

Q&A with Landen Freeman
2023 Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship winner



High School: Davenport North High School

Secondary education plans/major: I plan to attend Mount Mercy University in the fall of 2023 to pursue a bachelor's degree in mathematics with a concentration in environmental justice followed by graduate studies in math and environmental law.

What inspires or excites you most about learning? One of the greatest joys in my life is asking good questions. There is so much knowledge out there, so many different ways of communicating all of that knowledge, and so many different ways of understanding and interpreting that knowledge. Learning is simple, as long as you can muster the guts to ask questions. My love for question-asking, logical reasoning, and problem-solving cultivates an intense passion for learning. One of the innate qualities of man that separates us from other creatures is our intense desire to understand things on a fundamental level. To me, that desire to understand is more than some innate *thing*; it's become essential to my purpose, to understand things on a more fundamental level. When I learn something new, it feels like I'm rooting myself deeper into that purpose; that new information becomes a part of who I am. Learning calculus, for example, ushered in a whole new world of math that I never knew existed, and thus created a whole new version of me—a far more analytical and thoughtful one—that would never have existed otherwise.

What is an accomplishment in your life that you're most proud of thus far? I am fortunate to have many accomplishments to be proud of, so this is a really tough question for me. I would say I'm most proud of the man I have become, even despite the hardships I've suffered. Of course, I'm not perfect, but I am perfectly *me*. I have kept a strong resolve over the last few years, and I have worked hard as a leader in my community to make the most positive impact possible. Whether that's helping peers with math problems they get stuck on or spending countless hours volunteering in various clubs. I can only hope that my conviction to serve leads others to do the same. I've worked hard, incredibly hard, and I never gave up. When I failed to reach a goal, or a dream died, I created a new goal; I dreamt a new dream. I am my greatest accomplishment.

Why did you decide to apply for the Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship? I've seen many adults' lives greatly restricted by student loan debt. I've seen how people close to me, family members, and family friends have been kept from their dreams because they have tens of thousands in student loan debt. As early as middle school, I decided I would dedicate my time to procuring an application I could proudly present to scholarship organizations and colleges. In 7th grade I took a test to move up a grade in math, and it was from then on that my goal was to 'get ahead of the game' so

that I could attend college without loans. I'm proud to say that through my efforts and the existence of several local scholarship opportunities such as the Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship, I will be able to attend college for free. (A note to any parents or up-and-coming seniors: Apply for every scholarship under the sun. As a mentor of mine once said, "Turn it into a full-time job, where each essay you write has the potential to make you thousands of dollars.")

How does it feel to be chosen as the recipient? I'm overwhelmingly grateful. When I first discovered the TKE Memorial Scholarship, I observed that there had only been one Davenport Schools student to win it before. Scholarships are a gruesome thing – anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of talented individuals working their butts off to convince total strangers that they deserve/need that scholarship the most. I've applied for over 65 scholarships in the past year, and for most of them I did not get selected as a recipient. It is a DRAINING process. So, when I get selected for a scholarship such as the TKE Memorial Scholarship, it brightens my whole day and takes a couple pounds of stress off my shoulders.

Future goals and aspirations? While I plan to major in math at Mount Mercy University and pursue graduate school after, that is simply the pathway through which I hope to achieve my main goals and aspirations. I desire, above all else, to lead a life in which I affect positive change and to leave a legacy by which others can be inspired to chase their dreams. Particularly, I hope to make a great impact in the math world as a research mathematician and professor; I love to learn, and I love to share what I learn. I also intend to imbue my mathematics background with a strong passion for environmental stewardship and advocacy to contribute however I can toward a more environmentally conscious world. Climate change is a beast of a problem that affects hundreds of millions around the globe, spanning across just about every field of study from politics to science, and I hope to do whatever I can to work toward meaningful solutions.

Anything else to add? I'd like to express my thanks once more to the scholarship committee for selecting me to receive the Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship. I also extend my thanks to the many great teachers at Davenport North High School who have shaped who I am as a student and person. Finally, I thank my mom for bringing me coffee on all those late nights when I was cranking away at scholarship essays, and for always believing that I could do anything.