



**Significant Challenge College Scholarship
2022 Second Place Winner - Sienna Torrez**

Essay Part A: Briefly describe a significant challenge you have faced in your life.

When I was a baby, I was diagnosed with Biliary Atresia. This is a rare form of liver disease that affects about 1 in 20,000 babies a year. Due to this disease, I had to have a liver transplant when I was nine months old. I spent my childhood in and out of the University of New Mexico's (UNM) hospital although I lived hours away in Las Cruces, New Mexico. I spent days, weeks, and sometimes months at a time in this hospital with the complications that occurred before and after my surgery.

It wasn't until my teenage years that I saw my life was completely different from others my age. My friends did not have regular doctor visits, they did not have medicine they had to take every day, and most importantly, they did not have a scar that spread across their stomachs that stuck out now more than ever. I became incredibly insecure in my story. My younger self went from being in love with my life to dreading the past I had because of my illness. I was thirteen dealing with mental and emotional issues that no one else I knew could understand. I did not want this scar, I did not want to take my medicines daily and I did not want to constantly be on high alert because of my immune system.

Essay Part B: Describe how you overcame this challenge. Tell us how it has shaped you as an individual.

On March 29th, 2021, After a year of speaking to my donor's family online, I was able to meet and stay with them for a week. It felt so surreal. I felt as though I was living life through my donors eyes and I walked on the house he had once ran through. His parents and sister were some of the most kind people my mom and I had ever met. I learned so much on that trip, a lot of random facts his dad seemed to just know, much more about medical school from his sister, and his mom taught me about their beautiful culture any chance she could. Within a week, this family became my own. The scar that I was ashamed of before I entered that house had a completely different meaning as I left. I walked out of the hospital with a new chance at life and a scar while they lost their only son and brother on the same day in August of 2004. An unknown author once wrote, "Organ donation itself is not a tragedy but it can be a beautiful light through the midst of one". Through their own heartbreak, they found it within themselves to donate their son's liver to a stranger whom they did not know. The little boy with an infectious smile and his family are the reason I am here today. They are the reason I'm able to apply for college and work towards

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fulfilling my dreams. Ever since that week I felt as though I gained a new family. His dad calls me and gives me advice frequently when I have important interviews or speeches. His mom continues to share her kindness and love to me and my family. His sister has opened my eyes and tremendously influenced my future career goals. They are some of the strongest, selfless people I know.

I will never understand how I got so lucky with my transplant journey. However, I know that not all journeys end this way. I will continue to devote my life to advocating for organ donation so others can experience what I have. I still can't tell you exactly why me but I can say one reason I was given this opportunity is to give back and use my experiences to help other children who are going through similar illnesses and instill hope in families who are experiencing loss within their lives. Organ donation saved my life and I will help be the reason it saves countless others. My story has instilled a fight within me that will last throughout my life and I will always be grateful for it. There were many strangers who helped my family and I when I was sick and I want to repay this beautiful community that helped save me. During high school, that has been my motivation to do various volunteer, speaking and charitable events. I want to make a change and let the legacy of my donor shine through me.

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