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Running the System: From the 661 to the 310

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First Quarter:

“You and the 6 raised me right, that shit changed my life.”—Drake

I am from the Antelope Valley. Most call it the AV. Some refer to it as the Hi-Desert. Very few say the 661. I just call it home, more specifically Palmdale. Well some people say The Dale or Dirty Dale...anyways you get the point! Most people like to mock my hometown. I never take it to heart though. Trust, I am ALWAYS down for playful banter. However, it is the desert. It is filled with Joshua trees and tumbleweed. Palmdale is not the most exciting place to live, but that is fine. The landmarks of unforgettable experiences, the muses that moved me, and the people I have encountered originate from the real 6 side. This dustbowl has a special place in my heart.

Being an only child, I naturally have a strong relationship with my parents. They are the ones that INSTILLED that fire in me and INSISTED that it never fade away. You have to understand: both of my parents work(ed) for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Shit, talk about discipline. I’LL TELL YOU ABOUT DISCIPLINE! My parents are definitely not strict, but they do hold me to high expectations. I mean...I do not blame them! They have cultivated a calm and comfortable lifestyle for the family. My mother constantly excelled and promoted up the ranks. Now she is a retired Chief Deputy Warden. Meanwhile, my father is about to retire as a Correctional Officer.

Throughout my childhood, I watched how hard they worked. My mother was the epitome of diligence and success. She went from being a Correctional Officer, a Sargent, a Lieutenant, a Correctional Counselor II Supervisor, a Correctional Captain, an Associate Warden, and finally a Chief Deputy Warden. She was resilient to say the least. My mother was a Black woman rising up the ranks in a predominantly White, male institution. She transcended all borders and expectations. However, it did not come easy. I witnessed my mother study for hours and hours on end for the Captain exam. She did the same for the Associate Warden exam and did the same for the Chief Deputy Warden exam. She would lock herself in the bedroom, review material, tape record herself verbalizing what she studied, and repeat the process again. My mother had multiple binders, stacks of paper, and hours of tape recordings. She did this for weeks at a time. Then she had to endure the interview process and take a written exam. She was always prepared. Her motto ‘till this day is “stay ready so you don’t have to get ready.” I saw how overwhelmed she was. I recognized how important this was for her. I was in awe of her staunch work ethic.

I watched my father work overtime three to four times a week—6 am to 10 pm. Then wake up at 4:30 am to do it over again. On select weekends he would have go to work for additional Officer training. He even prevented an

inmate from escaping and was recognized for his efforts. My parents have, as the great Phil Jackson would say, “THAT WILL TO WIN”. They raised me to be compassionate, disciplined, humble, and sincere. They always told me that I could do anything in this world if I put in the time and work. I was conditioned to reach for excellence...and absolutely nothing short of it.

I understand the sacrifices my parents have made for me to be where I am today. I am appreciative to have been raised under such care and guidance. Their unwavering love and support will forever keep me grounded.

Second Quarter:

“Runnin thru the 6 with my woes!”—Drake

I attended Pinecrest Lancaster from pre-school to the eighth grade. The school was a private, non-religious institution. Saying that the school was influential in my life is an understatement. That was my academic and social foundation. I was able to come into my own and flourish there. To be honest, it was all I knew considering I was there for over ten years of my life. Being there brought me so much happiness. I felt a sense of belonging. The people there were like my second family.

I have met some lifelong friends at Pinecrest. They were my competitors, my inspiration, my soundboard, just everything man. It is inexplicable. Being an only child, I looked to them as my brothers and sisters. We grew up together. We cried, fought, and laughed together. They make up the majority of my childhood memories. I always kicked it with the boys. They just accepted me and took me in. We would play basketball, baseball, dodge ball, football, handball, and just about every other sport under the sun. Most times I was the only girl invited to the boys’ birthday parties and sleepovers (I would stay until they went to sleep, then I had to leave). Parents probably thought it was weird at first, but they became used to it. I never felt out of place or out of touch. They were my boys! Do not get me wrong though, I had some good times with the girls too!

