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Entering the Drug Free Clubs of America in sixth grade, I saw the club as an obligation to keep myself out of trouble and out of situations I was uncomfortable in. I have always stayed committed to being drug-free, and I imagined that the Drug Free Club could be an institution that was able to keep me accountable and steadfast in my ways of schoolwork, athletics, and family dedication. While the club has absolutely upheld that wish, it has become so much more than just an obedience apparatus for me. The club has become a place where I can not only help others keep their dreams at reach by staying disciplined but also a place where I can connect with others on a personal level.

I have seen addiction become an immeasurable struggle in people from a young age. I have nothing but incredible love for my family, as they are wonderful people who have guided me through life by setting great examples regarding work ethic, family values, and compassion. However, some of the choices they have made regarding drugs and alcohol have put them at a distance from me. Many close family members, including uncles and cousins, began abusing drugs and alcohol at only fifteen years old. While they are not fully reliant on drugs and alcohol to function day to day, their activity with them has become more than only for recreational purposes. Their middle school party habits became lifelong hurdles to jump over, showing that drugs can affect anyone at any age, and the effects can escalate rapidly. My grandmother was a smoker for over forty years, and she recently passed away from cancer which had metastasized from her lungs to her brain and lymph nodes. All of these factors play a role in my continued dedication to the Drug Free Clubs of America.

The Drug-Free Clubs of America is now a setting where I can share my stories with others who have gone through similar, or even worse experiences. It is a place where we can feel pride in ourselves, knowing that we are not defined by our families and their decisions. It is a place where passing a drug test means more than just a checkmark put on the paper, but an overwhelming sense of fulfillment, realizing that our futures weren't decided by the circumstances in which we grew up, but by the choices we have been brave enough to make. It is even a place where we can inspire others to overcome whatever obstacles or barriers they may encounter in their life and offer them an out from their struggles with outstretched arms. No member of the Drug Free Club is perfect, but achieving perfection was never the goal. Striving to be better than yesterday continually and coming together through a shared passion against the malicious demons that drugs and alcohol bring, which wreak havoc on so many others close to us or not is the shared objective.

I could never have dreamed that Drug Free Club could have grown into such importance to me, but I am so thankful that it did. Despite starting out as only a spot to hold myself accountable, it has blossomed into a place where I have been able to connect with so many people, whether through shared experiences, common values, or instilled inspiration. It has shown me that no matter the situation you are experiencing, somebody is either going through something similar or worse, and there is always someone to talk to or a way to get through it.