

Turner Daudert
ACF Visionary Scholarship
Essay

Orange in color, each petal not bigger than a quarter, the delicate California Poppy is an opportunist. Each Spring it can be observed taking over entire hillsides in Southern California and peeking through the cracks in unkempt sidewalks. Roadside easements and the neighbor's front yard garden become temporary hosts for the visitor that will only be in bloom for a few weeks. I live in the Hemet-San Jacinto Valley in California. San Jacinto, nestled between the mountains and the desert, is a community with a population of 53,000. It is a place with high poverty and crime rates and low per capita income. This is where I call home. When I think about why college is important to me I feel that it can be explained and illustrated through the story of the perseverance of the California poppy. The state flower is included in beautifully kept botanical gardens and is also witnessed forcing itself through weathered and cracked asphalt on the streets I take to school. It is here that I appreciate the perseverance and resourcefulness that this poppy has proven to possess. With little access to water or nutrients, it is not placed thoughtfully in a terraced planter, or in an expansive nature preserve surrounded by natural beauty, an abundance of water and floods of natural sunlight. Instead, a post-mounted "YIELD" sign casts a flashing yellow light over one side of the waxy stem. The flower sits only about a yard from the Dollar General parking lot and just feet from passing vehicles. I see myself and some of my peers in that singular poppy. That poppy has spread its roots deep and wide to reach for soil rich in nutrients. It has found opportunities for growth where there was little access and where the odds were stacked against it. In a town where only 12% of adults have a college degree, compared to the

state average of 36% and the national average of 35%, I am unwavering in my belief that going to college is the best way to make a positive difference in my community. I look around my school and community and I see perseverance and potential. I see potential for my community to blossom and become a place where going to college and appreciating all that higher education has to offer will become the new norm. For my family, it starts with me. My Mom got a job right out of high school and my Dad joined the Army. We do not come from generational wealth, but generational poverty. College is important to me because my goal is to build my community up instead of leaving it behind. I am unrelenting in my efforts to bring more access and education to my community and the best way I can do that is by broadening my own mind and views through a college education.