

American Citizenship Essay

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The feeling of depression is near-unimaginable for someone who hasn't experienced it firsthand. The constant weight of existence, combined with an aura of hopelessness and helplessness - nearly akin to bringing a butter knife to a gunfight - can destroy a person from the inside out. Being raised in a strict, manipulative household full of narcissistic abuse, without the base understanding of the malevolence that lurked behind a mother's seemingly normal actions, would cause anyone to fall into this state. However, while it may be a rare occurrence, the worst environments can create the best people, as in the case of Kelly Phillips. Throughout all of this hardship, and a seemingly endless list of additional trials, Kelly endured, facing all of the physical and mental battles with the most steadfast of wills, and continued to become the light of many people's lives, including my own.

Growing up In Lamont, California forcibly immersed Kelly in two separate lives: one in constant conflict at home, and one trying to fit into a culture she didn't understand at school. Understandably she engaged herself in extracurricular activities, as an escape to the militant schedule and ever-growing expectations. In her own words "There was always the pressure to be perfect from my mom, but perfection kept changing." Then, to make matters worse she was raped at 14 years old by a town "hero" who was about twenty, but since he was so beloved within the town, she was accused of lying and attention seeking. This caused her to suppress her emotions of guilt, shame and anger surrounding the rape, and only ended up confronting and processing it in her twenties. When she finally gained awareness of the incessant toxicity of her household, she became determined to move away from the town in which she endured all of her childhood trauma.

Heading off to a four year college at nineteen, she managed to get her masters in criminology while suffering with diagnosed PTSD and depression. As the years passed, she jumped from school to occupation, trying to find somewhere she felt she belonged. Eventually, after running into an old friend who turned out to be a dean at the California School of Psychology, she found an intriguing internship in

LA. Since then she's worked numerous jobs in LA, including a 2-3 month span working at a residential teen treatment center, miraculously being the place our paths crossed.

Although that two month span may seem like an inconsequential blip of time in both of our lives, in that short time she managed to become someone I still look up to to this day and strive to be like. As we got to know each other she taught me what true validation and support meant, and all the weight I felt like I was carrying alone lessened, helping me understand that not everything was my fault. As she was learning about my personality, she figured out what helps me to listen and understand, teaching me how to healthily cope as a mentally ill 13-14 year old kid. Not only that, but as we talked with each other, it sparked an interest in psychology within me. This interest developed into a passion, and this passion developed into a goal, helping me see for the first time that life is worth giving a chance. It may seem like an insignificant time in her life, but I left that treatment center with a newfound hope for a future I could enjoy.

Now 43 years old, Kelly Phillips works as a successful forensic psychologist for a conditional release program built for mentally ill offenders who are in the community. In her lifetime she has had to overcome so much and still strives to find new and exciting challenges such as teaching a class at Pepperdine. The most impressive part about her story is the fact that she was dealt such a bad hand, yet she managed to not only make a successful life for herself, but also a life devoted to helping others. She has changed my life and so many others for the better, and will forever stay a role model and a hero of mine.