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I'm Possible
Aszanee Laws

Fall semester of August 2010, the month I decided to give up on life. I was drowning in failure, and I just knew that college wasn't for me. I never considered myself to be a quitter, but at that very moment I really didn't care. I just wanted out.

During my freshman and sophomore years of high school I knew I had it all figured out. I knew what I wanted to be in life and how I was going to get there. Ever since I was a little girl in elementary school I wanted to be a teacher. I always played school with my younger siblings and cousins; it brought so much joy to me. I loved watching little kids learn and discover new things, and I wanted to be a part of that. My love for teaching came from my mother. She always taught pre-kindergarten children, and was well loved by the parents, staff and her students. Now that I think about it, I guess you can say I wanted to be like her. I admired her patience with the children and the way she was able to teach them.

My mom was my inspiration behind wanting to be a teacher, but as I got older I realized that being a teacher wouldn't cut it. Growing up showed me that I wanted more out of life. I wanted to provide for my family, and give them things they could never imagine, and being a teacher wouldn't help me accomplish that. I gave up on my dreams of being a teacher because I figured out that they didn't make much money, so in typical "Aszanee fashion", the way that I go about doing things, I thought of a job that involved children but provided a much larger salary. I came up with the idea of becoming a pediatrician.

I held on to that dream through my senior year in high school, but when I entered community college I quickly changed that goal because I was told that I would have to deal with a lot of math, and I absolutely hate math! Back to the drawing board I went. I struggled with what I wanted to be in life. All I knew was that I wanted to make a difference and provide for my family at the same time. I wrestled with questions like, "What are you good at?" and "What interests you?" I didn't know the answer to those at the time, in regards to a career. I was lost and confused. I wondered how people came to the conclusion on what they wanted to be in life. I even tried some of those career-matching surveys.

My cousin played football since he was five years old, and when he was about ten we made a pact. He was extremely good and had people looking at him at an early age; so we agreed that he would make it to the NFL and I would be his lawyer, no ifs ands or buts about it. We were both kids at the time, and I really didn't take becoming an actual lawyer seriously, I just planned to appoint myself his lawyer when he made it, how naïve. It wasn't until I was arguing with

someone that I realized, this is fun and I can't lose doing what I'm good at; proving my point, while proving someone else is wrong.

On top of realizing that I like to argue, so to speak, I started seeing things in the media about injustice, and hearing stories about how public defenders are pretty much there to make people take plea deals. Public defenders don't genuinely fight for their clients like a lawyer that was hired and paid by the client would. I had an "ah ha!" moment. I knew just then that my destiny was to become a lawyer, but not just any lawyer. I remembered the pact I had with my cousin, who had just entered high school at this time, and I decided to do a bit of research on sports and entertainment lawyers. I learned that they made a good amount of money. I thought to myself, perfect! I then decided that I would be a sports and entertainment lawyer, but then I realized that wouldn't solve my problem of wanting to make a difference, so in typical "Aszanee fashion" I decided that I had to revamp my career choice. I decided that since being a sports and entertainment lawyer would make the money I wanted, I could provide pro-bono work to individuals who are in need of a lawyer, but who don't have the necessary means to get one. It was a win-win situation. I had a goal, and I was determined to accomplish it, but I underestimated the challenges that would occur while trying to achieve that goal.

When I first attended American River College in the fall of 2009 I was ill prepared, and that resulted in a catastrophe. I was unsuccessful my first two semesters of college during the 2009 and 2010 school year. I was extremely hurt when I saw that I failed those classes. I knew I didn't put in the effort to pass, but failing was the last thing I had expected. Previous to that, I had only failed one class in my life, and that was my Algebra II class during my junior year in high school, but seeing those F's made me wonder if I was even smart enough to proceed past the high school level. I felt defeated, because not succeeding at something so early on gave me the attitude that college was not meant for me, and that was not a feeling I was used to.

I didn't know how to cope with that feeling so I did the only thing that felt right, without thinking I immaturely dropped out and decided that I was going to go after the dream of becoming the next reality star, model, actress, or musician. When the fall 2010 school year came around I refused to enroll back at American River College, and instead I started brainstorming ways that could possibly get me on television. Upon dropping out I did not have a plan, I did not do any research on the steps to take to get to the level of being a television star, and I had no idea of how many people were fighting to succeed at the same empty dream of instant fortune and fame with little to no success. I did not do anything in efforts of pursuing my television career. I didn't attend auditions; I didn't record songs; I

didn't make a profile; I didn't even do the basics of taking head shots. I was out of school and doing absolutely nothing with my life.

