

“You may not understand now what I am doing. But someday, you will” John 13:7

*This is a mistake. There’s no way I’m supposed to be in this class.*

I cautiously took a seat in the front row, as usual, but quickly ripped my schedule from my bookbag and confirmed my fear: *I am exactly where I am supposed to be.*

It was the ultimate first-day-of-school nightmare. I was placed in Digital Technology instead of Business Technology—*very* out of my element. As I waited for class to begin, the boys around me burst into chatter about the video game tournament on YouTube that weekend. I had never experienced that side of YouTube. To me, it was a platform for workout videos, and my weekends consisted of college football, shopping with friends, or baking my famous cake pops—not competitively killing demogorgons.

Pulling out my monogrammed planner and laying out my color-coded pens, I noticed there wasn’t anyone else *like me* in the class. I wasn’t naive; I knew I didn’t fit the “profile” of a Computer Science student. I was a surprise— an exception to the preconceived rule that a person can only be *one* thing: an athlete, a leader, a girl, the embodiment of strength and power, a politely-mannered do-gooder, or, even now, a coder. I will not give others the power to determine who I am. I will decide.

Voluntarily waking up at 7 a.m. each Sunday is hard, I’ll admit it. But I have to remind myself that it was even harder to get the opportunity. Being a part of the ministry to the sick and homebound is very emotionally taxing. For four hours each Sunday, we visit elderly people who are bedridden or too sick to come to church, a position truly close to my heart. As I tied my shoes to step into this role, I was faced with a difficult task: I had to prove that, though I was young, I was young *and* mature, confident *and* sincere, a listener *and* a leader. I set the bar higher for every standard I was expected to meet. The sparkle in my visitees’ eyes wouldn’t have been possible had I not been a trailblazer for my age-group to get involved. Defying odds and expectations used to be my obstacle. Now it’s just my goal.

After 14 years of competitive gymnastics, I’m still fighting battles of eradicating toxic standards and seeking to prove coaches, teammates, and spectators alike wrong. “You’re too tall to be a gymnast,” “you’ll never make Honor Roll if you’re on the Varsity team” and “you have to pick your priority” follow me wherever I go. Hearing these doubts about my ability invites insecurities to creep in. But you can’t control your thoughts, so you can’t let your thoughts control you. You must learn how to work within your parameters; you’re only given four inches on the balance beam to maintain full control of your body in both power and grace. I only get 24 hours in a day—those are

my true parameters. When the hours of gymnastics training and extracurriculars add up, homework time becomes limited. I work with what I have. I have learned to be a multitasker yet a perfectionist, manifesting the determination and animalistic drive of a gymnast while still exemplifying the grace and positive outlook that community service has established within me. My different traits from my different worlds collaborate to make me unique.

I am a better version of myself because of my multitudes. Being the exception to the rule empowers me, and pushes me to reach my goals.

Vanquishing assumptions has ignited my ambition. Expectations I have faced have equipped me with the strength to not only stay in the Digital Technology class, but excel in it. The presumptions made about my capabilities based on my outward appearance made me fall in love with coding and Computer Science—I've accepted it as just another one of my fundamental dichotomies.

I am not a varsity athlete, an honor roll student, a compassionate volunteer, a teenage girl, or even a fluent coder.

I am all of the above. I am the exception.

And I am exactly where I am supposed to be.

God is always working. Sometimes you can't see it, sometimes you can't feel it, and sometimes you can't even grasp what he is doing. But, that's what faith is, believing in the goodness of God even when we don't understand.