



# W.H.E.E.L.

## Scholarship Contest Winner

**Erica González**

**Topic:**

New Career Choice

Why Now?

Your Inspiration

Cody and I had the type of friendship that bordered on family. Our parents were close friends and so we spent almost every holiday, vacation and milestone together while growing up. We had combined birthday parties together in the summer, spent weekends together at the cabin in the winters and would spend the school year together in classrooms. He was the king of cracking jokes and was always walking around singing whatever song was stuck in his head that day. We had a picturesque childhood and then walked together at our high school graduation. Soon after, I left to start my new journey at Michigan State University and Cody began his new job studying and working in the trades.

The time I spent at MSU was nothing short of the typical college experience. I spent my weekdays in class and at 2 part time jobs to make ends meet and spent the weekends passing time with my friends. However, my time spent at MSU wasn't just filled with studying and fun. I was always feeling a little lost and even changed my major almost 6 times. I was confused as to what to do with the rest of my life and didn't have a clue on what avenue to even slightly start to pursue. This indecision caused a lot of unwanted anxiety and eventually I knew that I needed to just pick a major and finish my Bachelor's because having to keep paying for university credits was becoming unrealistic.

One day in November during my last year at MSU, I woke up to a 3am phone call. It was my mother, telling me that the house that Cody had been renting had caught on fire with him in it and that he had sustained substantial burns. An ambulance had taken him to the local ER but was being transferred to Hurley's burn unit because he needed a higher acuity of care. She told me to try to go back to sleep and that we could go to Flint to see him and his family in the morning. Waking up to that news was startling and frightening and sleep never returned that morning.

My family and I got to Hurley around 9am. We sat in the family waiting room with Cody's family that morning eager for any news of his condition. A team of doctors eventually came out and told his parents that he had sustained 3rd degree burns to both arms and that the damage to his lungs from smoke inhalation was substantial. Because of the damage to his lungs Cody was being put on ECMO, a machine that does the job of the lungs by filtering out carbon dioxide from the blood and putting oxygen back into it and that he would need to be transferred again to Ann Arbor in order to receive the care that he needed.

Cody was in the hospital in Ann Arbor for 6 months before he passed away. His lungs never recovered from the smoke inhalation and he suffered complications from the very same ECMO machine that was keeping him alive. During those 6 months, I made a point to visit my friend and his family as often as I could. I had never been around acute care like that before and I found myself often surprised during every visit. The hospital staff, especially the nurses, were so caring and always checked in on not just Cody but all of his visitors as well. They became instant family every time I visited and they were family to Cody's family during his hospitalization. They were encouraging yet realistic and made sure that Cody's last months were filled with as much life as anyone bedridden could hope for.

After his funeral, my life went back to "normal". I continued classes at MSU but something had changed. The nurses that I interacted with in Ann Arbor were some of the kindest, most hard working and unselfish people I had ever met. During their shifts, I observed those nurses help strangers through some of the hardest moments of their lives in that hospital wing and I knew that I eventually wanted to be someone that was fortunate to have those skills as well. I knew then that I wanted to be a nurse and so I finished my Bachelor's at MSU. A year later I applied to Lansing Community College's nursing program, knowing exactly what profession I wanted to finally call a career.