

The Start of “El Cinturón”¹

When it comes to my memories, many are good. Our memories last our whole lives. They keep people and events with us forever. In all my life, people have told me what I can and cannot do. Nevertheless, last year, and once again this year, some people told me things that changed how I see my life. What they said to me helped to clarify and to see my life in a new light. It is because of three people that I am a better person than the person I was when they first met me.

Last year entering APEP, I thought I knew it all. I came in arrogant because I had my Associate’s degree. I felt like I didn’t need Augustana, because I had enrolled in the Northwestern program, until one day I expressed this to Dr. Varallo and she responded “Well, we are happy that you are here and we are going to make the best of this.” Her response got my attention because she said it in a caring way. However, one day after FYI 101 Dr. Varallo and I were having a discussion about how to help people. Dr. Varallo said “Young, you have to go to graduate school,” and it wasn’t what she said but the way in which she said it, it was the expression on her face and the sincerity in her eyes that showed me that she believed what she said. This declaration came from someone that I admire and respect, and it pushed me to want to be a doctor. The only thing I didn’t know was what type of doctor I wanted to be.

When it comes to what type of doctor I wanted to be, I owe that to Dr. Day. Last year in the Greek Warrior Mythology class, we read Jonathan Shay’s *Achilles in Vietnam* and the *Iliad*. These two books made me think: How can I help people like me? Those who look and sound and think like I think. It was at that moment that I knew I wanted to be a psychologist one day. Then after one class we were talking about a grade that was good but that I felt could have been better. At one point in our conversation, Dr. Day looked me in the eyes and said “I’m going to teach you how to play the white man’s game².” Dr. Day said this with tears in her eyes but with clarity and power. I don’t know if she realized it or not, but this declaration changed my life because it showed me the belief, faith and hope that she had in me. This is why I push myself in my studies in Augustana because I feel that I owe it to Dr. Day, to Dr. Varallo, and now to Dr. Rockwell.

Spanish is difficult. Learning a new language at the age of 37 is the most difficult task I have had in APEP. At the beginning of the year I thought about stopping but one day walking in the corridor Dr. Rockwell said something that opened my eyes to the truth. Dr. Rockwell said “I don’t care what the exam says, I know how much you have learned.” I don’t know if she knew it but this declaration made me believe in myself again. In her voice I heard, and in her eyes I saw, that she believed in me. If she believes in me, why don’t I believe in myself? This is the reason why I push myself to do the best I can.

In conclusion, I want to say thank you to APEP, because all my life I have done what I wanted. But Augustana has showed me what I need to do with my life. For this reason I feel that I owe APEP the best version of myself. I will always be a warrior in the classroom and I will fight for APEP. I will always push myself to be the best person that I can be for Augustana because Augustana gave me a new life.

¹ Meaning “the belt”, this is the student’s nickname, having to do with chess-related boasting.

² This is the student’s loose paraphrase of the conversation.