

Jeremy (Jay) Stephens

I stand on a hill at my grandparent's house overlooking the garden that appears overly saturated from tap water and Miracle Grow. The muggy air and restless chickens trapped in a coup give me solemn comfort in knowing that I am home. As a child, the creation of my garden had been a kind of therapy; a way to escape the uneasy feelings caused by the fear of uncertainty. One who heard murmurs insisting I would never be good enough. Witnessing my mother struggle as a single parent, and experiencing abandonment by my father added more thoughts that said regardless of any success, my life could turn upside down at any moment. I hold vivid images of that lost boy digging purposefully into the earth with a shovel attempting to rearrange the external physical landscape; with the underlying hope of finding a source that could rearrange the internal landscape within him. In the midst of it all, working in my garden gave me an incredible feeling of peace and comfort that helped me believe that I was going to be ok. The impossibility of stability was replaced with hope by that garden.

During the latter half of my junior year in high school, I was faced with great adversity. When I lost my father, it was very difficult for me to accept the fact that the man that I needed so much in my life as a child was gone forever without any way of repairing our tumultuous relationship. When my mother and I also relocated to Minnesota, I was forced to leave my childhood friends and family behind for a place that was totally foreign. At the same time, I encouraged my mom to go back to school. She had basically put her life on hold for nearly two decades raising me, and I thought it was time for her to do something for herself. My mother is my inspiration. She has taught me what it means to have courage and belief in self despite setbacks. These experiences were impactful on my life because it allowed me to grow as a person. They also allowed me to share a testimonial with others, and give advice based on my own life experiences. It was then I realized my gift of relating to others by thinking

of a rational solution to their situation. The passion that I have to be a strong advocate for others is a major attribute that I possess to one day become a successful lawyer.

Prior to attending college, I was eager to get involved and prove to myself and others that I was capable of doing anything I set my mind to. With my desire to one day attend law school, I joined the Pre-Law Society. I discovered that practicing law would be my way of giving hope to others who may also be facing a period of adversity in their lives. As I started to believe in my potential, others did as well. I was elected president of the society second semester of my freshman year; becoming the youngest member as well as the first African American to be elected president. I also represented my fraternity in Big Man on Campus during my junior year; an annual philanthropy designed to raise money for Breast Cancer Awareness. I went on to become the overall winner of this event, as well as one of the top contributors in helping to raise \$75,000 for the cause. I began working at the Purdue Recreational Center as a sophomore, and received a promotion as Facility Manager over our school's newly renovated 400,000 square foot fitness center. To further enhance my understanding of the law, I was able to serve as a Summer Associate at McCarter and English last summer. It was there where I was able to network, and receive great advice from individuals who are already doing what I hope to one day do.

Today, as I stand observing the same garden I began creating when I was 13 years old. My most cherished plant has always been the Leyland Cypress. One time barely to my knees, it now towers 20 feet standing firm and confident. Despite the hot dry summers and the foreign winters, it ultimately remains undaunted. Still growing, still branching out, still exceeding the boundaries set to become even stronger. Once engulfed within an unstable foundation, it is now established; deeply rooted and soaring higher every day. This is me.