

Throughout the course of the past year and half I have learned “To live and let live.” I have learned this through my experiences with people and the words they say. I have recognized the fact that people may disapprove of many different characteristics about me and even my character itself. I have also learned that I cannot allow these opinions to affect my actions or the way I handle situations and relationships with others. This small, but impactful chapter of my life will stick with me the rest of my life as a reminder to not let one moment affect your future.

Whenever I hear the word integrity I immediately think about when I broke my hand in January of 2022. In a moment of lost control, with a gnarly scar as reminder, I learned a valuable lesson that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Despite being known as a well mannered person, a mix of passion and fury blurred my focus on maintaining a sense of control over my emotions. The splint surrounds the mess of bones and screws, but in reality it held my fractured mind together. Anger with myself over a moment of lost control. Disappointment from my parents over a life-long lesson. Resentment from my coaches and teammates for a moment deemed as selfish. The intertwining of stitching and skin to prevent blood from escaping. How just one moment of anger paired with the absence of the integrity that my parents taught me, now teaches me a lifelong lesson.

The locker room was silent with tension from the loss. The bone poking through the gash in my arm was an alarming signal that I had done more damage than I intended. I can still feel my arm jabbing at the metal locker. The warmth of the blood flowed off of my hand. The absence of pain was a result of the adrenaline coursing through my veins. This account of what, at the current moment, seems like the end of the world does not concern me, but one of my teammates. During our team meeting right after the loss resulting in me punching a locker, my head coach and two assistant coaches ignored the pool of blood collecting at my feet.

I still remember every set of eyes in that locker room; all of them focused on my knuckle, skinned to the bone.

I still remember trying to wipe up the pool of blood with a wet paper towel. I made trips back and forth from the locker room to the connecting bathroom for more wet paper towels. I sat holding a mangled hand together with a school paper towel. The sandpaper-like texture rubbing against raw flesh. I still remember coming back from one of the trips and seeing one of my teammates, a fellow sixteen-year-old, wiping up my blood with his warmup shirt. I will never forget the sight. I still remember this same teammate helping me take off my white home jersey, making sure I did not get blood on it. At that moment my coaches, all whom I admired, had their integrity tested. These same familiar faces turned a blind eye to my mangled hand. Despite seeing one of their players injured, they chose to ignore me because of the actions leading up to the injury. Because of this they forced my teammate to show his true integrity that will stick with me for the rest of my life. Because of this teammate helping me in a time of need, I strive to make sure to help people in a time of need.

I still remember asking my assistant coach, a man that I grew to trust, for tape to secure a wet piece of paper towel I grabbed during one of my trips. I still remember him responding with, "Tape? We don't have tape." My stomach immediately fell to the floor. I knew that our head coach always kept a roll of sports tape in his backpack. I still remember taking my shoes off and noticing that the one teammate that helped me disappeared. As the last person remaining in the locker room, I continued to undress and change into my street clothes. I still remember, as soon as I slid on my white street shoes, seeing my teammate walking through the locker room door with a roll of white athletic tape in his hands. I later learned he walked across the gym to get the tape from our school's athletic director. I still remember my teammate carefully helping me wrap a new piece of wet paper towel around my dismantled hand. All this while my three coaches stood outside of the locker room doors waiting for me to exit. The only thing on their minds, getting home after the upsetting loss.

This moment taught me that it's the relationships you build with others that matters most. I have learned that it's the journey not the destination. Despite this horrific experience, these relationships are also a reminder of how truly rare, but meaningful moments like these are in a person's life. The countless hours spent at the dining room table with my mom doing rehab. I have learned to look back and enjoy the hard work it took in order to redeem my actions in a moment of lost control.

I still remember walking past all three of my coaches with my orange team hoodie covering my bloody hand, embarrassed by my lack of control. Embarrassed that I had been so frustrated with one single game, that I lost sight of the bigger picture. I was embarrassed my gruesome injury was undeniably my fault. I still remember my head coach, who happened to be one of my best friend's dads and a man I possessed and still possess a great deal of respect towards, making eye contact with me and not saying a word while I gave him a fist bump with my injured hand. I still remember walking out to my mom and telling her that we needed to go to the hospital and seeing the disappointment on her face. I still remember feeling of guilt creeping into my stomach while being wheeled into surgery. Seeing my mom's face and knowing that this was all unavoidable.

As I write this, a little over a year after the original injury, the number of lessons that I learned and am still learning from breaking my hand in a moment of lost control cannot be counted, but the most important thing I learned involves my teammate. I learned that, at that moment, my sixteen-year-old teammate showed me the greatest amount of integrity I witnessed so far in my short life. While my coaches ignored my injury, my teammate recognized the seriousness of the injury and realized that I needed help. Instead of choosing to ignore me like all of my coaches and other teammates, he chose to step up and help me. I still hold a great deal of respect and love for all of my coaches inside of my heart, but the amount of respect and gratitude my teammate earned at that moment may never get earned again by anyone else in my life.

The scar on my hand, the memory of a splint that surrounded a mess of bones and screws. Those serve as a reminder of a teammate helping me in a true time of need. They will always be a reminder of how quickly your actions can affect your future. They exist as a reminder that mistakes in a person's past can be used to learn and grow to help create a better future.

Throughout my recovery, I have experienced first hand that you can not let the words of others affect your actions. In a moment of intense emotion I tend to think about how long the emotion itself will last. In the end, these split moments are never worth the idea of affecting your future. I have learned that I can not control what is said about me, but I can control the way I react. The saying "to live and let live" has opened my eyes to the idea that people will always criticize your actions, but this does not mean you criticize yourself as well. Throughout this journey I have learned that others will live their lives tearing down others. However, I have learned that others will be there in times of need. This process has made me realize I need to be the latter.

When looking into future situations where my self-control may be tested, I will remember that everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Along with this everyone should also be allowed to live their life the way they want to. When going through life, I will not judge someone based on one moment. Instead of having an ethnocentric view going into college, I feel as though this entire experience has truly opened my eyes. This will also help me when building relationships with others. It has opened my eyes to never judge someone based on their actions without knowing the reasoning.