

# AYLA HORAN: BETTERING HERSELF BY WORKING TO BETTER THE LIVES OF OTHERS

DECEMBER 4, 2014 TAYLER CADDY LEAVE A COMMENT

Students slouch around the Marshall Student Center in sweatpants and squeaky, soaked sneakers, umbrellas dripping at their sides. Everyone seems to be falling asleep to the dull patter of rain falling against the building's roof and windows, until one female's laughter breaks through the dreary ambiance.

Ayla Horan hugs and greets several acquaintances on her way inside the student center. She flashes a huge smile, pushing her long brown hair to one side as she adjusts a bulging burgundy Greek emblazoned tote bag.

Leaving her friends, she answers several new text messages on her phone. Horan's online presence only underlines her outgoing and social personality. Online there are photos of herself with sorority sisters and friends abound—one can't help but notice her many involvements and accomplishments at USF. Horan seems to do, and have it all.

However, a second look shows her to be much more than just a polished social butterfly of a sorority girl.

"I grew up always being told, 'You're going to be just like your parents. You're going to amount to nothing,'" Horan said.

She grew up outside of Atlantic City, New Jersey, in a house broken by crime and drugs. Horan's mother did drugs up until she was born; her father, an alcoholic, drug addict and robber, was in and out of jail.

During her freshman year of high school, her father started abusing Horan and her mother, causing her parents to divorce. Then, after two years of silence, Horan decided to try to reconnect with her father, but found she was too late:

"Within the same week of that decision, my dad passed away. He overdosed," she said.

Horan saw her sad and defeated feelings reflected in her local community, which was predominately Hispanic. Horan's now ex-boyfriend and his family were undocumented. So



while she and her friends were getting accepted to colleges, he faced the reality that he couldn't even apply.

"It really hurt me that he felt so hopeless and that he was just going to stay in New Jersey and work in restaurants for the rest of his life," Horan said.

Then, in June 2012, the Obama administration started Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), allowing Horan's ex-boyfriend to gain a work permit and apply to college. Horan said this event showed her that there was hope in any situation, and inspired her to leave home and go to college.

"I'm white, but my major is Spanish. I'm obsessed with Hispanic people, their culture, everything," Horan said. "I want to go on to be an immigration lawyer to help bring them into the country and get visas and the right to education."

At just 20 years old, Horan found a way to turn her obsession into pure passion. Since coming to USF, she helped teach English to children in Costa Rica and Argentina while studying abroad and holding a position on the GloBull Ambassadors advisory council. More importantly, she joined Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. (LTA) in November 2013, where she helps organize events to spread awareness about tuition equity and rights for immigrants. Horan has held three different positions on the organization's executive board, where she is vice president.

Horan recalled first seeing the Lambda Theta Alpha sisters at an on-campus event called Latin Fest, and admiring their pride and confidence as she watched them dance, or "stroll." Learning the organization's motto, "Latin by tradition, not by definition," Horan became an official sister along with other young women of various ethnicities a few months later.

"It's like a second family," she said. "I owe everything to LTA. I don't know where I'd be without my sorority."

Shaneese Hernandez, 22, a senior majoring in business administration and a LTA sister, forged a friendship with Horan as the new member shadowed her to learn about the vice president position.

"You don't come across a person like her. She really does care about everyone," Hernandez said. "She definitely goes above and beyond for everything, and she's always trying to make things better for any organization that she's a part of."

19-year-old Bristin Price, a sophomore majoring in elementary education, said Horan is definitely devoted to the Latino people. Price said her favorite memory of her best friend is when the two took a vacation to Mexico in high school.

“It was really cool to be able to experience it with someone who was so passionate about the people and their culture,” she said.

Horan plans to study abroad in Colombia and Spain, and to join the social justice group NITE to get involved with other communities on campus. She hopes to further her education with a graduate degree in Spanish, followed by law school at Florida International University.

At the end of the day, Horan still has weaknesses and obstacles to overcome.

“She definitely tries to put too much on her plate at times, and she wants to please everybody,” Hernandez said.

“She works hard for what she wants, and when she sets her mind to something, she goes to extremes to get it,” Price said.

Horan agreed with these statements.

She also mentioned that her going away to school has caused her mother to feel lonely and depressed, leading her to abuse drugs again. She is currently in and out of rehab. While this saddens Horan, she has hope for the future.

“That’s probably the hardest part about being in Florida, that I’m not with my mom, helping her get through her issues,” Horan said. “But I’m working to better the lives of both of us.”

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