

Lessons learned

2020. A year of ups and downs, but most importantly, one where many lessons were learned. As I sit down and reflect on this past year, I cannot help but realize how the specific events that happened, negative and positive, allowed me to discover important perspectives about life.

1. Appreciate life's blessings while you can. A constant that many experienced this year was the fact that things were taken away in an instant. Life is way too short. Tomorrow is never promised, so we must live for today. I was reminded throughout the year to make the most of everything, every person and every moment. To be positive 100% of the time, to never go to bed mad and to share my feelings with the people I love. I learned that it's crucial to tell someone how you feel about them. One of the biggest challenges I faced in 2020 was moving my dad into his assisted living residence due to his dementia. He is slowly losing his

ability to communicate with me, so I cherish each moment I get to spend talking with him. There will come a day that he will not be able to speak a single word, so I know how important it is to express my love and gratitude for him now. Do not wait to tell your loved ones "I appreciate you" or "Thank you for what you have done for me," because before you know it, you might be too late. Hesitation will cause regret and life is not worth living in regret. I once heard a saying along the lines of, "Bring me my flowers now while I'm alive, not at my funeral." Why wait? Do what you can to make a difference in people's lives now. Go the extra mile to make someone's day. Be grateful, live in the present, avoid negativity, be vulnerable about your emotions and share them with confidence. Live life to the fullest by doing what makes you happy and avoiding judgement. Love deeply by being caring and performing acts of kindness to those you encounter each day and never look back because the past cannot be re-done.

2. Leave a legacy. This year, I realized we never truly think about how we want to be remembered

when we pass. We don't know what tomorrow holds, but we can control our words and actions towards the people we encounter. I have come to a conclusion that at the end of my life, I do not want people to remember me for the things I owned or accomplished, but rather for how I made them feel. This realization hit me when I tore my ACL and my meniscus right before school started this year. I was no longer able to contribute my physical efforts on the soccer field and basketball court, but I still could make an impact from the sidelines. I knew that I still needed to be there for my teammates by encouraging them and creating positive atmospheres for my teams. Personally, making others feel loved and appreciated means more to me than any sports accomplishment ever could. I believe that this is something often overlooked, but when you pass, these actions are a reflection of the life that you lived.

Some people may argue that they cannot make much of an impact on people and that their actions aren't truly effective. In reality, an individual can make an impact and it could make all

the difference for another person. Also, many people rely on others to dictate their legacies, but I believe that it is an individual choice and responsibility. It is a true blessing to have the power and control over the people that we become and the character and attitude we decide to possess each day.

If I can leave you with anything, I want it to be this. God has a story for each of us, so we must trust in His plan always. There will be struggles and challenges along the way, but even when times get tough we must strive to live out our purpose in life and to be the best versions of ourselves. As we begin our new journey in 2021, let's all spread more love and kindness, embrace our uniqueness and celebrate all of the goodness in our lives. For after all, the good outshines the bad if we generate grateful hearts. Take some time to reflect on the lessons you learned this past year that you can take with you into 2021, because I promise, you won't regret it. Never forget YOU are loved.

Mary Kate Moeder
Sports Writer