the one my foster family offered. In high school I played football, basketball and swam. By the end of high school, I knew I wanted to continue to play football in college.

I started college after graduating high school at Whittier College in eastern LA. I played football there. I quickly realized Whittier was not the right fit for me and ended up returning home. I went to a local community college. It was tough taking what felt like a step back, but I kept my eyes forward, fixed on next steps. I eventually received a call from the football coach at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma Washington. I attended Puget Sound my sophomore through senior years of college; majoring in business. I played on their football team and participated in many other campus activities, such as the kayaking club.

Four years ago, when I first sat down with Ashlee and Sherri and interviewed for the YES Scholarship, I had no idea I would be here now. The YES Scholarship enabled me to attend college and take out very little loans. It is a blessing to have the Silicon Valley Children's Fund working so closely with us scholars. Their help and support goes a long way in supporting us in reaching our goals of being college graduates.

My one piece of advice, is never give up. It is so easy to take shortcuts in life. There were so many times when I could have taken the easy road and not tried; I could have been defeated by my time in juvenile hall or St. Vincent's. In high school, I could have not cared and not worked hard and just gone through the motions. Today I can say I am a college graduate and it is because I did not give up. If you set your sights on something, I say go and get it.

I want to thank the Silicon Valley Children's Fund for giving me the opportunity to reach my goal of finishing school with the support of the YES Scholarship. I want to congratulate the Class of 2016 on all of your hard work, WE DID IT! For the rest of you, still making your way, your time will come! It is worth all of the ups and downs.

Thank you so much for listening to me share my story. **Remember, NEVER GIVE UP!**

Thanks!