

Greater Richmond Relocation Council Scholarship - Personal Essay

One thing I've learned in my life is that my family is always there for me, no matter what. I'm extremely fortunate to have wonderful parents and two awesome—and rather silly—brothers (although they can be a bit crazy sometimes, I would not trade them for the world). Family means so much and I do not take mine for granted; I share the funniest, happiest memories with mine. Hardships, like separations because of my father's Marine Corps deployments, or our frequent relocations, have only strengthened our bonds. Over the past seventeen years, I have moved many times: from Virginia, to California, to Hawaii, then to Colorado, and finally back to Virginia. I've had to leave close friends and neighborhoods behind; however, my family has always been supportive and a source of strength and stability.

Being a military dependent has allowed me to see and experience a wide variety of things—some wonderful, some tragic. Among these many unique experiences, relocating frequently has taught me how to succeed in different cultures, schools, and communities. Although it has been difficult at times, I am grateful for these moves, as they have strengthened my character and provided occasion to explore a wide variety of interests—and taught me to turn new challenges into learning experiences and opportunities to grow, and succeed.

Now, when I think about what I want to do when I'm older, a vast array of thoughts floods my head. I envision myself working with NASA, building spaceships, going into other galaxies and discovering the unknown. I see myself pondering at my desk, trying to solve the world's problems with creative ideas, as an engineer. I picture myself putting my interests of criminology and psychology to good use and working with the FBI...or maybe even thriving in the hectic scene of a hospital, performing neurosurgery and helping to save lives every day.

To be quite honest, I am not sure exactly what I want to be; however, I do have goals. I want to be successful...for me, this means doing something I am passionate about which not only makes me happy, but helps others, challenges me, and contributes to society. I love math, science, and technology. I especially enjoy how science is intellectually stimulating and involves observation alongside experimentation. New behaviors and characteristics are constantly being uncovered through continuous questioning, analysis, and the human desire to learn and understand. I love how there is always more to discover within these fields, and they allow my creative side to show—it's a bit like solving a puzzle. So, even though I am not sure exactly which career path I want to take, I strongly believe that my past and current academic courses and extracurricular activities have prepared me for what is to come, and my journey in college will immensely strengthen my preparedness for the future.

I've had some amazing experiences since moving to Virginia: working with other students from across the state as a Virginia Aerospace, Science and Technology Scholar (VASTS) at NASA's Langley Research Center to design a manmade mission to Mars; spending an incredible month of the Summer at the Math, Science, and Technology Governor's School at Lynchburg College (and making lifelong friends there

in the process); learning important values through the Frances Hesselbein Leadership Program during a week at the U.S. Air Force Academy; and working with other “student diplomats” during a world crisis simulation at the Model NATO Challenge. I’ve found that the Richmond/Tidewater area has so many available enrichment opportunities for high school students. Along with these great experiences, I’ve also enjoyed annual volleyball tournaments at the Richmond Convention Center the last two Memorial Day weekends. Playing volleyball the past eight years of my life, and these other adventures more recently, have all served as critical educational stepping stones throughout my life.

Sports can definitely be a good constant to help bridge relocations. Fortunately, volleyball came into my life in sixth grade. I fell in love with the sport, and it has been a major part of my life and a source of stability during frequent moves. Sometimes it actually seemed like that was all I was doing...volleyball, volleyball, volleyball (and school of course). High school season, practice every day; club season, tournaments on the weekend; strength training, game day--it was almost never-ending. But I loved every part of it and have learned so much from playing this wonderful sport. It has taught me how to be a team player, how to work hard, and most importantly it has taught me time management. It has also helped me to appreciate my parents even more, to understand how much they do for me despite their hectic schedules, and to be thankful for my teammates, my coaches, and all of the support people and volunteers. I think it has helped prepare me very well to overcome obstacles, and I would not take back a single second of it. Volleyball also has a special place in my heart because I have met many of my closest friends through it.

Relationships with friends are very important. Moving every few years can make it challenging to develop enduring ties with others, but I have managed to keep in touch with several friends from each place I’ve called home--today’s technology is definitely a blessing! Whenever we visit or talk to each other on the phone, it is like nothing has changed, despite the thousands of miles of separation. Courtney, my closest friend in Virginia Beach, just moved to Japan, and although it was hard saying goodbye, I am excited for her and for the adventures she will experience. I routinely communicate with another great friend, Natalie, a neighbor from my Colorado years. My childhood friend Kelsey—with whom I spent so many days, years ago while living in Hawaii—also remains very close to me. I value all of these friendships, and look forward to making many more in college and throughout my life. Although it takes time and effort to maintain contact and nurture relationships with people across the country (and world), it is definitely worth the effort; sustaining these bonds and friendships make life so much more beautiful and meaningful.

I encourage those who move frequently or have recently relocated to the Richmond/Tidewater area (or anywhere) and left loved ones behind to adapt and overcome when transferring into new communities and schools. It can be intimidating (and even scary), but learning to take chances, to be bold, and to put yourself out there helps you meet others and opens doors to numerous opportunities. Once I became comfortable with this myself, I realized how many others go through similar struggles, and helped start a Student 2 Student (S2S) Coalition at my school. S2S groups are awesome, and are at many schools in the Richmond/Tidewater area. There are also

great online resources like “Checklists for Transitioning Students” (check out <https://www.schoolquest.org/resource-library/resource/transitioning-student-checklist>). New students should see if their school has an S2S--and if not, start one!

I have made many connections in Virginia and I now strive to encourage others to participate and help make a new student’s day. I have been presented with many changes and have faced numerous hurdles: different school systems, new teachers, varying requirements and expectations, having to make new friends, and the need to impress unfamiliar coaches. From community to community and house to house, I have taken with me bits and pieces of what has helped me to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically; these pieces of my military-influenced “life education” served as continuity during transition and continue to help me to this day. Get involved, pursue passions, pay attention, have fun, stay focused, set goals, explore the community, make friends, have respect, be responsible, take chances, love your country, seek personal improvement—these have helped me to be successful, and I am confident I will continue using these lessons I’ve learned as I move forward in the future!

The Richmond/Tidewater area is full of friendly people and has so many things to offer. Busch Gardens and Kings Dominion are nearby for the roller coaster lovers. The beautiful beaches are always fun places to go hangout, to be in nature and relax, and maybe even see dolphins. A day at the Boardwalk is never a bad idea. Mount Trashmore is one of many great parks to visit. Virginia Beach has an Aquarium, Ocean Breeze Waterpark, and Adventure Park (with various ropes courses and lots of zip lines--it’s so fun!) Richmond has Carytown with lots of good food, great shopping, and endless people watching. There are many trails to hike and festivals to see, too. So for those who recently relocated to the area, I recommend getting out and exploring; there really is so much to do. Making new friends makes it even more exciting, so introduce yourself to others as much as possible--it will be worth it, I promise!