One year ago, I had no direction, no drive, no feeling. Having come back from a bad school year, I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. The stress levels were high, the excuses numerous. Until winter 2014, I was depressed. “What am I going to do about Vyčiai? I don’t even know where I am with the program. I haven’t done the work, but when does the work begin? Should I even bother continuing the program?” What am I going to do about school? What am I going to do about a job?” These were the questions I was asking myself. I didn’t care about anything and didn’t try to fix the problems I had on my mind. I was going nowhere. And then one day in April, I woke up and I turned my life around. And with that mindset, I set out to pursue all the things that vyčiavimas stands for.

Vyčiavimas doesn’t stop at the end of sueigas or at stovykla. We live our entire lives as Vyčiai: helping for the greater good, pursuing knowledge, and benefiting others in every way we can. Our work does not stop at building front vartai or a laužas. We extend our hand whenever we can, wherever we can. I am a Vytis. I do not wear the purple tie, I don’t have a lazda, but I live my life like one. Maybe I didn’t save the lives of thousands, nor did I save one, but I can tell you this: I have changed the lives of people over the years: in Mexico, where I built a house, in North Hollywood, planting a community garden, tutoring inner city children. But my work doesn’t stop there, as it doesn’t for anyone. All kind gestures are pieces of what vyčiavimas is. I’m proud of what I have done and extremely excited about what I can do in the future. And nothing can stop me from living along the lines of the tradicinė.

While everyone can perform acts of kindness, one trait that sets us apart from other groups is that we are all lietuviai. Whether we have a direct connection to Lietuva or we are descendants of lietuviai, we all represent the country that we promise to answer in the tradicinė. Throughout the last few years, as I transition further into adulthood, I feel as though I am drifting farther away from my culture. Even though I try to immerse myself in lietuvių kalba as much as possible, without a community I can belong to, it becomes difficult to maintain a link to Lietuva. Skautavimas and vyčiavimas is the link that matters most to me. Vyčiai are not just random people coming together, but a worldwide group that shares the same culture and traditions. Being part of this group is important to me not only because I can help and enlighten others, but because I can be part of a group that means a lot to me, even as the years fly by.

Finally, I want to remain a skautas. My love for nature and the desire to escape the busy technical world we live in once in a while is strong. Any skautas can attend stovykla, but not everyone is able to attend full-time. For 12 years, I attended the full stovykla, never believing there will be a time that I will not have the ability to do so, but here I am. Last year, I was able to come to stovykla on the last day, enjoying what seemed like a few hours, but I felt strangely empty. It was the first time I had missed most of stovykla. After years of working hard on patyrimai, after all the hard work put in through daily activities, nightly jobs, and iškylas, I was not ready to give up, even if I had had thoughts about prioritizing other things. This summer may be my last in Los Angeles for a while. Due to my school curriculum, my major, and tempting job opportunities, my heart is set on the Pacific Northwest and the adventures life has to bring. I never have to give up skautavimas. Nobody is telling me that I have to. Nobody is forcing me to. And I can live out the įžodžiai and the vyčių tradicinė anywhere. But there will never be a full experience like Rambynas, like the people I have gotten to know in our community, anywhere else on this planet. That, I can guarantee.

Like I have said before, vyčiavimas is not a status, not a simple rank, it’s a lifestyle with ideals we must carry out. You don’t just become one in one day, you live it, you learn it, you earn it. It grows on you until you suddenly realize that you have become one. And no one tells you when that happens. It happened to me, and despite my past, I have changed tremendously over this past year. Ultimately, receiving a title or a name is not my decision, but it does not mean I cannot emulate the Vyčių ideology or live the life of one. Regardless of what has been said or what choices have been made. I am a Vytis and nothing will stop me from living like one.