

# Marcus

Marcus stopped me in the hall and said "So, you're the counselor?"  
"I am."

"My name is Marcus and it's great to meet you." He held out his hand. "Now I've been told that counselors are supposed to be good people who help kids, right? Ok, so here's the deal. I'm going to graduate this year and I have some big plans."

I had to smile. This guy was in charge.  
"Let's go to my office and look up your records, ok?"

Marcus had one huge grin. "Perfect, 'cause I need me a scholarship."

As I looked through his files, I saw that Marcus had no parents or siblings listed and that he had been in and out of many state systems, including Child Protective Services, foster care, juvenile detention and group homes. He was currently living with a friend's parent. He had a 1.2 grade point average, which is barely passing on our scale. I needed to find out who was on Marcus' side.

"Give me some time. Let me see what I can find out."  
"Got it", he said. "I'll be back."

And because Marcus would stop by every day thereafter, to check on my progress, I was able to find out about this interesting young man. He had had one tough life, but you would have never known. His grades weren't the best, but the fact that he had achieved any high school credits within the many foster homes and multiple institutions where he had lived was nothing short of amazing.

You see, Marcus was a survivor. He had learned to take the very best parts of life and build his world around them. The rest he left behind. He was also a gifted listener. He shared many of the values and lessons that he had learned from his mentors in the system. No matter what I shared with him, he seemed to take in every word with such respect and regard.

"I have been taught to look for the good people in this world," he said, "that the power of good will take you through the tough times."

Marcus had an indomitable spirit. There was no stopping him and he would never give up. Despite a life full of hard times, he chose to believe that there was a great opportunity ahead of him. He just needed to find good people in this world to help him make it happen.

We finally found the perfect scholarship application. I had never seen it before and was shocked, as it fit his circumstances perfectly. Marcus wasn't that impressed, he said that he knew that we'd find something. The requirements in the application included that the student reside in our state, was part of the foster system, and wanted to further his/her education. Qualified applicants would also include teens with special needs and teens who were parents.

If awarded, the student's entire tuition would be covered along with an ongoing mentorship and support system, food, clothing, provisions and funds for transportation. It couldn't have been more perfect for Marcus, but the competition would be fierce. No doubt, every applicant was worthy of support and a second chance. Only two awards would be given.

We were told that there were hundreds of applicants each year. I tried to warn him that the competition would be heavy.

Marcus replied, "No problem. This one belongs to me."

We filled out his application together. Marcus was charismatic; he was a good athlete; he had great communication skills, along with many outstanding qualities that related to life and, of course, survival. He also had a nearly failing grade point average. How would anyone see his potential on an application form?

One of the questions on the scholarship form asked, "What do you feel is your greatest talent?" He responded without hesitation. "That's easy," he said. "It's my physical strength." I asked him to explain what that meant to him.

"You see, I've been in and out of foster homes since I was little. I never really knew my parents. I grew up making stories about them, saying that they always loved me, but then were killed in a car wreck. Never happened. My mom gave me up a long time ago to social services. I really don't know who my parents are."

"And to be honest, I wasn't always a good kid," he grinned. "I remember when I was about 7, I climbed up on the kitchen counter in my foster home, stole some cookies and my foster mom caught me. Now she was this big ol' lady and plenty scary. I knew I was in for it. She was one mean machine."

"When she got mad, she would punish me by sitting on my chest. Now I wasn't a very big kid and I remember that I'd get really scared 'cause I couldn't breathe. Dang, she must have weighed at least a couple hundred pounds. I'd squirm and twist around and try to push her off, but pretty soon I would just black out. I thought that I had died, but later I figured out that I just fainted. I was always scared that the next time I might not wake up." He shook his head slowly.

“So, that’s when I decided that if I didn’t get strong, I mean really strong, I could die if I couldn’t escape. Who knows when the next ol’ lady is going to pin me down and sit on me, right?” Back came the grin. “And here I am. I mean, I can get away from anybody. I thank that lady for teaching me a lesson that has helped me escape from some bad dudes. The lessons we learn in life matter, right. That’s what I’ve been taught?”

I recorded his story and filled it on his application word for word.

Marcus made the semi-finals. I was elated. He had no doubts. He would now go through a personal interview. There were 20 finalists, each scheduled with a questioning session from ten adults who represented the scholarship board.

We arrived. We stood together in front of this huge building, both of us staring up into the sky trying to see just how high the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor was. I was intimidated. Marcus was undaunting.

A very gracious lady greeted us as we got off the elevator and escorted Marcus into a room where everyone waited for him. The entire office was glass. I could see about ten chairs behind a table with one in the front center. Marcus was directed to sit in that position. The interview lasted 42 minutes.

When it was apparently over, Marcus stood up and went by every board member to shake their hands. He waved good-bye to them and we were off.

I waited for him to share some part of the interview, but he said nothing, just hummed some rap music and tapped his hands on his legs.

I had to break the silence. “So, Marcus, how do you think it went? No doubt you did a great job.”

“Pretty good,” he said.

“Well, what was the last thing that they said to you? Did they tell you when you’d be notified about their decision?”

“Well,” he said, “it went like this.”

They said, “Marcus, you seem like a great young man. Now we’re all good people here and want you to do well in life and we want to help you get what you want. But you know, not everyone will get this scholarship. What will you do if you don’t receive it?”

“Well, now I thought that was an easy question ‘cause of what he just said. You know the part about them all being good people. So, I just told them that you all just said that you wanted to help me be a success in life which was really nice of you. So, if I don’t get this scholarship, I’d like to get your contact info today. Then I will call each one of you up ‘cause I have no doubt that together we can figure out another way to get me through college.”

Then he said, “The judges all looked at each other and looked kind of worried.”  
I tried not to laugh.

Four weeks later, Marcus dropped by and pulled out a letter from his backpack. Marcus had won the scholarship. Marcus knew how to make his dreams come true.

**Your thoughts: (no names or places)**

**Each year thousands of children are placed in the custody of the state. What do you think would be the toughest challenges for them? Explain.**

**What did you admire the most about Marcus?**

**What is unique about his approach to life? Why?**

**Some people are always positive and can find ways to get through the tough times. Others appear to “have it all” and yet forever complain. Do you agree?**

**Do you feel that Marcus deserved the scholarship? Why?**

**What do you think about his message that “there are always good people out there”?**

**Name three qualities in a good person.**

**The power of good can be described in many ways. Some people might substitute the power of trust, respect, kindness, nature, personal strength, etc. What other examples can you think of?**