Denisha

[*A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them, and strong enough to correct them.*](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/johncmaxw391398.html)

[***John C. Maxwell***](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/john_c_maxwell.html)

*[Editor’s note: This is an excerpt from Denisha’s complete Senior Talk]*

“Your child Denisha has been assigned to Gates Expeditionary Learning for 6th grade for the school year that begins in September of 2006.” This is the letter that confirmed my attendance, to what is now called The Springfield Renaissance School. I still remember the anxious feeling I had when my mom signaled left to turn into the parking lot. At the steps, I was greeted by this seemingly friendly, yet rather zany man wearing a bowtie. Out of courtesy and good training, I smile, but all the while I find myself wondering *who in the world is this guy?* As I walked through the set of double doors, I never even consider the difference this school would make in my life.

Like at any other school, there were general priorities and objectives. On the top of everyone’s list is the inevitable: make friends and the main objective: survive. And survive, I did. Though middle school may be looked at as a trivial phase in life, it was just as, if not more crucial as high school. In middle school, I quickly learned the meaning of responsibility. This school encouraged being active and promoted good citizenship in both the school and the community. This prompting was enough to make me lead my very own orchestrated food drive, run for president, *and* try out for sports. As if that wasn’t enough, I had to juggle all of that with school, friends, and of course, boys.

Today, the American Dream seems to be further and further out of reach for my generation, not even considering those that are African- American or those who live in a mans world. This is great news for me, because I happen to fit in not one, but both categories. Yes, it would appear that I have the largest disadvantage. As of February 2013, the Bureau of Statistics show that African Americans are in the lead...for unemployment, with a whopping 13.8%. And the numbers for African Americans in my desired field is even more dampening, with only 5.4% of African Americans being employed, and 13.7% of women as a whole for civil engineering.

Lucky for us, circumstances don’t define who we are. Rather, it is how we grow from the circumstance. Growing up, my dad didn’t exactly play a role in my life. My mom wound up raising me all by herself. There are those who would look at the situation from the outside and come up with notions based on the facts. And the reality was this: I was a child being raised by a single parent and had financial problems. Based on the facts, I was carelessly deemed a statistic, presumed to be a failure. I was expected to be part of the 70% of fatherless children who dropped out of school. People looked for me to engage in risky and illegal behavior. The 10% of youth from low- income families that don’t go on to graduate from a four-year college? I was supposed to be part of that. The nearly third of youth from low- income families that don’t graduate from high school? That was supposed to be me. I was supposed to be vulnerable to poor outcomes, according to my circumstances. I was the one who lacked the resources and opportunities that everyone else had to help them succeed. I, Denisha, was supposed to be the causality of those statistics.

*Office of Admissions-* it was what I looked for every time. It indicated to me whether it was the acclaimed acceptance letter or the infamous rejection letter. This is opposed to the typical *Save the Date* or *Want to know more about..,?* mail that I generally received. I practically shredded through the envelope when I came home to it sitting on my bed. “Congratulations! I am pleased to inform you that your application to the Civil Engineering Technology program at the Rochester Institute of Technology has been approved by our Admissions Committee for Fall 2013 entry. We believe that you posses the academic potential and motivation to benefit from the rich academic resources available to you at RIT.”

*It takes a village.* The phrase it takes a village to raise a child, has been more than evident in my life. Though my mom did raise me by herself, she had some assistance. My family, my friends, the faculty here at this school all contributed to the shaping of who I am today. The things that I have accomplished, the things I will accomplish, couldn’t have happened without the support of this village, and my unwavering determination. I am a product of this village, and I am so proud and eager to go out into the world to be a representation.

I was supposed to be unsuccessful. But this fall, I will be attending Rochester Institute of Technology, my number one choice, with almost all of my tuition paid for. I was supposed to be a statistic. But I stand here before you, defying them. My circumstances tell me that I was supposed to be part of the heap. But the way I see it, I’ve never been one to let numbers bind me, so why start now? Hence, I think now would be a good time to contact the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, and tell them to add one less person to the heap.