Deciding to quit was the easy part, but I still had to tell my family. I was so afraid of what they would think of me because all of my life I was the "smart one." My family held me on an educational pedestal, and telling them that their "beloved, intelligent Aszanee" was not as smart as they thought I was, was going to be the hardest thing I ever had to do up to that point in my life. I couldn't muster up the courage to tell them the truth, so I lied. When my mom asked, "Winnie, why aren't you preparing to return back to school?" The first thing that came to my mind was to tell her,

"Oh mom, I didn't tell you? I can't go to school this semester because there aren't any open classes, but don't worry because that it is normal for students to have to sit out a semester or two because I don't have registration priority."

"Wow! That's not right. They need to do a better job at making sure everyone that wants to be in school has that opportunity."

I knew my family really didn't know how the whole college registration thing worked, so I played on that. I wasn't happy with myself; in fact, I was pretty disappointed in myself, but I'd rather be disappointed in myself than see the disappointment in my family's eyes. I knew that they all looked for me to be successful educationally, especially being the oldest of my siblings. As a kid I prided myself on boasting over my grades, but that wasn't the case in college, and I didn't want the image my family had of me to be tainted. I had to deal with my failure, and I didn't want to drag my family down with me.

During my time off from school I realized that if I stayed out with the attitude "school is not for me," then I would just be repeating the cycle of those before me who did not attend college, or just gave up when things began to get too hard to handle. I went back and forth with myself contemplating on what I was going to do with my life if I did not return to college, and I also thought about what I would do if I did go back. The answer became clearer as I weighed out my pros and cons:

Pros to going back to college:

1. get educated
2. receive a degree
3. get a job
4. become successful
5. own my own business
6. gain independence

Cons to staying out of college:

1. be stagnant
2. only have a high school diploma

3. work at a fast food restaurant or department store for the rest of my life
4. be dependent

I came to the conclusion that staying out of school would not benefit me, but in fact it would actually hinder me in the long run.

After two months of feeling stagnant, I decided to look in the mirror and ask myself, "What do you really hope to achieve out of this life that you live?" It took me a moment of deep thought to genuinely answer that question, and what I came up with was that I hope to achieve great knowledge, the ability to serve, success, and the ability to break out of the box of low self-esteem, ignorance, put downs and statistics. Being African American and the first person in my family to attend college, I was able to take a serious look at my surroundings and see exactly what I did not want out of life, which was to be stuck in a world that consists of depression, stress, over exhaustion and under payment.

I knew that I wanted to be able to provide for my family, my current family and my future family, financially and give them things in life in which they are not familiar with. I did not come from the wealthiest home in the world, but I can say that my mother did the very best that she could as a single mother with four children. She provided for us in any and every way possible, even if it meant giving up her last or sacrificing something that she wanted, and for that I am extremely grateful. With all of that in mind I came to the decision to return back to college. That decision was not easy though, I had to disregard my previous failures and really center my attention on the idea that it wasn't my intelligence that resulted in those failures; it was my lack of effort. I returned back to American River College in the spring year of 2011 with the attitude that without school I would amount to absolutely nothing. I was determined to go back and prove that college was for me, and that I would succeed and provide a better life for my family and me.

When I did go back I began repeating classes, and even though I was unable to receive financial aid and I did not have a job, I managed to find a way to pay for my books. Although it was hard and stressful trying to come up with the money I did not give up. I moved in with my step mother, and she agreed to help me pay for my books, because she said she had faith in me. I was determined to get my books and genuinely give college a real attempt. That semester made me realize that nothing good comes for free, but through hard work, ambition, faith, and dedication any and everything is possible.

After my spring 2011 semester was over I witnessed with my own eyes that I could do good in school, I got a 3.0 GPA for that semester, and I became very motivated. I was so impressed with myself. I felt a sense of achievement and pride, and I immediately went back to my little girl stage of feeling the need to boast about my grades and show that I was and am capable of succeeding educationally. I knew that at that moment, I was smart enough to continue. I

continued with school and I attended for the fall 2011 semester and received a 2.0 GPA, because I failed my math 120 class. That was not the best GPA ever, but it was good compared to where I started from. Even after coming up a little short I continued to work hard and for the spring 2012 semester I received a GPA of 2.9, and for the fall 2012 semester a 3.0.

