

# ACE Award encourages students to give all

Jennifer M. Slattery 12:10 a.m. EDT May 10, 2014

*Award has reminded me how much a couple of words can mean to somebody, and now I take time to make sure someone knows that I am proud of the things they have done and the person they have become.*



At nine years old I was diagnosed with Fibrosarcoma, a type of cancer that no one had any information on. However, thankfully, it wasn't an aggressive kind and after two surgeries, I was free of cancer.

With that obstacle, though, came baggage. I was ashamed of my story. For years I didn't want anyone to know what had happened to me, so I denied it even to myself. My sophomore year of high school was when my life turned around.

My social studies teacher, Marcus Drango, was leading the Relay for Life team for Hillcrest High School and needed volunteers to help. Even though I was still embarrassed about my story, I decided to go to his co-captain to tell her about it. She immediately asked me to help out.

At the time I was willing to do anything, but I wanted to do it as a student, not a survivor. Throughout our fundraising drive, I grew to appreciate the concept of what it meant to be a survivor.

Beginning my junior year in high school, I was anxious to help. One day, Mr. Drango asked me if I would speak in front of the entire student body at our Relay for Life pep rally. My whole life as a survivor I didn't want anybody to know my story, and now I was about to tell it to every student and faculty member.

When I had to stop talking because my class of 2013 was chanting, "We love Jennifer", it was clear that I had officially beaten cancer. The doctors may have removed it when I was nine, but it had still consumed me until that moment.

I was nominated for the Coaches 4 Character ACE Award because of what I did for our Relay for Life team. I never knew that the blessings of that day would continue to follow me a year later. Anyone who knows me will tell you that I will do anything asked of me, and I never expect anything in return. I was an "unsung hero."

When my guidance counselor told me I was nominated, it was truly surreal. It showed that my hard work was noticed, even if it was only by one person that went the extra mile to say thank you. I asked over and over again who nominated me, but my counselor told me she had no idea.

As I was walking back to my seat after I received my ACE Award at the ceremony last May, I saw my Spanish teacher, Anna Cuyar. She congratulated me and told me that she was the one who nominated me. It meant so much to be surprised by her as I was being rewarded.

My experience was overwhelming and I wanted to share the joy I felt in being noticed. This year I decided to nominate a friend of mine. I have always looked up to her, as she truly is a prime example of an unsung hero. I nominated her because very few understand her personal struggles and the way she has overcome them. She deserves to be rewarded for everything she has accomplished and just like Mrs. Cuyar did for me, I asked to remain anonymous.

Winning the ACE Award has encouraged me to continue giving my all. Even though everyone may not see the amount of work and dedication I put into things, it only takes one person's recognition to feel appreciated. It has reminded me how much a couple of words can mean to somebody, and now I encourage myself to take the couple of minutes to make sure someone knows that I am proud of the things they have done and the person they have become.

I am at Greenville Tech now, studying to be an elementary school teacher. The Coaches 4 Character ACE Award has already opened my eyes to techniques I can use in my classroom one day to make sure that deserving students are recognized for the good things they do. If I can put a smile on a child's face by saying "thank you" for something they did, it is a great day.

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