

Opportunities

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Kalamazoo Area Mathematics and Science Center, Class of 1990

In life, each person is offered opportunities, one after the other, until life ceases. For me, one of those opportunities was to attend the Kalamazoo Area Mathematics and Science Center, an NCSSSMST school. While attending KAMSC as a member of its inaugural class required a bit of imagination regarding the opportunity at hand, and since Kalamazoo, Michigan was just inventing this concept, I can say quite irrevocably that choosing KAMSC wasn't just the best choice for high school. It was the best choice for my life. Every single part of my life – college, professional, and even personal – has been touched by KAMSC.

years at KAMSC, influences how I approach problems. He used to say, "Computers are incredibly stupid, incredibly fast, and incredibly accurate. People are incredibly smart, creative, slow, and inaccurate. Let computers do what computers do well and people do what people do well." In all of my college and professional experiences, I use this as a guiding principle – automate where it makes sense, apply brains where it doesn't. I also use this Mr. Nichols quote when I train and coach others on the continuous improvement curriculums of Six Sigma and Lean as it is truly about challenging how we use computerized tools in the work place. Further, Mr. Nichols introduced me to statistics and mathematical modeling. I regularly use these tools in my job and have built a career punctuated by my technical expertise in modeling and statistics.

Another icon of KAMSC culture was Mr. John Streeter, and I think in this day and age he would be labeled an "Information Technology" teacher. He would post the assignments and completions by students (his electronic grade book) on the bulletin board at the front of the room. The "wallpaper," as he called it, would be regularly updated with a speech from Mr. Streeter that went something like this: "The latest wallpaper is up, folks. For those of you are who behind, I suggest you get caught up before you become a bigger behind." In the world of work, I say the last sentence of this to myself regularly, usually with a chuckle and private smile, when I feel like my work is piling up without an end in sight. The quote reminds me that even when I'm becoming a "bigger behind," I can laugh and get on with the multitude of tasks at hand.

My KAMSC career started with Ms. Cynthia Addison. Ms. Addison taught Interdisciplinary

KAMSC truly brought a smoother path to college. First, I received numerous offers to top programs, and, even more importantly for a child from a blue-collar family, tremendous scholarship opportunities. In an era of the average student loan burden exceeding \$30,000, I took no loans for either of my degrees in part through working, but largely due to academic scholarships. Second, KAMSC employed some tough teachers who truly saw every class as college preparation, regardless of whether the class bore the initials "AP" in its title. The homework load, content, level of instruction and clear need to self-start made the transition to college much easier, based on my observation of "normal school" peers. Third, I learned my limits. Attending KAMSC made me realize there were people smarter than me on the planet, and that I was never going to be as tremendously talented as them. However, I also saw that not all talent lies in academic performance.

One of the joys associated with being in the inaugural class was that the several teachers worked with us two or more years. To this day, Mr. Cameron Nichols, my math teacher for four

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Studies and coordinated a program where interested seniors were paired with professionals in the region for real work experience. Without learning early about thinking in an integrated fashion, I wouldn't have the type of job I do today – helping a company change and improve the value it adds. Further, she essentially got me my first job in the paper industry, where I have been working for over 18 years. Ms. Addison paired me with a peer's father at a local paper company doing Research and Development work. That was the first industrial experience on my resume. This led to the highly uncommon reward of an industry-based internship as a freshman in college. While I may have gotten where I am today without her support, I still believe the road was easier with the first bricks laid by Ms. Addison.

My desire for a doctoral degree spawned from learning with Dr. John Goudie, biology and anatomy/physiology teacher. Dr. Goudie was Mr. Goudie when we first met him. He finished his degree while we were at KAMSC and led me to my own aspirations to be Dr. Terri Beck. As part of my personal twenty-year plan, now in year 13, I will get my doctorate degree. For now, the master's degree and a strong leadership position in a company I enjoy working for is keeping me quite busy enough. However, Dr. Goudie did inspire me to dream big in all things.

A school experience like the one I had at KAMSC is the ultimate life-changing opportunity. It brought me in contact with a different friend base than my small "normal school" in a largely agricultural area would have ever allowed me to meet. My peers were the children of professionals unlike any in my childhood exposure – professors, lawyers, doctors, and executives. My KAMSC friends' lifestyles showed me a different way of living, more culture, and a broader perspective. To this day, I have close and deep personal friendships with people I met at KAMSC, and they continue to inspire me to new heights.

KAMSC also influences my world-view the most in an odd way – philanthropy. KAMSC would not exist and persist without charitable contributions, so I persistently remember one of the highest impact opportunities of my life came through others' giving. Further, while at KAMSC we were encouraged to help the environment and community. This is a responsibility I never forget and regularly participate in personally, professionally, and academically.

In closing, every single part of my life has been touched by KAMSC, and absolutely for the better. Albert Einstein is credited with saying, "Experience alone can decide on truth." The truth of the matter is that places like KAMSC change lives. They provide a larger perspective and greater experiences than a student could find on his or her own in the "normal schools" of the world.