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### What Drives Me?

Over the course of my life, what drives me has changed a multitude of times. I wanted to be an anesthesiologist, a teacher, or even a marine biologist. From a very young age, all I knew was that I wanted to make a difference.

Early on, my mom taught me to treat others with respect and dignity. Ever since I can remember, she has helped countless friends, family members, students, and even strangers. It's no surprise, then, that I started volunteering in elementary school, helping my mother in her classroom, and handing out homeless care packages. Throughout middle school, I participated in the National Junior Honor Society, volunteering for various causes in our area. I quickly learned that I shared my mother's passion for giving back to my community, even in the smallest of ways.

At 15, I was introduced to a program called Forge Evolution, also known as teen court. Every Tuesday, I head to the municipal court to participate in peer panels or student trials as an attorney. We spend countless hours preparing the cases for presentation. Each infraction has a certain number of community service hours and peer sentencing recommendations to help defendants understand the problem, recognize the harm, and attempt to make things right. I have been honored to get to know the youth in the program, learning their life stories and what led them to Forge Evolution.

Using restorative justice practices, Forge attempts to prevent future criminal behavior through creative sentences. With a program such as Forge, teens can remove offenses from their record and become more involved in their community. Seeing the long-term effects of defendants' actions and helping them make positive life choices drives me to become an ardent advocate in the legal system. As I pursue sociolegal studies in the future, I aim to use these experiences to create and refine restorative justice programs similar to Forge Evolution in other communities.

Ultimately, my mother's dedication to service inspired me to take it to the next level. Assisting defendants in making wise decisions for their lives drives me to practice law and promote social justice. Working at the municipal court has made it abundantly clear that court-appointed attorneys have decreased significantly, especially in Colorado. As I pursue a law degree in the future, this scholarship would help me make a small dent in the public lawyer shortage while also applying my knowledge and experience to pursue fairness and justice for all.