

1. Discuss any challenges or obstacles you have dealt with and overcome. How would this experience help you succeed in college and beyond?

Throughout my seventeen years of living, I've never imagined I'd be here standing amongst dung and feathers, holding hands with a dead chicken—or rather, its feet. As I grip a foot in each hand, my feet race through an army of oblivious clustering chickens who behave like deer in headlights, flapping about out of the way the minute I nearly step on them. Heaving my remaining stamina, I swing it in a pile of chicken carcasses and feces, emitting a putrid odor enough to make one nauseous. Upon layers of face covering and tissue that I drown myself in, the stench would still somehow seep through. As aberrant as it is, this has been my farm life for the past three years.

Since relocating to an open swath of land, my drab, gray social life never belonged in such a colorful abode. Outsider. Anomaly. Whatever you might call it. It defined me. How could I explain to my city-dwelling classmates that I snap the necks of chickens or spend my days in a humid chicken house instead of going to school football games? Besides, the difference in language and culture didn't contribute to my fruitless efforts to conform. Beyond time, I found myself shrouded in animosity and a longing for a friend who would understand my native roots—farm life, ethnic language, and Asian culture. Perhaps God answered my prayers by drawing my out-of-character actions to join our school's newly formed robotics club. Despite zero technical knowledge, I ventured out to learn and accomplish things I'd never done before—cutting wood and metal and formulating frameworks for the robot. Alike yet distinct, the toil harbored gained intellect rather than mindless drudgery from hauling animals. Gradually, the sound of clucking chickens was replaced with the tinkering of tools. My nose which was clogged daily with malodorous odors is now accustomed to the scent of metallic and musty rust.

As much as I repent the thought of it, plodding away on the farm opened a pathway to my profound prosperity. The valuable time spent in robotics has cultivated my interests, developed a growth mindset, and shed light on my ability to maneuver an industrial robot. Reminiscing on our rookie year transported me back to the thrilling day we stood on the stage in the Championships, a testament to our teamwork and self-made discipline. In this unrestricted space devoid of judgment, establishing connections with like-minded peers was more unconstrained than ever. Perhaps living a farm life and reaping dead chickens don't correspond to societal standards. However, not fitting into those standards doesn't necessarily define you as an outcast. Rather, in my case, gray was a base color that led me to create my unique shade. The initial implication of gray as gloomy won't confine the lifelong ambitions I hold to embrace my originality. Whether it begins with a simple impulse to join a robotics team or toiling away in a stifling chicken house, it is one step towards the future that is to come.

2. What area of study will you go into and how would you use it to greater serve your community?

That blissful summer of my sophomore year in high school, while most teenagers would spend buried in the gritty sand at the beach, I sat in my bedroom staring at the “Hello World” function on my school-borrowed Dell laptop. Intimidated by the idea of not being able to comprehend the string of numbers my eyes lay upon, I found myself unexpectedly participating in the 2023 Girls Who Code Summer Immersion Program that year. During two weeks, I was introduced to coding in JavaScript and fundamental concepts of game development. Intrigued by the notion of generating a domestic awareness website or space interactive games from mere letters and symbols, I fixate on interpreting human language into comprehensible code for computer systems. As an eighteen-year-old, it stimulates intricate ways of thinking and piques intellectual curiosity. Transcending lines of conceptualization and tangibility, coding can transform imagination into reality. The prospective developer I am, granted the ability to revolutionize, I’d combat real-world issues with digital advancements. A concoction of expressive creativity, innovations of solutions to complex issues, and interaction in leveraging technology, computer science offers a variety in the domain of software that I gravitate towards. In taking this path, I aspire to give back to my community through my computing skills; creating accessible digital platforms that connect underserved members of my community with essential resources like job opportunities and free educational tools are just a few of many ideas to come. Through technology, I aim to bridge gaps in access and empower my community with tools for long-term growth while embodying For A Bright Future Foundation’s mission of bridging the opportunity gap that exists among high-achieving students.

3. How has your previous involvement in school and other activities impacted you?

My eyes rest on the royal blue banner, “For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology.” It was a Saturday afternoon when all teams gathered with their robots and awaited the results of the fierce competition. It was a different story for us, however. It was our rookie season, so we didn’t anticipate much from our low ranking. A blare of music interrupts my train of thought followed by the announcer, “They have evolved from a crawl into a run. Team 9153. Bearcat Robotics!” We were utterly unprepared to receive this award. Compared to the other well-established teams with their premium LED setups, we scraped together run-down toolboxes and handcrafted designs of our t-shirts. That Saturday was forever etched into my memory as the day we won the Rookies All-Star Award and qualified to go to Nationals in Houston. The opportunity we gained was a testament to our teamwork and self-made discipline. To this day, I would’ve never imagined that when I helped co-found this team as a sophomore, it would sprout to occupy a huge chunk of my life and alter the trajectory of my future. As now co-captain of the drive team, I can proudly say that the past three years have been nothing perfect with many hours spent fixing one problem, but our collective efforts to brainstorm ways to persevere through tough challenges have been the root of our profound success. Being a part of this robotics team has nurtured my passion for STEM, honed my practical skills in technical work and programming, and cultivated critical thinking skills and cooperation.

4. Why should you be selected for this scholarship?

I lived in a family that spent money frugally so from the perspective of an outsider, our situation was shameful; we were “helpless” which is what it would seem like. However, it was far from miserable. Blissful even. My resilient parents filled the void of our financial hardships by presenting their love through actions. Be it a menial trip to the grocery store or a small school event, they’d show up to every occasion. Whether we needed money for lunch money or school fees, they’d fork scraps with callused hands that tended hours of labor work. The hours I see them hauling heavy loads of work, I’d spend that many hours studying. To me, materialistic things never held priority, rather it was gaining the education my parents sacrificed their hometown, future, and time for. It may appear as a seemingly trivial promise, but paying for my college tuition without the help of my selfless parents who have supported me from my lows and highs, is all the motivation I need. The efforts they exhibit in farm work, to the point where their hands are tattered and blistered, or the aching back from heavy loads, project onto me. My parent's perseverance has solidified my efforts in school and resolution in life: utilize their sacrifices for my future and fulfill their lost dreams. Coming from a war-ridden country and witnessing firsthand my parents' tan skin from the hours spent in the blazing sun, it was only natural for me to prioritize education and choose a future that not only benefits me but my entire family. Not only is my parents' vision of the American Dream that fuels my drive but also my sheer ambition to achieve higher education that would provide a testament to both my hard work and the toils of my parents. Hence, receiving this scholarship would alleviate the financial burdens of college tuition and also continue my endeavors of achieving higher education and pursuing a job in the software industry. Within my interest in tech, I found content, a passion for STEM, and my community of people. Amongst college, I intend to continue to expand my circle of like-minded peers and venture into the realm of software that I possess an interest in. Knowing that For A Bright Future Foundation, a renowned non-profit organization that gives underserved children a chance for a brighter future, believes in my potential would drive me to prove myself worthy of their investment in my education. The prestige associated with the scholarship would encourage me to maintain a high standard of academic performance and to take advantage of all the opportunities that come my way. It would serve as a reminder that my aspirations are within reach and that I have the support and resources necessary to achieve them.