

Dream Deferred:

My Path to the Ivy of the Midwest



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The weather in early February in Nebraska is bitter and unforgiving, but despite having just come in from the cold, I felt the familiar clammy palms of anxiety and the buzzing warmth of excitement. I was awaiting the decision of an opportunity that would allow me to live out a dream I had carried with me since I was 10 years old.

The dream of going to an esteemed institution to further my education. I had always known I wanted to go to college, since I was old enough to know what it was. At such a young age, my goals were unhindered by the reality of being a low-income

student, with all the odds stacked against me.

Despite always knowing college was the most logical pathway to feed my love of learning, I can pinpoint the exact moment I knew which direction my life was heading. In 5th grade, my elementary school hosted a career day. My classmates' parents shuffled in to our class rooms and took turns presenting their various high-achieving careers. I was relatively uninterested, as at the time my heart was set on studying marine biology and there aren't too many of those in Nebraska. Until Dr. Shahab Abdessalam flicked on his PowerPoint presentation.

Instead of the usual oral presentation about the ins and outs of everyday work life, Dr. Abdessalam provided images of injuries he had worked on and told stories of cases he had seen as a

pediatric surgeon. Where all my fellow students became squeamish, I was enthralled with his stories, hanging on to every word.

When he was finished speaking, we had to quickly move to the next eager parent, but I wanted to know so much more. I started doing my own research on all sorts of medicine and schools that could get me to where I wanted to go.

When it was time to choose my middle school, I choose to attend McMillan Magnet, a school with a heavy emphasis on STEM curriculum to allow my love of science and passion for school to flourish.

I eventually decided to continue with this path and go to North Magnet for high school. There, I was really able to nurture my love for medicine and pick out colleges I knew would be a good fit. With my time as an underclassman in the rearview, the

idea of college was becoming infinitely more real.

But so did the idea of paying for it.

I scoured the internet for scholarships for everything from academics to having hazel eyes.

Coming from a low-income family, I knew the financial burden of school would be mine alone, and any savings I had, had just gone to buying a car.

I slowly lost hope as I realized that all the hard work I put in may not even matter if I had no way to pay. I began looking more at in-state schools, much cheaper than their academically rigorous counterparts that I had my heart set on.

The more I looked, the more I couldn't help but feel that I was betraying my younger self whose dreams couldn't be held back by the harsh reality of the circumstance.

This was not

something I was willing to settle for, and I'm known to have quite the stubborn streak, so when I heard about the Questbridge Scholars program, I knew I had to at



QUESTBRIDGE
College Prep Scholar &
National College Match

least try.

Questbridge is an organization designed to assist students from non-traditional, low-income households with college applications to universities that may otherwise seem unattainable. They partner with 45 schools nationwide,

including Ivy Leagues and top-rated liberal arts colleges. Two main programs are offered, the College Prep Scholars, and the National College Match.

I was first selected as a College Prep Scholar in April of 2021. I was provided with

materials and given the opportunity to speak to admissions counselors to help me build the strongest applicant profile.

Summer of 2021, the National College Match application opened. It felt like my last chance at making that little girl proud.

Finally, in the fall, I found out I was a finalist. I would get the opportunity to rank my top choices of the given partners, with the potential of receiving a full ride scholarship.

For a month, I obsessively checked my email, hoping for some sign of good news.

regardless, and crossed my fingers for good financial aid.

Then Washington University, a small, research institution in St. Louis and the school that I ranked 2nd, sent me an email encouraging me to move my application to Early Decision.

