

In 20 Years

In 20 years, when I have had a chance to do the work that I would like to do in life, I would love to be able to be known for my efforts to help people in positions such as that which my brother was in; to be able to receive awards for helping them in any way possible, through bioengineering.

My reason for aspiring to a career in the bioengineering field has been shaped both by my natural abilities and various turning points in my life. Turning points are what run our lives and what make us who and what we are. Turning points are what make life interesting and make up the twists and turns that shape the journey that is life. These are what shape the person in ways that the world sees, and many that are relatively unseen. Many times, it is the unseen elements that play the largest role in shaping who we are, and who we appear to be. A person who simply aspires into an engineering field tends will be assumed by many to either just be good at it, or looking for money. Bioengineering is one of those fields. Bioengineering, however, is among those in which high ethical standards is a must. The kinds of standards ideal for this field are usually created by major ‘turning points’ in a person’s life.

In my case it is a major memory, of the life of my brother, and the time just before my high school graduation, something that, along with my lifelong *learning differences*, was a major life “turning point”. This turning point started when I was 15 ½ months old, at the birth of my brother. But I digress. Stories about “turning points” in our lives almost invariably start with “I remember when ...”. So I’ll start with that here.

I remember when I lost my best friend to a genetic killer known as Cystic Fibrosis (CF). It was three days before my Senior Ball. He was also my younger brother, Keegan. We were only a little over a year apart - 15 ½ months apart to be exact - so for as long as I can remember, he had always been around. He had CF and had also had a lung transplant at Stanford University Hospital about a year before, so he'd always been sick. Nevertheless, he had always been there for me, with his own twisted sense of humor, and even though we fought much of the time (like siblings do), we were best friends and would have fought off anyone that tried to hurt the other. He was a great person.

He had been sick again and in the hospital. When I first heard about it, I didn't really think anything of it. He had had many problems before, and this one didn't seem that different to me. The doctors had said that he wouldn't survive many times before, yet he always seemed to anyway. However ... he died on May 30, 2001. My mother, my father, my sister, and I were by his side. One of my main memories of that day was that it was the first and only time in my life that I have ever actually seen a doctor cry over the loss of a patient.

Keegan was an amazing person and an inspiration to all those around him. In fact, a scholarship fund was started in his memory to help other high school students that have undergone challenges in their lives, be it for medical issues, family crises, or whatever, so that they might be able to continue a dream of a college education. It has been given to those with learning disabilities as well as to those that endured abusive households and those that have medical issues. My desire to pursue biotechnology then is driven by my memory of and my love for my best friend and little brother, Keegan.

His lifelong struggle with CF as well as the various challenges throughout our family has driven me to pursue robotics engineering with a biotech emphasis. It also caused another of my first cousins to be currently pursuing her Masters Degree in Genetic Counseling at Northwestern University in Chicago after graduating from the University of California, San Diego, in biochemistry. It has made my entire extended family understand the tenuousness and preciousness of life itself. It has shaped me in particular to want to use my strengths and my abilities to do everything I can to prevent similar things from happening to others.

It has always been my wish to help people. One of my first memories is when I was 5 years old. Even then, I was fascinated by robots and would try to put together various toys, erector set parts, and other items from around the house in order to make something that would be able to move about the floor or perform a specific task, I always tried to think of a way it might be able to help people like my brother. Many of these inventions worked; however, even when they didn't, I generally knew why. I once decided that since the VCR was having trouble ejecting tapes, I needed to fix it. My mother walked out of the room for a short time. By the time she came back, I had it on the floor and in dozens of pieces. I remember that she was upset - but I put it back together, even with parts missing, and it worked better. Even at five, I would make other robotic items like cars that would move. I also remember wondering if there was a way that I could apply this skill to help my brother.

I remember all sorts of things like this, and I continued to do this all the way through grade school and into high school. Along the way, I ignored every figure that tried to discourage me from doing these things, and developing the ability. If I 'fell down' I would just get back up again, stronger. Upon entering high school, I founded an award-winning competition robotics club/team that competed in the national US FIRST Robotics competition. I was President for my entire 4 years in high school. I had always had the goal of going into some sort of mechanical engineering field with an emphasis on robotics. However, there were several "turning points" that have shaped what I want to do with my love and talent for robotics engineering.

My oldest cousin, who is now 28, underwent chemotherapy for testicular cancer at the age of 17. One grandfather suffered from juvenile diabetes most of his life and subsequently died of lymphoma.

The other grandfather had heart disease. I have a brother who died at the age of 17. My sister and I both have various learning differences. Cancer and heart disease as well as gastric illnesses have shown up in my family. This has made me interested in finding ways to use my talents in robotics to help those with medical issues. My ultimate goal, then, is to continue this lifelong love of robotics engineering (with a specialty in biotechnology) through the engineering program offered at the Rochester Institute of Technology and also obtain an internship in biotechnology to supplement this due to my family history.

My plan, however, was delayed by the learning difficulties that plagued me throughout school. These differences, however, have been another turning point, albeit a lifelong one, in shaping who I am. I was clinically diagnosed with ADHD, mild Tourette's Syndrome, and mild Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder at the age of 8. I was extremely disorganized and troubled with certain testing styles to the point that I did poorly in classes in spite of being able to score in the 99th percentile for science, upper 90s for math, and in the 80s for reading comprehension on the California Achievement Tests. Due to these issues, I decided that it was going to be necessary to spend a couple of years attending Landmark College to improve my skills in organization and time management. I steadily improved during my years here, and with the skills that I was taught there such as active reading, margin noting, the master notebook system, and palm pilot organizer, as well as numerous other coping strategies, I graduated with an AA degree on May 14, 2004. It took time, but I am now able both keep track of which paper is which and what I am supposed to do with it, as well as to produce far greater quality writing than ever before. I am now very proud of the fact that my semester GPA's continually improved to the point where I had a 3.8 during my final semester while also being involved in other things such as being an active representative to the Student Government Association (SGA) on campus as well as being the SGA technical advisor, managing their website, and being in charge of finding ways to make technology at Landmark better tailored to the needs of the students and their various learning differences.

Thus, in conclusion, I very much want to continue my love of Robotics and Mechanical Engineering in memory of my younger brother as well as to make it so others will not have to deal with many of the same issues that my family has endured. I look forward to my time at California Lutheran University and being able to pursue this dream there.