

Dorchester

Reporter

About my journey out of the abyss

By Josiah Harrell, Special to the Reporter
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Reflecting on my high school experience, resilience seems to be the defining factor in how I and my fellow members of the class of 2024 navigated the dark and uncertain years of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I grew up without a father, so my grandfather was one of the most influential figures in my life. As I got older, my role started to transition to that of caregiver for him. In the early days of the pandemic, we were inseparable, but on May 10, 2020, my life was forever changed when he passed away. I still vividly recall running downstairs and seeing him collapsed in the bathroom.

To witness something so terrible, and to grieve the loss of such an important man in my life, was pain enough, but things were compounded by the fact that I couldn't leave the house due to the Covid virus. I was haunted, an eighth grader trapped in my room with trauma. I couldn't go outside, and even when I did, it was completely desolate. At one point, I collapsed. As I fell into a spiral of depression, my grades began to fall, too. For the final weeks of eighth grade and for my entire freshman year in high school, I was in a terribly dark place, unable to even see my friends who might've offered me solace.

Like me, my classmates were navigating their own difficulties. All of us had been thrown into the deep end, where we spent our first year staring at computer screens. We didn't feel that we were learning anything. My grades continued to sink into D's and F's, and I was still mourning the loss of my grandfather. I didn't really care. I had my family and my counselors, but there was only so much they could do.

Gradually, though, I came to the realization that my grandfather wouldn't have wanted it to be like this for me. I had to remember that no matter what, he would want me to persevere. I didn't want to let him or the other important people in my life down.

As pandemic restrictions began to loosen, I was able to get out of the house, and start the healing process. Returning to the classroom in person, and feeling resolved to succeed for my grandfather, I worked hard to get my grades up. I participated in my school's ACED program for students who have opted into getting a head start on the college and financial process in their junior year.

Last summer, I engaged in coursework in Psychology and English at Temple University, living independently. Despite my courses becoming more rigorous, my GPA continued to climb throughout my last three years, and I enrolled in multiple Advanced Placement (AP) classes. To boot, I did all of this while playing basketball and track & field, serving as the captain of our flag football team, and working as a barista downtown.

I'm now proud to say that I'll be attending Regis College in the fall to attain my degree in psychology. My goal is to become a clinical psychologist, so I can help people who've struggled like I have. Mental health is a real thing. In the Black community, especially, it is not always necessarily recognized as important. I want to be an ear for the people who, like me, felt that they couldn't discuss their struggles with anybody.

As a proud Black man, as a person raised in households with separated mothers, and as someone who has endured incredible trauma and persevered, I know I have what it takes to help those who feel alone or misunderstood. I now know that the hardships I've endured have made me the man I am today and have also given me the skills to succeed on a personal level and to support my friends, family, and community.

Josiah Harrell, a Dorchester resident, recently graduated from Match Charter Public High School. He will attend Regis College in the fall.