

October 24th, 2018

Dear Honorable Judge Scullin,

I believe that these three questions will allow me to most efficiently express myself: How did you end up in this position?, What lessons have you learned?, If/When given the opportunity, how will you proceed?

Q1) How did you end up in this position?

A1) I had just begun my fourth semester at Cornell, when my brother began hinting at another fight at home. He was living in Colorado and cryptic in his messages. I took this as a sign to call my mom, and learned that her and my father had had their worst fight yet. He choked her until she nearly lost consciousness. After talking to my father, it was clear that he was still agitated. When I told him that he couldn't put his hands on her he snapped. He told me to mind my business, and if she pissed him off again he'll kill her.

As I reflect on those few days, it is obvious that I acted on perhaps 30% knowledge of the situation. All I knew was that my mother was unusually defeated, and repeatedly told me that he was going to kill her. I felt like there was no other option, that I had to protect her. Rather than digest the situation, and any other possible alternatives, I acted on impulse, leading to my series of immature and irrational decisions.

Q2) What lessons have you learned?

A2) I grew up learning not to let anyone in. Physically at the house, and mentally it was never ask for help, never tell anyone about our problems. My father pressed this on me, but it was also reinforced by my brother. I recall one summer night at the town carnival when I bumped into his close friends. They asked me where Jeff was. I told them he had gotten into a fight with my parents and moved out. I actually thought he was living with them. Later that night I received furious texts from my brother. I guess he was upset that now his friends knew about our personal problems. I promised him I would never tell them again.

Looking back, its clear that bottling up these problems/emotions will only backfire. Put into my situation as a 19 year old full of fear, anxiety, anger, with no outlet and no one to talk to is a recipe for disaster. If I had taken a step back to talk to someone, and realize that there were actually many better options, I wouldn't have felt so desperate.

My singular goal was to protect my mom and make sure that she was safe. I did not, however, anticipate the amount of collateral damage inflicted on those around me. My friends know that

I don't often ask for anything, so when I do, they are readily willing and available. But I abused their blind trust, and put them in a predicament that has caused them tremendous stress. I know that I will never be able to mend those relationships, regardless of my profuse apologies. As for my brother, he was forced to return from Colorado, just as he was beginning to gain some momentum, to clean up the fiasco that I created. To this day I don't believe he forgives me. And finally my mother.

Although she is safe and healthy, I don't think she will be happy for quite some time. She would trade places with me in a heartbeat, and couldn't give a damn about her reputation, but she sacrificed 20 years of her life to ensure that I would have the best opportunities at every turn, and I squandered it. I know that hurts her the most.

If I could talk to my 19 year old self I would tell him to breathe, that he is not alone, that he should call his football coach who doubles as a school counselor and vent, finally unload, and realize that the situation is not as dire as your fear is making it seem. I would tell him that the path he is currently on is only going to hurt the ones he loves most.

Q3) If/When given the opportunity, how will you proceed?

A3) I often wish that I could address the Honorable Judge Piampiano directly, to let him know exactly how I have taken full advantage of the second chance he has given me.

Immediately following the dismissal of my case, I was forced to withdraw from Cornell, so I began applying elsewhere. I promised myself that I would be enrolled by the next cycle. Meanwhile I was volunteering at the Village At Ithaca, a mentorship program for underprivileged youth.

In the Spring of 2016 I moved to Atlanta, GA, to pursue an unsolicited interview with the Admissions Office at Emory University. I knew that there was a black cloud hanging over my transcript, so I wanted to tell them my side of the story. While I waited to hear back, I became a Certified Personal Trainer, and also certified with my one year old German Shepard for Therapy Dogs International - an emotional support volunteer organization. Although I was ultimately rejected from Emory, my momentum continued forward.

I moved to Chicago, IL that Fall to attend Chicago State University, the only school out of 24 to accept. Nonetheless, I was back on track. Located in the heart of Chicago's Southside, I surprisingly found myself in a beautiful neighborhood. Between 4 neighbors there were 13 children who became my little siblings. Academically I was going through the motions, but it was this new, extended family life that I became absorbed with.

My experiences these past two years have made my direction for the future clear. My strength is with working with adolescents. My dream is to open an afterschool facility for them to engage in a mixture of academic workshops and sports training. To teach them the discipline of balance. To let them dream of collegiate athletics, which guarantees they will further their education. And most importantly, to instill the theme that my mentors have taught me - to Pay it Forward, with Servant Leadership.

All I need is the opportunity to do so.

Respectfully Yours,

Charlie Tan