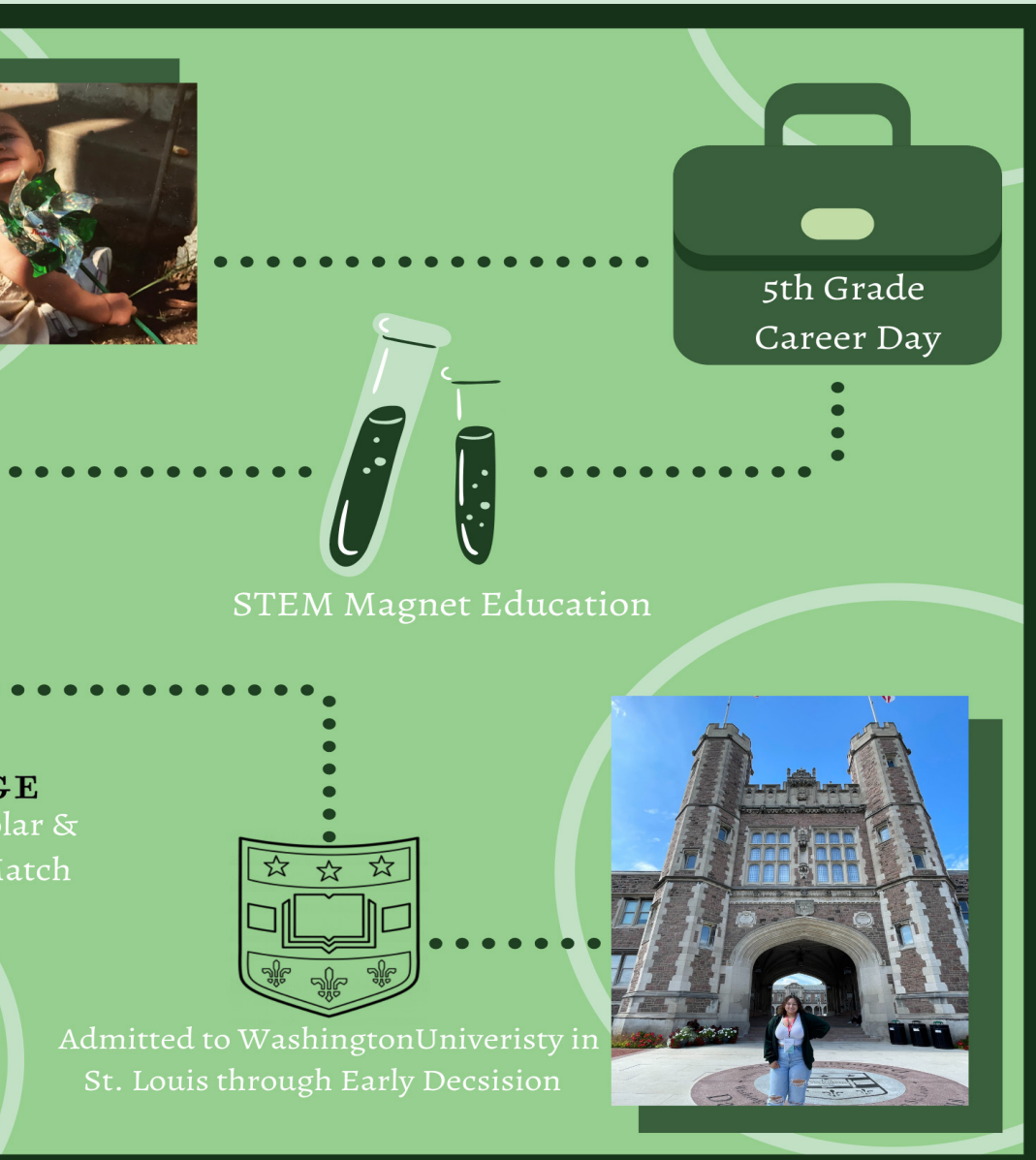
Eager to have another chance, I responded immediately, a decision that would change the course of future for the better.

Which brings me back to that cold February day. 5 o'clock hit and I refreshed the page religiously until the fateful words, "Status Update" appeared on my screen. I was nearly too shaky to navigate the mouse, then in an instance that is now a blur, CONGRATULATIONS was big, bright, and bold on the top of the web page.

In a matter of seconds every dream had come true.

When December 1 rolled around, I was informed that I had not been selected to attend one of the six schools I had ranked. I was devastated, but I refused to let anyone see. I thought if I told enough people that I was okay with it, that I still had a chance, I would believe it myself.

I began looking into schools with less name recognition, but great schools



GRAPHIC BY ELENA GAINES