

Miracle Children's

Nicole – 8 Years Later (June, 2015)

“Nicole” was one of my clients whose story I told in *Miracle Children*, published in 2008. She drove to my office for a visit after she returned home from her second year as a university student. During her high school years and as a college student, she is given extended time on tests. Her caring nature showed through as we spent nearly as much time catching up on my life as we did hers. She was full of questions about my activities, yet I was just as full of questions to ask her.

Anna: I'm delighted to see you again! Thank you for coming to visit! Do you remember when you were little and we worked together? You'd be doodling along the sides of your paper and I'd say, “Now, Nicole, no more doodling.” You'd say OK and go back to doodling. Do you remember?

Nicole:(laughs) Yes, I remember.

Anna: Do you still doodle?

Nicole:Yes, because I'm thinking, “I don't want to be here.” Or they're taking too long explaining something and I'm bored.

Anna: Yes, I get it. I do that too.

Anna: Did you think public high school was hard?

Nicole:Not really. It took a lot of hard work, but I got straight A's. It's not that I'm smart. I get good grades because I'm dedicated, I want to learn, and I want to do well. I think not everybody understands that in high school. It was difficult and I had to work hard, but that's the way it's always been so I just do it.

Anna: What school are you attending?

Nicole:University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

Anna: Why did you pick Colorado Springs?

Nicole:My counselor in my sophomore year of high school recommended it when I told him I was interested in nursing. I wanted to stay in Colorado.

Anna: What made you think about nursing in the first place?

Nicole:Well, in 9th grade, I had to write a research paper on a career in which I might be interested. I couldn't think of anything, and my mother suggested nursing because she said I care about people and I like to help others. And I'm a good memorizer, which is a key component of nursing. (smile) The idea kind of stuck with me.

Anna: What kind of nurse do you want to be? What do you picture yourself doing?

Nicole:Well, I've always thought about pediatrics. I heard five nurses describe their jobs and what they like and dislike about nursing. They all said at first they wanted to be in pediatrics but they couldn't do it. I think they thought it was too emotional and hard to see children who are sick. But I still think I would like it. I love kids. I loved my personal doctor. She is retired now, but she always took a personal interest in us and she would ask how our races went and about our travels. We had a good relationship. I think doctors tend to be maybe cold and less personal and nurses seem to be friendly. Geriatrics might be interesting too.

Anna: Do you think you're an emergency care type or maybe you prefer in-office work, helping patients as they come for non-emergency situations?

Nicole:I think more of the regular things like common illnesses.

Anna: There's pediatric wings in some hospitals, or the nurseries where newborns are cared for.

Nicole:Yes, I'm not sure yet but I do not want emergency room. The nursing program requires us to become acquainted with all different areas of nursing.

Anna: Ok, I see. That way you get familiar enough to know where you would best fit.

Anna: Do you live on campus?

Nicole:Yes.

Anna: Did you occasionally go home on weekends?

Nicole:Oh, yes, yes. Probably more often this last year than my first year. Maybe three or four times a semester.

Anna: Did you get used to not living at home?

Nicole:Yes. It was hard during my freshman year but my sophomore year was better. I made friends and stayed busy, so I got used to it.

Anna: You don't see your sister much now, do you?

Nicole:This last year was hard because she's away at college too. I think I saw her once in four months! We made it, but it was hard. I liked going home once in awhile for a break and to get some good food.

Anna: What did you end up doing on weekends at school?

Nicole:Friday night was usually movie night and the next two days were for homework.

Anna: School is for studying, right?

Nicole:Yes, homework, projects, studying for tests.

Anna: Work, work, work.

Anna: Do you have a car?

Nicole:No. But this next year I'm going to have a car. (big smile) I didn't mind not having one before. I went to class and had fun. But then I realized it was hard to go on hikes or running. Next year, I'll be able to go hiking with my friends.

Anna: So what did you do when you had some free time but no car?

Nicole:I organized my schedule so that I gave myself one fun night away from studying, which was Friday. Usually I watched a movie, sometimes with a friend, and sometimes by myself.

Anna: Nicole, tell me about classes you've taken at school.

Nicole:Well, I started with the four-year nursing program, but it didn't work at all. Classes included Anatomy and Chemistry, which I had to take at the same time and amounted to 17 credits. I didn't realize how difficult it was going to be. I thought, "Oh, this is going to work out fine." I'm a hard worker and I thought it would work out. But I didn't get good grades in Anatomy. I didn't really know how to study. I also didn't know how much to study. I was getting a D in the class, and you know that's not me — I have to get good grades. So I dropped the class and I think it took me to 13 credits. Then I transitioned into the five-year program. So these first two years were pretty much pre-requisite classes. I took this class called "Off and Running." I learned that to achieve the impossible you have to believe in yourself.

Anna: Good deal. Was Anatomy a really hard class?

Nicole: Yes. Definitely! I was told to study 20 hours a week just for that class. So I made my schedule and organized my time around my other classes (which were not as heavy with homework). The professor had suggestions about how to study so I started with that. Then I found a method that worked and put all my time into being able to do that. I told myself that I didn't think an A was possible and so I worked and hoped for a B. But I did really well and I got an A!

Anna: Good for you!

Nicole: Once you figure out how to study, the material might still be hard but it becomes a different kind of hard. The material is hard but you can learn it.

Anna: How did you figure out how to study?

