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# Luck of the Draw

Alexis Mayo

*Xavier University of Louisiana*, [pathways@xula.edu](mailto:pathways@xula.edu)

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Alexis Mayo

*Luck of the Draw*

Perseverance. A word that includes a notion of hard work and determination, two characteristics most people who know me would say I lack. They would say I'm lucky because nearly five years ago, they would have said there was no way I would graduate from high school. Ten years before that, they would have said there was a chance I would never see my mother again, let alone the inside of a classroom. My biggest obstacles in life were just the luck of the draw.

I wasn't yet five when doctors knew something was amiss. I was diagnosed with cancer and given chemotherapy. Back then those words didn't have the same agonizing ring they do now. It wasn't the cancer that ruined me mentally. It was childhood ignorance. No one told me that cancer and chemo meant not having birthday parties for years, or that my own little sister was too much of a risk for me to be around. No one told me it meant coming home in tears because someone's mother didn't think it was necessary to tell their child not to make fun of the girl with no hair. After starting chemotherapy, there was nothing I wanted more than to be normal. But every day there was someone to remind me of the ugliness in being bald, or the sickly black circles that surrounded my eyes. They would tell me I was too weak to play games with them, and I often cried. I refused to go to summer camps with kids who were like me because I refused to be sickly like them. They tried to convince me I was normal, despite the world telling me otherwise. I began to question why I was here. Why did I have to suffer through it all?

You think remission would have eased the weight of the world, but people still made fun of me like I was still a sickly little girl. I still looked in the mirror and envisioned myself bald

with dark eyes. I was in middle school when I met a new group of people, and I received a new label that successfully removed the old one. I was no longer the sickly little girl. I became one of the bad kids. The bad kids taught me how to ease the burden of the world. They showed me that I could end the bullying and the tears at night. No one messed with me as long as I proved I was willing to fight. They showed me the world of drugs and alcohol, which they seemed to adore. They helped me ease my pain at night, and I helped them see that sometimes things do go right. At the end of the day, all we had was each other because few people cared about kids who weren't going anywhere. Most expected us to be dead or in jail before eighteen.

Alternative School is supposed to be a punishment, but I saw it as reward after suffering for so long. The teachers there actually cared. I watched them weep sometimes when former students were shot down or when they made the news for unethical things. They wanted nothing more than to see us succeed, and they're part of the reason I'm here. They taught me to dream of success and they always called me back when I began to veer. One man more than others helped influence my dream. He was a psychologist, our counselor by day, and ran a private practice at night. He told us about the world without sugar coating. Never did I know so much love for the world that I hadn't seen before. Never had anyone else told me it was okay to scream, nor made me realize how big I can dream. I wish I could call and tell him how far I've come, but I still have a long way to go.

Now I'm breaking my back to get a degree, in hopes of helping little girls who are like I was. I want to be the person for them that my teachers were for me. In actuality, I want to make our youth dream. I want to help those who've been told they're destined to fail and started to believe those lies. I want to help them carry the weight of the world. I will show little girls the

beauty in imperfections and remind them that it's never too late to make their own path. That they can ignore the ignorance of people who laugh. That they can bury the past.

I look back and see how far I've come, and even though I still carry pain, I have a chance to make a change. Tomorrow I may wake up and question why I'm still here, but right now I'll enjoy the luck of it all. There's a reason behind every card we draw.