

What makes you an exemplary citizen, student, or person that should be the recipient of the Ronald E Thomas Memorial Scholarship?

By Nina Hymel

Knights in shining armor, gold medals on a champion's neck, the sound of a room applauding. These are the sorts of images that the word exemplary brings to mind. But how can a student, someone as young and seemingly insignificant as me, be seen as exemplary? I've never rescued a child from a burning building or had a room full of people clap for me. Then how is it that I, a seemingly unworthy candidate, can see myself as exemplary?

To me, being exemplary is more than always being the winner. It is much more about picking oneself up and refusing to quit when things don't go as planned. I have a 4.5 GPA, but my Bs in Chemistry mean far more to me than my straight As in English because those are the marks that I truly fought for, the ones that kept me up studying for hours because my teacher said I would never be able to achieve higher than a C and did not belong in her competitive honors class. It means never, ever letting someone tell you that you cannot do something or that you are not good enough. It means believing in yourself, even when no one else does. Being exemplary requires hard work and is far from glamorous. Over the summer I spend my time working at the St. Charles Summer Inclusion Camp with special needs children. There isn't much glory in the job and it's hard not to be jealous of friends that spend their summers lounging. However, knowing that it is possible to impact someone's life by doing something as simple as playing with a child for a few hours makes it all worthwhile. Knowing that you may not be commended for a good deed but doing it anyway is an integral part of being exemplary.

Being exemplary is also deeply rooted in the art of resiliency, determination, and sheer stubbornness. It means never giving up on your dreams and always striving to do the absolute best that you are capable of. I'm sure that Michael Phelps could have stopped at one gold medal, feeling that he had already achieved his goal and that anymore would simply be excessive. Obviously, that wasn't the case. People told me I was being ridiculous when I said that after receiving a 29 on my ACT, I planned on retaking it. After receiving a 30, I still have plans to take it again. Being exemplary means knowing and firmly believing that it is never okay to settle for "good enough".

So no, I cannot offer you anecdotes about my heroic actions or incredible feats of mind or body. But what I can offer is an exemplary desire to always do my best and to never give up or settle. I can offer an exemplary desire and determination to chase my dreams and an unbreakable resiliency. This is what makes me, a seemingly average girl, exemplary. Because after all, gold medals can only take you so far.