

*Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.*

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There are so many people in this world with so many stories, insights, struggles, accomplishments, and failures, and behind each person is some form of influence to propel each individual story and drive each success. Everyone has a mentor who they look up to and admire. My mentor came to me unexpectedly as a slightly hunched-over, older man, maybe late 60s or early 70s, with a lean, fit body, and well-dressed in a pressed collared shirt, slacks, and cardigan. In this unassuming man I found wisdom and confidence.

Math has always been my strongest subject. Up until high school I was homeschooled, and by 6th grade my parents could no longer help me with my math. We needed to find a way to continue my growth in math, but we were stuck: how were we ever supposed to find a skilled math tutor in the little, slow, tourist town of Pagosa Springs, where most people who weren't already retired either owned a gift shop or a real estate business. Fortunately, my dad knew a lot of people from his physical therapy practice. One of my dad's patients was a retired physicist who loved everything to do with math and science. Hesitantly, my family asked Dr. Donald Lundergan if he would be interested in tutoring a little 6th grade girl in math. Without reluctance he agreed.

There are a few things you need to understand about Don. He was not in his late 60s or early 70s; he was actually 86 years old when I first met him. He refused

any amount of money to tutor me. During his service in the U.S. Navy in World War II he engineered a way to detect underground enemy bombs. He reads books on Quantum Mechanics for fun. He worked at the Sandia Labs, on national weapons, and he was a college professor for years. Amazing! This overqualified man consented to tutor me.

Math class became the highlight of my 6th through 8th grade years. Not only did I learn geometry, algebra, and trigonometry, but also I began to recognize the importance of an open mind and to always value opportunities to grow my knowledge. Don's passion for learning drove me to work harder and understand simply for the excitement of storing something new in my mental dictionary. He taught me life and schooling shouldn't solely entail holding onto only what's necessary for getting by, it should involve understanding and retaining knowledge that excites and inspires. Don has always said to me, "I would do it all over again if I could," meaning he would go back to high school purely to absorb something new and expand his knowledge.

Since starting at public high school, I attribute much of my successes and my drive to learn to Don's many words of wisdom he never knew he was giving. When I felt like calling it good on long English essays or saying "just forget it" when I had difficulty grasping a Calculus concept, I would remember Don's wish to return to high school. In those instances, Don's words of wisdom motivated me to push myself the extra step to learn to my full potential.

To me, successful people build a strong foundation and never give up on expanding that foundation even when life is challenging. Don has no judgments towards anyone or anything. He takes things as they are and accepts them. I aspire to reach such a

state of mind because there is an abundance of information, knowledge, and perspectives in our world that I can recognize with an open mind. With Don as my mentor, my foundation of knowledge continues to expand. As I've seen Don's successes in small and large ways, I strive to learn all I can simply to develop a more open mind and holistic perspective for my benefit and for society as a whole.

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