The girls in my class were definitely something else. Our class as a whole was unique. However, the girls possessed this eccentric, yet mature demeanor. We would have slumber parties at hotels and sneak out of the room for the sake of it. We would dance around, jump on the beds, and prank-call the boys because we could. Then there was always that one girl that got sentimental on everyone and cried for some reason. It was all love though! If we were not sitting on the bleachers cracking jokes or making fun of each other, then we were play fighting and throwing shoes at each other. Or we were putting each other in the trashcan. Or having lunch with our teachers (right? like we actually enjoyed spending time with our middle school teachers).

As a collective, we all enjoyed each other and had each other's backs. From the class projects, to the school dances, to the sporting events, Pinecrest gave me so many great memories. It was always a good time with my friends, the faculty, staff, and teachers. They cultivated such a warm and welcoming environment. My time there played a significant role in my life.

Some of these people continue to be my right hand. Most I have lost contact with. There are others I only talk to on occasion. Life has taken us different places and that is okay. We will forever have that space and time in our memory that no one else will understand.

Third Quarter:

"Only see the truth when I'm starin in the mirror. Lookin at myself like, there it is there. Yeah, like there it is there man, woo!"—Drake

I attended Paraclete High School from ninth to twelfth grade. I like to think high school was my prime. To my knowledge, I was well liked by my peers. The teachers seemed fond of me. There were some haters, but they shall remain unnamed. Despite what everyone else thought, I knew I was all that. No one could tell me anything. I was on cloud nine and had no intention on coming down! I was Class President three out of four years, played varsity basketball, was in the newspaper numerous times for academics and sports, attended California Girls' State, and graduated as one of the valedictorians with a 4.3 GPA. LIKE WHAT?! Dignitaries in the community, other basketball coaches, students, and teachers all had something good to say about Alexis Hall. SHOOT! I felt like I was that bitch and I had every right too.

I was never boastful though. Life was in my favor, but I always remained humble. I did not feel the need to run around and brag. In my opinion, that was childish and ungrateful. I was thankful for such accolades and used them as motivation to keep excelling. It was not like everything came out of the blue. My accomplishments were a product of my persistence...and my parents staying on my ass. Everything was clockwork. Some mornings called for 5:45am basketball practice. Most times I didn't want to get up. Then I would hear my mom yell, "ALEXIS, get your mothafuckin ass up! You're not a quitter, are you?! You chose to play, so play! What are you doing?! Get your ass up and go to practice!" My dad would just laugh and shake his head. During the season, we would get back from away games at 11:00pm. Then it would be a night filled with homework. Go to bed at about 2:00am, wake up, and start over again. If I was not busy with basketball, then I was busy with ASB. If it was not ASB, then it was community service. If it was not community service, then it had schoolwork or something else. My life was busy, but I did not want it any other way. I always

wanted to excel and push myself to the next level. Complacency was not in my vocabulary.

There were times when I felt stressed. I felt like I was under pressure. I felt worn out. However I wanted to set myself apart. I knew that was what I had to do. Then again, I had a feeling that it was much more than that. As a Black girl, I felt like I had to go above and beyond all expectations so my presence was felt. (Honestly, I felt that way my entire life. I still feel this way). You know? I had something to prove. The Antelope Valley is a predominantly White area; thus, I always attended predominantly White schools. So it was like “yes, Black people can do this and do it very well”, especially when it came to my academic and leadership endeavors. So when I hosted the homeroom show, spoke at campus wide events, or whatever the occasion, I was speaking on behalf of all Black students. That gave me a sense of intense pride.

I look back on it now, and it's like....damn, what now? What does it all mean? At times I think, “these accolades don't mean shit in the grand scheme of things. Or do they?” They are tokens of my efforts. Behind each honor there is a memory. There is a story. I am grateful for the experiences. I know firsthand how far persistence can take a person. I know how support from your loved ones keeps a person going. Most importantly, I understand that this cannot be the end all be all. There are more milestones that I will have to overcome. There is more life to live. There is more room for growth.