I felt like I was given a second chance in life by not only returning to college, but also by succeeding with a plan. My plan was to be finished at American River College no later than fall 2013, if not sooner. I planned on being completely transferred and ready to start the four-year institution of my choice by the spring semester of 2014, again if not sooner. I did just as I planned; in the fall of 2013 I was accepted to Loyola Marymount University. I knew that at the rate that I was going, minus my minor setback, my goals were tangible and my plan for providing a better life for my family and I was well on its way.

When I went to check the mailbox and saw that big white envelope with the red seal, I was ecstatic. I ran straight into the house and tore that envelope open. When I saw the words “Congratulations Aszanee Laws,” nothing else mattered and I just broke down and began to cry. My mom was at work, and I was at home alone, so I had a chance to take it all in before I made my round of phone calls. I immediately took a picture and posted it to Instagram, then I called my family. Everyone was so happy for me, because they knew just how hard I worked, and they were willing to do whatever they could to help take my education to the next level.

Deciding to return to college, or take the opposing road of chasing a dream of instant fortune and fame demanded me to think critically and analytically about the possible effects each direction could have on my life. When I took the time out, and actually thought about what I wanted out of life, I weighed out my two options which essentially broke down to being; I could choose a life of assurance, stability, and education, or, I could choose a life of under employment, government assistance and heartache. It took some thinking about my situation and surroundings for me to be able to put it in that perspective, and I had to think hard about the actual reality of me making it on television, or me making it through education. Assessing my life from this stand point helped me arrive at the decision of returning back to American River College, and the fire to further educate myself was lit. It took me integrating my intelligence and character to realize that not educating myself was only going to add me to the statistic pile of uneducated African Americans, and I knew that was not a part of who I wanted to become. I am a strong, independent, and intelligent individual. With critical self-assessing I was able to realize, and capitalize off of that. Looking back, I now see that I have a new found confidence and ambition to succeed. I am more focused

and dedicated than ever, and that is due to me taking time out to think about the impact of my decisions, rather than just thinking or not thinking at all.

When I made the move from a community college to a university, and not just any university but LMU, I thought, “I finally made it!” I felt a sense of pride. I felt that all of my hard work has finally paid off, and there was no way I was going back to Sacramento.

Those feelings were short lived, however. The first week of school was so depressing. I missed my family, I felt alone, and on top of all that, my phone was not working. I had to communicate with my family through Facebook for the first two weeks of my new life. I have always been so dependent on my family, but when I moved here, nothing was the same. It was as if I needed them, but they no longer needed me. I was twenty two years old, and out on my own for the first time of my life. My classes started to pick up, and it was like work was due the second class meeting. Unfortunately, due to lack of finances and me not wanting to burden my family, I was unable to get my books. I literally cried every day for the first two weeks. I felt like I had been defeated as soon as I thought the game had been won. I had no one to turn to. I was depressed and ready to pack up my belongings and quit once again.

Right when I thought my life was over, I had a meeting with a staff member who I was informally introduced to through email over the summer, by someone who had graduated from LMU. When I say this lady changed my life, I mean it in the most sincere way possible. I sat in her office for the very first time, and cried my heart out to her as I described my struggles. She gave me a pep talk, and without hesitation she gave me the money to buy the books that was needed at that moment. At that very moment, I knew LMU was where God wanted me to be. This lady was meeting me for the first time, and saw something in me that took me years to see in myself, potential to succeed. I was so grateful, and my tears of despair turned into tears of joy. Things started to look up for me, although my financial burdens were far from over.

The first semester was extremely difficult to me, because I felt alone and that was not a feeling I enjoyed. I had a lot of time to think about my life, and it just made me so sad because I felt as if I wasn't where I was supposed to be in life at the age of twenty two. I sensed as if I was behind, like there was some written rule that said I had to be in a certain place in my life at a certain age. The biggest mistake was putting a times table on my life. I soon learned that comparing my progress and age to those of my peers was one of the dumbest things in the world that I could do. I learned that everyone is different and have very different situations. In retrospect, I think that in a weird way, I wasn't ready earlier in my life to buckle down and really focus on my goals and dreams. I have come to

accept that everything happens for a reason, and I came when I was mature enough to handle the life of a university college student, without getting sucked into the stereotypical college lifestyle of constant partying.

