

It was 7:30 a.m. on April 3rd, 2020. My mom barges into my room and proceeds to stand by my bedside with her phone in hand. “Mom it’s early in the morning. You know I don’t sleep well”, I replied in agitation. Refusing to leave, she begins reading a Facebook post she came across about a possible job opportunity with the California Department of Justice. As I lay there pretending not to listen, I then hear her say: “...is looking for a Student Assistant for the Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit”. She leaves the room and I dwell upon the job opportunity as I stare at my ceiling. Being a criminal justice major at Sacramento State and maintaining a strong desire to work in law enforcement, this opportunity would mean I would finally get the chance to serve my community while doing something I love. Seconds later, I jump from my bed and run down the hallway into the kitchen asking her to tell me more.

“Wow! Gina that’s the fastest I have ever seen you get out of bed in the morning”.

“Mom, where do I apply?”

Within one hour, I had already contacted the supervising manager and submitted a state application. I prepared my resume, cover letter, and provided my LinkedIn account so my prospective hiring manager could see my work experience. Three days passed before I received a message in my email inbox.

“Gina, can you interview Friday at 1:00 p.m.?”

“Yes! That works great.”

I thought to myself: “No. This can’t be. Not now. Not during the pandemic”. For the past year, I had applied to every single student assistant job for the state and never once got a reply. I was completely shocked at how responsive the hiring manager had been. For a first-year student or even a postgraduate student, this job opening is sought out by many and highly competitive. During my interview via Zoom, I gave the hiring manager what I call a “virtual handshake” and another on the panel a “virtual fist bump” as a way of breaking the ice and bringing a little humor to the table. Forty-five minutes after the interview, I received a call from the hiring manager offering me the position. Answering the call, my sister, brother, and mother rush into the living room to listen in while closely watching my facial expressions as if that determined the outcome. I couldn’t believe it. How out of all circumstances do I land a job not only during a pandemic but while millions of others are filing for unemployment? While I was excited to be offered the position, I also felt terribly for others. I dealt back in forth with whether or not I should feel a sense of accomplishment or relinquish in the hardships of others. While I did a great deal of both, I acknowledged my hard work and finally gave myself a pat on the back. For all the times I was told I wasn’t ready or that I didn’t stand a chance, this was sweet success.

I began my job on May 1st and have loved every second of my work and my opportunity to bring closure to families. My colleagues are amazing and have helped me a great deal with the learning curve as working from two monitors simultaneously and organizing case material can get crazy. This experience has taught me that even during the worst of times, there is always room to grow. It taught me to humble myself as those around me are trying to stay afloat. It showed me that I can positively contribute to my community and to the nation without direct contact. It allowed

me to understand my purpose as an individual and as a college student. Even from my cubicle, I can greatly affect the outcome of those families longing to find their missing child or taking every step to identify a loved one. For once in my life, I found an immense appreciation for human interaction. We thrive off of each other. During the COVID19 crisis, I have learned that we cannot survive without each other's love and sense of togetherness. While securing this job during times of separation and social distancing also meant I could bring people together. I never imagined landing my dream job amidst these trying times from the very inside of my bedroom walls. If there is anything I would want anyone to grasp from this experience, it would be this: Continue to persist amidst adversity. Don't stop because others doubted you. Do what you love even if it means you have to fail a hundred times to succeed. Don't be ignorant but rather, empathetic to the differing circumstances and lives of others. Take what you know and become the driving force for tomorrow. Lastly, never give up (not even during the middle of a worldwide pandemic).