

As I sit and carefully pipette 10 μ L into a rt-PCR plate, I cannot help but think this is not what I predicted to be doing my senior year of college. I once wrote a letter to myself that said by the time I was 23 I would be in graduate school studying to become an elementary school teacher. If someone from the future had told me in four years I would be graduating with a Bachelor's of Science with the ambitious goal to achieve my PhD, RD I would have called him or her crazy. Life has a way of throwing crazy opportunities at us to push us out of our comfort zone and help us discover the passions that drive us to achieve our own personal greatness.

My journey into the field of dietetics began before the summer I decided to take a risk and conquer the difficult subject of chemistry in order to switch my major to HNFE at Virginia Tech. A registered dietitian changed my life at the age of 16. It took a special person to convince a teenage girl dreaming of becoming a dancer for the American Ballet Theater that it was possible to live a life free of anorexia nervosa and enjoy a balanced and happy life on and off the stage. The recovery I achieved was something I kept to myself, until the day my professor in HNFE 1004 asked me to share my story with a class of more than 200 students. That day I stood in front of my peers and realized the field of dietetics needed more people like me, an individual who has experienced the effect of good nutrition in her life and now uses the experience to help and educate others. Over the past three years I have dedicated my time outside of the classroom promoting eating disorder awareness on campus by educating my classmates and Virginia Tech staff members on the importance of the registered dietitian in the recovery process. There are few things that give me more pleasure than standing in front of a room of college students and professors, motivating them to take action and work to live healthier lives.

As I advance in life's journey, crazy opportunities continue to be thrown my way. I entered HNFE terrified I would discover I was not cut out for this major or career path. Anatomy and Physiology would be my first test. The success I achieved in this class extends beyond the 4.0 I worked hard to receive both semesters. Anatomy followed me into my junior year, when I held the position of Undergraduate Teacher's Assistant, and discovered a passion for the education process. The review sessions I designed and implemented with a fellow TA were my opportunity to share my passion and knowledge of the subject with others. As I attempted to instill a love for anatomy in these students, a professor of metabolic nutrition was successfully and unknowingly creating a new passion in me. Dr. Hulver caught me in my element, and my fascination for the subject he taught led me to appear in his office proposing he sponsor me for an undergraduate research fellowship. I had three 100's on his examinations to support my proposal, but no research experience to back it up. Thankfully, he took a leap of faith and chose to support me in a dream I did not fully understand.

When I first began working in the laboratory, I thought it would be a breeze because of my background knowledge and success in metabolic nutrition. It's a good thing Dr. Hulver knew it was time to take the classroom, the notes, and all of the step-by-step guidance away from me in order to get me thinking like a researcher. Realizing that the research experience in metabolism was nothing like the hundreds of facts and many pathways I had memorized and learned to apply to hypothetical test situations sent me into a panic at first. Then I realized how amazing it is not to have the answers right in front of you. I look forward to the mystery of a new experiment, and the new questions that arise from a previous experiment instead of the final conclusion we had started out in search of.

The events in life that make a difference and help us decide where we should go next are not always planned. These events surprise us, and sometimes we stumble before we learn to walk with confidence onto the next big event. Each day I take each opportunity as it presents itself,

especially when it is not in my plan. I realize that while RD, PhD may remain as the destination, the journey will continue to be filled with experiences that will push me out of my books, away from the classroom, and prepare me to accomplish tasks I never dreamed possible.