Nicole: Well, I learned what not to do. In my freshman year, I didn't have time to read the textbook before doing the homework, and the homework would take two to three hours. It was terrible and I was miserable the whole time. The answers weren't word-for-word from the book, but that was what I was trying to do — find word-for-word answers. It was not good. I decided I need to read the book before I do the homework. My professor told me that it has been scientifically shown that the brain can focus on material for seven-to-eight minutes at a time. He suggested I read for 15 minutes, then get up and take a break: walk around, get a drink of water. Then come back and read some more. After reading each module (maximum two pages), answer the review questions. I started doing that before I did the homework and I found I did better on the homework.

Anna: So his idea worked — spending about 15 minutes at a time with short breaks between. And, review as you go.

Nicole: Yes. And I made sure I was spending 20 hours a week studying anatomy. I spent a lot of time memorizing.

Anna: And you're a good memorizer, aren't you?

Nicole: Yes, I am.

Anna: Did you also learn some physiology and maybe pathology?

Nicole: Physiology, yes. But I realized it is more difficult for me. I wish it weren't because I feel like that's more important than knowing anatomy. I think I understand what I learned pretty well. I noticed that my anatomy lab scores during second semester (which was more focused on physiology) were lower than the first semester lab scores (which were more focused on Anatomy), but I still got an A.

Anna: You took your prerequisites. What's next?

Nicole: I just took the HESI [Health Education Systems Incorporated] exam and will have to pass in order to enter the nursing program. I have to pass the test and have a high GPA [grade point average]. If I pass the HESI, I should be able to start classes in the fall and complete the program in three years.

Anna: How did it go taking the HESI?

Nicole: It was hard. I read in this book that you can take a watch so I took a watch in order to organize my time between sections. I had a plan so that I could get through all the sections. The website said the number of questions was less than there really were. When I got there, I found out I couldn't have a watch. Every so often they announced how much time was left in the six-hour allotment and I had to calculate backwards to know how much time I had in a given section. Unfortunately, I ran out of time before starting the final section, which was grammar. I was really upset after the test but my mom said maybe they could see I know grammar from the other sections of the test. She said you

can't do amazing in reading and vocabulary if you don't know grammar. They go hand-in-hand. Also, the practice test said that I could check my answers if I had time. I thought I would have access to the answers, but once I hit "enter," the answer was done and I couldn't go back. I couldn't skip some and come back later like I could during the practice test.

Anna: Well if you end up taking it a second time, you'll know what to expect. Seems unfair a bit, though, doesn't it?

Nicole: I had six hours for it and I couldn't eat or drink during the test. I had to leave the room and the time kept running. I couldn't have gum or a water bottle. I did take breaks but it was hard.

Anna: Let's say the worst thing happens — you don't pass the test.

Nicole: Well, (pause), you can take it twice. If I were to fail a second time, I would no longer be at my dream school. There are other schools in which you don't need to pass the test to get into the program, but this is the school I want to attend. I like the campus. I have friends there.

Anna: You're working this summer, right?

Nicole: I'm a summer camp team leader at the city rec center.

Anna: What do you do as a team leader?

Nicole: This is my second summer there. We oversee the children's daily activities. There are swim days, morning activities, free time, games, sports, nature walks around the perimeter of the rec center, crafts, and snacks. On Thursdays we take the children on field trips.

Anna: What ages do you work with?

Nicole: I work with the 5-7 year olds. I like little kids. (smile)

Anna: Do you also work at the rec center when you come home for school breaks?

Nicole: I worked one day during winter break because the enrollment was low and then I worked a full schedule during spring break.

Anna: I know you're a runner. When was the last time you went running?

Nicole: Oh, it's been terrible. I completed one run this summer. Before that, I remember running a half-marathon in November of my freshman year. I ran once that Thanksgiving and again in April. I was going to start again but I got sick and then it was near the end of the school year and I decided I'd start again that summer. But then I had a summer job and I only had one day off each week. I like to sleep in when I can. (smile) At school I didn't really have time.

Anna: That's what I'm thinking. You spent all of your time studying.

Nicole: I love running, but I also like to sleep (laugh).

Anna: How far do you run?

Nicole: I was used to seven-mile runs during summer cross country practices. It wasn't hard for me then, but I was in shape. In high school, five miles would be a normal workout.

Anna: How long do you think it would take you to get to seven miles now?

Nicole: Hm. Maybe a couple of months. The first run I did with my mother this summer was 20 minutes. It wasn't as terrible as I thought it might be. So I think gradually increasing my time will be easy to do.

Anna: Good for you.

Nicole: I did go to Zumba classes about once each week.

Anna: What is Zumba?

Nicole: It's a workout that includes dance. I've tried other workout classes and I really like Zumba. We have a rec center on campus and I take the class there. My roommate from my freshman year introduced me to it and it was the greatest gift!

Anna: What do you picture yourself doing when you're 30?

Nicole: Hmm. That's a long time from now. I see myself being married. However, I am not sure about whether I will have children yet or not. I might hopefully be a nurse. I guess I would go to work and also attend Zumba classes.

Anna: Will you still be running or will Zumba be a replacement?

Nicole: I still run. My boyfriend and I are going to run together in a race this summer.

Before I realized it, Nicole had me talking up a storm about my current activities. Her soft, gentle spirit and genuine interest in others demonstrates a gifted and natural bedside manner.