Fourth Quarter:

*“I don't wanna miss the boat, I don't wanna sit in coach.
I don't wanna sit at home, I gotta get where I'm going...”—Drake*

Attending Loyola Marymount University is the best decision I have made thus far. I knew that this is where I needed to be. The people here have shown me nothing short of sincere care and compassion. My mentors and professors have had a profound impact on the expansion of my worldview. They took the time to listen to my concerns and doubts. They believed in me when I did not believe in myself. They encouraged me to venture beyond my comfort zone. Without them, I probably would not have studied abroad in China. I would not have had the opportunity to intern with an Assemblywoman. They motivated and supported me every step of the way. My mentors and professors have molded me into a more comprehensive and receptive person. My friends have shown me what true friendships look like. We challenge each other. We encourage one another to be our best selves. We check each other when we're trippin. At the end of the day, it is nothing but love between us. It is nice going through this thing called life with such compassionate, determined, and unique people surrounding me.

As an LMU student, I have come to value self-reflection. I try not to involve myself in the superficialities of life. Don't get me wrong! I love to have a good time and I am probably the most lighthearted person ever. However, I have come to really appreciate authenticity, complexity, and individuality in the objects and people around me. I do not feel the need to live up to others' expectations of me anymore. That is not a good way to go through life. I have come to understand that not every accomplishment comes along with a title or deserves an accolade. As long as I know what I have done and I understand its importance is all that matters. I cannot live life based on the confirmation of others. That is what characterized my life before LMU. Therefore, I cherish and practice the notion of self-validation.

Being at LMU has been an incredible experience up to now. I have had the opportunity to be involved within our campus community and the greater Los Angeles area. I have learned that I love to help others. I enjoy being the catalyst to others' success. Being a Resident Advisor, tutoring kids at the Boys and Girls Club, and showing first generation high school students college is their reality has been rewarding. One of my proudest moments as a LMU student is selecting the class motto for the Class of 2018 ("What is easy is seldom excellent"—Samuel Johnson) and giving the Convocation speech to the incoming freshmen. My goal was to convey that challenge was something we all fret over, yet simultaneously strived for. Without challenge, we only hindered our own personal growth. However, once we conquered that greatest feat that was when we achieved true excellence. The speech gave me a platform to convey my experiences as a freshman, describe how LMU has shaped me, impart words of encouragement, and leave my print on Lion history. It also allowed me to reevaluate myself to continue embracing challenge in my own life.

My college experience so far has been nothing short of exceptional. LMU has really shown me the essence of Alexis. Words cannot explain the gratitude and pride I have for this university. LMU continues to open my eyes to new things about others, the world, and myself. I have never felt so confident and sure in something as I do for LMU. Everyday I wake up and thank my lucky stars for allowing me to be here. This institution is a close-knit community with people that really care about my success and well being. I can certainly say that LMU has been a source of life-changing experiences and unforgettable people. There is nowhere else I would rather be. I will forever bleed crimson and blue.

Overtime

"What am I afraid of, this is suppose to be what dreams are made of..."—Drake

I think what I am most afraid of is not living up to my full potential. I have

set outstanding goals for myself. I do not want to fall short of them. Things do not just come to those that wait. I have always understood the concept of hard work and dedication. I know that I embody those characteristics. Now I wonder: what keeps me going? What lights that fire under my ass? It is like “The lights are on you, Alexis. What are you going to do?”

That is where I am at in life right now. I am just trying to figure out who I aspire to be, how to get there, and why I want to get there. That is my focus. I intend on achieving that for myself. It has always been about being a good person with good intentions that is doing well in life. I am sure that with diligence, purpose, and time that I will not only accomplish my goals, but also exceed them. It is what I have done my entire life. This should be second nature to me.