

Samantha S. Downey

Sexual Abuse Survivor Scholarship

A college education gives one the chance to improve their life and take control of their own destiny. My own personal story is a perfect example of this. At eighteen years old I joined the Army as a Combat Medic. I have traveled all over the world—from South Korea to Fort Drum in upstate New York to the blistering hot deserts in Afghanistan. I have dreamed of being a lawyer since I was ten years old and have found that no matter where life has taken me, my dream of becoming an attorney has remained constant. Even though I did not choose a career in the legal field in the Army, fate would stand true and put me through the key experience that has furthered my resolve to become an attorney.

In 2015 I was sexually assaulted by my direct supervisor during a field training exercise. In 2016 my assailant was convicted of that assault, and he was sent to prison. While this was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life, both the actual assault and dealing with the court martial process, I must say that I was able to find the silver lining by being inspired by the legal prosecution. The entire prosecution team that handled my case was made up of female attorneys serving as the criminal prosecutors and as my legal liaison. All three of these women not only got me through one of the most significant atrocities of my life, but they also deepened my resolve to become an attorney so that hopefully I could help other people the way they helped me. Their example turned my adolescent dream into a passionate vision to be a powerful leader in the legal field and to help others—to pay it forward.

Once I left the military, I went back into school to finish my bachelor's degree and start the daunting task of applying to law school. I am proud to say that I held a consistent 4.0 GPA while attending the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay. As a full-time student, I was also a mom, wife, legal intern, volunteer, and public speaker for sexual assault victim advocacy—all

while attempting to keep my sanity. I am very excited and proud that I have recently been accepted to the Notre Dame Law School Class of 2024.

With my Juris Doctorate I plan to not only improve my own life by becoming an attorney, but I also want serve my community as a pro bono legal liaison for victims of sexual assault and other violent crimes. Specifically, I would like to help the population that is most disadvantaged in our judicial system: those that suffer from economic impoverishment. While every person in our society faces their own individual struggles in life, individuals and families that face poverty suffer the greatest burden in many societal arenas including the justice system. I hope that through my legal guidance coupled with my own experience with sexual assault I will be able to inspire my clients to not only survive and heal from their trauma, but be able to thrive after it. This is how I plan to use my education to improve the opportunities going forward in life for myself and my clients.