

Driven Dreams of an Aspiring Psychologist

Sun light trickles through the partially opened blinds and our sleepy eyes try to adjust. Sitting in the poorly lit living room we giggle about the high pitch squeaking coming from our dog. Kelly Parker lists off the basics of her life starting with her hometown of Naperville, Illinois. Again, we both chuckle as we both came from Illinois. Looking down she explains, “You know, I’ve lived a pretty privileged life.” She gazes towards the wall looking past me in thought and like magic snaps back to reality to chat about her major. Currently a sophomore at Regis, Kelly has a clear vision of what her purpose is in life. Grinning she tells me she hopes to be a clinical or counselling psychologist. This sense of purpose and a need to help carries through most of our conversation. After exclaiming that she loves to read, I questioned, “Are you reading anything right now?” Eyebrows raised and with an “uh oh” look on her face she admits that she while she had not picked up a book in a while, her relationship with it was still strong.

She explains that her two favourite books, “A Thousand Splendid Suns” and “The Glass Castle”, stuck in her mind because they both had strong female protagonists. In a family of five, an older brother, older sister and two successful parents, Parker has sense of passion and drive about her. She is ready to take on challenges as needed. Both of the books cover some pretty heavy and emotional topics of abuse, sexism, and broken family systems. Parker, remembering the strong emotion she got from reading these books, describes, “I just remember one moment just looking up at my ceiling and realizing ‘Oh! I can separate myself from this book and what is happening.’” This realization sparked a passion in her to do more for people. Parker again reflecting, “There are some people who can’t take a breath or step back or look away. That’s their life. Things are not like I experience them.”

Taking a step back, Kelly goes back to revealing her passion and interest in the arts. Particularly drawn to graphic design, she used it as a break from everything going on. Remembering one specific project, her face lit up with pride. Describing how one of the projects they worked on in Graphic Design 2, it was meant to be a poster of anything they wanted. Hinting at a slight obsession with the band Glass Animals at that time, she explained her design and the tedious process of using Adobe Illustrator. Unsure of where the idea came from, she decided to use a chameleon for her design. She found a specific interest in using and creating patterns in her images. With regard to her chameleon and sweeping her hands in a grand gesture describing this multi-coloured, multipatterned design, “Each section of the chameleon was a different color of the rainbow and with each color there was a new design.” Caught off guard by the memory gleaming with delight, she quickly rambled off, “My teacher lifted my poster showing the class and said, ‘Check out what Kelly did!’ It was just nice to hear someone outside of my family who had real experience with this stuff complimenting me,” she said, laughing. “I didn’t realize I needed the external validation.”

Unsure of how to answer my next question, she sat in silence trying to find what she felt was her biggest accomplishment. Slowly, but surely, she found the words. She explained her journey of getting on her high school’s color guard team, “Tried out freshman year in the fall... Didn’t make it. Tried again that winter... didn’t make it. Sophomore fall... again didn’t make it.” Then finally in the winter of her sophomore year she made it on to the team. Once again feeling proud that she stuck to her guns and worked hard for what she wanted.

This same sentiment is present through our conversation and is especially recognizable when we discuss her passion for wanting to help Native American women. After watching the film “Wind River”, her eyes were opened to the atrocities that community faces every day

without the proper resources. Describing the complexity of the issue, Parker's hand gestures and movement becomes more erratic and jumpier. It was as if you could see the passion radiating from her in that hard cold wooden chair. She takes a breath and settles down explaining that these issues are what has driven her to follow that path of a clinical or counselling psychologist. Parker explains that the film was "a lot to watch and handle, but it sticks in your mind". Once in college she began to do more research. Her search led her to find out that native American women face sexual assault and abuse at significantly higher rates than most communities. She further explains the obstacles of the tribe's autonomy from the government can hinder resources as well as the cultural differences.

Throughout her life, Parker, has been drawn to help those in need and has a keen eye for communities that lack the proper support for mental health. Even in high school she could see that her friends and peers were entering a new age of mental health that has shaped the way they cope. Though social media and the internet has opened a wonderful amount of opportunity for psychologists to provide care, it has proven to be extremely damaging. In a world where young girls have access to the media and internalize ideas that they are only worth what their bodies look like, young women are hurting everywhere. This is where Parker can feel a special pull at her heart to do more. While the pandemic has altered her education experience, she sees some good outcomes from it. Going on she explained "Yeah... I mean the pandemic changed the way psychologists give help and I don't see tele-health going away. It has helped a lot of people and is just as effective as in person". Once again with the same driven clarity, she explains that she knows that she will be successful if she can live her life meaningfully by helping others.

Glancing back over at the dog, now peacefully sleeping in the sunlight, she lightly smiles.