



**“It was a Constant Mental Battle”
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August of 2017 - when I left Mountain Home and moved to Moscow, Idaho, to begin my undergraduate career - was the most difficult time of my life. I'd never been away from my parents for longer than two weeks - which was when I visited my grandparents in Mexico half a year before - and, even then, I wanted to come back home just a week after being there. Realizing that I was about to be apart from them for months was unsettling, especially since the university I'd be attending was a six hour drive away. Even though all of my older siblings attended college, none of them had ever attended a four-year institution or been further than a couple hours from home. The day my parents dropped me off in Moscow was, by far, the most nerve-wracking one. I was afraid for many reasons: I was about to share a tiny bunk-bedded room with a complete stranger, I didn't know how to even begin finding any of my classes on such a giant campus, and I didn't know the first thing about being a college student.

Before my acceptance to the University of Idaho, I didn't know how I'd be able to fund my education. I knew it wouldn't feel right if I allowed my parents to pay thousands of dollars for my education over the course of four years, especially when they didn't have the opportunity to attend college themselves. My solution was to apply for as many scholarships as I could. Fortunately, thanks to my GPA and my migrant and seasonal background, I was eligible for several scholarships that ultimately ended up funding my entire undergraduate career. Some of

those scholarships were awarded to me automatically through the university, while others had a more competitive application process. Among those scholarships, the program that gave me a sense of belonging was the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP). What I loved about CAMP at the University of Idaho was that it wasn't just a scholarship; it was staffed with people that actually cared about my academic success and my overall well-being. Not only did they guide me through my entire first year on campus, but they also made sure that I didn't lose sight of the reason I was in there in the first place: to earn my degree. From feeding me, to offering advice, to giving me a job the following three years as a tutor for the incoming cohorts – I don't think I would have completed my studies without their support.

I've always tried giving back to those who've helped me, which was the reason I applied to be a tutor for the CAMP program. Being able to help other students that came from similar backgrounds as mine was the least I could do, especially if they felt the way I did as a first-generation college student. I knew better than anyone what it felt like to be somewhere you felt you didn't belong, especially as a student in the STEM field. The first year wasn't as bad as the following three because the lecture halls were filled with tons of students, so it wasn't very easy to notice if none of them looked like me. But the further I advanced in my courses, the fewer people of color – and even fewer women of color- I came across. There were times I'd question whether I should even be there. Growing up with parents that didn't have the opportunity to graduate high school, or even finish elementary school, made me feel guilty for being there surrounded by students who were second and even third generation college students. There were several times I'd heard about "imposter syndrome" but I never thought that I would experience it myself. I doubted my abilities on a daily basis, wondering whether I was striving for a goal that was too far from reach. It was a constant mental battle, but, thankfully, I pushed through.

Four years later, I am able to say that I graduated from the University of Idaho – debt-free. Words could never express how blessed I am to have such a supportive family. My achievements are a product of the values and wisdom that my parents have handed down to me. Those four years were not easy, but they were definitely worth seeing the gleaming pride in my father's eyes and the glowing smile on my mother's face the moment I walked across the stage to receive my degree. This milestone isn't mine to celebrate; it's theirs.