As the time passed and the semester was coming to a close, I learned that I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I had a goal to become the most successful sports and entertainment lawyer that was able to give pro-bono work to the financially underprivileged, and I was determined to accomplish that goal. I was afraid to see my grades, because I didn't want a repeat of my first semester in community college, and I knew that the first month or so at LMU had been extremely rough for me. I just hoped it didn't show in my coursework. It didn't! I received a 3.14 GPA for that semester, and I was so ecstatic. I couldn't believe my eyes. I couldn't believe that the same person who thought she wouldn't be able to succeed at the community college level, let alone the private university level, had done so well. I was convinced that LMU was my new home and nothing would change that, so I thought.

Spring 2014 came, and I was excited. I had just passed all of my previous classes, and this time, financial aid helped me out a lot more, and so I was able to buy my books without stressing out. I was ready to conquer the world at this point. Just when my confidence was on the highest level it had been in a long time, it came soaring down within a month. I was hit with yet another bomb! I couldn't deal. My uncle and his wife came to visit me, and as soon as my aunt in-law saw the campus the first thing she asked was,

“Dang niece, how much do you have to pay to go here? This is a very nice school.”

“A little under sixty thousand dollars a year.” I knew exactly what her next question was going to be.

“Geez that is a lot of money. How are you paying for it all?”

“I had to get a student and a parent plus loan.” At the time of applying for college I knew I would never be able to pay for any college flat out, so I was prepared to take out loans. I was beyond ready to invest in my dreams, because I knew that I would be able to pay back my loans once I got on track with my career. I thought it was normal to get loans. I just wasn't aware of the amount of loans it would take. My aunt in-law had graduated from Sacramento State with her masters, and so she tried to explain to me that the amount of money I had in loans for my undergraduate degree was a bit absurd. I figured she would say that, but I wasn't prepared for what she would say next.

“I think you should think about transferring. There's other schools that you could get into with your GPA that are much cheaper than LMU.” I told her I would look into other schools and we said our goodbyes.

I really didn't want to transfer, but I thought she had a good point, because I still had to go to law school after I graduated. With everything in mind, I started

looking at other schools to transfer to. I looked up San Diego State, UCLA, CSULA, and a couple of other colleges, but to my surprise, the application deadlines had already passed. I needed another opinion. I went and talked to a very influential person at LMU, and her advice was pretty much the same as my aunt's. She set up a meeting for me to meet with a financial aid advisor and he told me the same thing, transfer. I broke down right in his office. I didn't want to transfer, because that meant I would have to take a semester off since the application deadlines had already passed. My heart dropped and my world was completely shook. I didn't know what to do. He advised me to appeal my financial aid award, yet again. I was determined not to give up, so I did just that. I went and had another meeting with LT, who told me about the student worker program. She advised me of the process, and how it would help me financially. I thought, what the heck? It's better to try and get rejected, then to not try at all.

I opened up the application and got immediately discouraged because it seemed like such a long process. I sucked it up, and stayed in the library to fill it out. I didn't hear back from them in the time frame that I was supposed to, so I began to get worried. Then I finally got the call to come in for an interview. I was so excited. I went through the whole interview process nervous as ever. Despite my nerves, they told me I had made it to the second round. Words couldn't describe the way I felt at that very moment. I was one step closer to being able to stay and finish my academic journey at LMU. The weeks after that were mentally hectic, because all I could think about was if I was going to get picked or not. Waiting is not my forte. As the days passed, I tried my best to keep my faith and remain positive. Right when I was on the verge of giving up hope, I got the phone call my life was depending on. "Aszanee, I would like to tell you that you have been accepted into the Student Worker Program." I almost screamed on the phone, but I held my composure fairly well. I was relieved, joyous, and grateful, all at the same time.

My life was looking up, and I loved it. I'm able to stay at LMU, and my dreams of becoming the best lawyer possible, and giving back to people who are facing similar financial burdens, are not too far off from becoming a reality. I look in the mirror every day and think to myself, "what would my life be like if I never gave myself a chance?" I almost knocked myself out of the fight before even getting into the ring. My story is nowhere near complete, but I know that I am perfectly capable of writing the ending that I want. Regardless of my trials and tribulations, I am still standing tall with my head held high. I now look back at everything as God's way of testing me to see how bad I really wanted it—and I passed!