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*E pluribus unum*: "Out of many, one."

This summer I have had the opportunity to work at my university as an Orientation Leader for incoming freshman. Part of my job entails presenting my personal story as to how I got to Dominican University in the first place, we call it our DU Story. My whole DU Story is about growing up in the backstretch and how that has impacted my values and what I chose to do for my future.

In my story I begin by trying to explain how unique the racetrack community is and what exactly it means to grow up there. Hidden behind the bright lights and fast-paced world that is the racing industry, you will find a small community all its own. Its nothing like any other town, or random subdivision you will ever come across. Many of the people here are in no way related, other than the work they do, and the space they share. Yet by this thin connection alone the community was built. Families share common aspiration in the possibilities of the country and the simple hope of a better future for their kids. It is in this hope, and aspirations there is a fundamental culture you can find of collective responsibility. a belief that we are all connected as one people. *E pluribus unum*: "Out of many, one." If there is a child in the community who is struggling, that matters to me, even if it is not my child. If there is a senior citizen somewhere that is in pain that makes my life poorer, even if it is not my

grandparent. This fundamental belief that we interconnected to each other, by work, by faith, and by common struggle, is what makes this community so unique.

To grow up in this tight knit community was what allowed me to grow up with this relentless optimism. This intrinsic confidence in all that I do was a result of the community that helped raise me. I could not have found my way to the school bus in the early mornings at Arlington without the other mothers making sure I was okay. I would have never become the student I am today without the early education and summer programs that helped me learn. Volunteers at the summer camp program helped me learn to read. Miss Patty helped me learn to drive. In these small ways my community helped raise me to who I am today.

I am not a blind optimist---the willful ignorance that thinks my community is pristine. The Backstretch has never been the shining city on a hill. The community is largely overlooked, where the reality is the rest of the world largely does not know it exist. The sense of being forgotten is all apparent in the community. The facilities are run down and unused, the programs that helped me thrive as a kid no longer exist. Now, in the aftermath of the pandemic, the hope of the community dwindles even further. Without proper facilities, programs, and medical services, it is hard to see this better future we all aspire for. Therefore, more and more young people in our community find it hard to even see college as an option. While the community is plagued by its deep-rooted issues and imperfections, this is my home. A community far from polished, far from pristine. It was no great city on a hill and very far from perfect. Yet, it is I, the young girl from this community that fades into background, striving to forge some greater purpose.

I went to college looking for the same connections and tight knit community that I came from. At Dominican University I have found my place. Now I tell new incoming freshman my story, the community I am from, and how those important people left the imprints that made me who I am today. I am in college doing research, and internships, and all I could ever aspire for because of the Backstretch community that helped raise me, and the ITHA programs that have allowed me to pursue my dreams of greater purpose.