

Brady O'Neil

### Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to become an engineer. As a small boy, I would sit and build lego sets for hours on end with my sister. In middle school, I joined the robotics team and was the youngest programmer. At my first lego qualifier competition, my teammate misplaced our program that had taken us months to complete. We had an outdated backup, but we were basically starting from a blank slate with only a couple of hours to recreate. I did not give up; I programmed everything I could remember. I would love to tell you we were victorious, but I guess that depends how you measure success. I learned how to work under pressure and stay positive and persevere through challenges. To me, that's the base of success, but, in the competition, we took last place.

My passion continued as I took STEM classes through high school. As a senior, I am the Student Ambassador of the Engineering Department and leader of the Kenya Clean Water Initiative. I've worked on the Kenya Clean Water Initiative since my freshman year in high school. I've been involved in all aspects of the project from the technical team, the structural team and the testing team. Our goal for the Clean Water Initiative is to create a cost efficient water filtration system for two villages in Kenya. Our aspiration is to expand this technology throughout all of Kenya and third world countries to save thousands of lives by removing harmful bacteria from their water through filtration.

As leader of the initiative, I was invited to travel to Kenya in January 2020 as the only student representative. I would travel, along with my teacher and a small team from our partner organization Fishers of Men Ministries, to collect data from the water sources in order to implement our project. I was asked to travel with very short notice (five weeks before the travel

date), but I knew the importance of this mission and worked hard to overcome the obstacles in my way. First, I needed approval from the school district and the board members of Fishers of Men Ministries. This involved several emails from my teacher, the administration and me. I needed to prove to them that the trip was essential to move forward in our classroom and that I could manage the time I would miss from school. Additionally, Fishers of Men Ministries required evidence of my faith. It took nearly two weeks to get the approval from everyone. While we were waiting for approval, I also had the obstacle of finances. This was not something our family could afford to do, especially on such short notice, but, with determination, and with the help of family and area businesses, I was able to raise a large portion of my trip expenses.

I fearlessly traveled to a third world country and spent two and half weeks away with people I barely knew. It changed my life and guided me in a new direction for future goals. My teacher Greg Smith and I successfully gathered the data needed, taught the students basic robotics with a lego robotic program that West High School had donated and also were able help implement the very first filters in the Kimando school. Personally, I found my purpose and knew how an engineering degree would help me change the lives of hundreds/thousands of people. I was able to experience what life is like with limited access to necessary resources. Observing the culture and the people showed me what true happiness was, how much we take for granted and how, with a little effort, I can make a tremendous impact on the quality of life of people who live worlds away. I knew this was not something I could not just walk away from when I got back to the States. I plan on attending Iowa State University, majoring in Mechanical Engineering, joining their club Engineers Without Borders and acquiring the skills and ability to change the world and provide better accommodations for those less fortunate.

Receiving this scholarship would help ease some of the financial stresses I feel. In 2018, my mom was diagnosed with terminal small cell carcinoma of the bladder cancer. I have watched her fight for her life through chemotherapy, radiation, and immunotherapy treatments. She is a fighter. She was given 6-12 months to live, and I'm still fortunate to have her today, but I also live with the constant what-if questions in the back of my mind. "Is she ok?" "Are the tumors back?"

It hasn't been easy. She wasn't able to work and had to go on disability. She was in the hospital for months at a time, and my dad worked a lot of overtime to keep the family afloat while medical bills piled high. Paying for college is going to be challenging. I recently dislocated my shoulder, and, after surgery, I will have a six month recovery time, but I plan on finding a way to work this summer and through college to help keep the cost down.

The experiences I have had throughout high school have shaped me into who I am today. The Kenya trip was life changing, but I've also been fortunate to be actively involved in hockey since I was five. I've been captain of the Quad City Blues all four years of high school. I've received the leadership and sportsmanship awards, the coaches awards, academic awards every year, and, in my spare time, I volunteer with the One Goal Program to help develop youth hockey. Hockey taught me many life lessons such as leadership skills, teamwork, grace in defeat, and the value of friendship. Between my education, sports, volunteer opportunities and family, I feel prepared for the realities of life. I learned how to work through hardships and never give up even when the odds are against you. I am able to turn my hardship into motivation and make the most out of the time I'm given in this life. I will continue to push myself every day to be successful and accomplish my goals. My journey has made me develop a passion for helping those in need, and that's what I want to do in the future.