

LESSONS IN RESILIENCE

Emma Maurer '20 epitomizes the values of the Judith Greenberg Seinfeld Prize

THREE YEARS AGO, Emma Maurer '20 started Syracuse University with big dreams and high expectations. Coming from Wappingers Falls, a small rural town in upstate NY, Emma's transition to campus life was more daunting than she had anticipated. "I spent my first year saddled with a lot of anxiety," she shares. Finances were also a concern, as Maurer wrote in her Seinfeld Prize essay. "I knew it was the right place for me to be, but deciding to come to Syracuse put a financial strain on both me and my family that I was struggling to come to terms with."

Now, a senior and the recipient of the 2019 Judith Greenberg Seinfeld Prize, Emma recalls how, even though her first year left her feeling disconnected, she kept going—the same way the prize's benefactor, Judith Greenberg Seinfeld '56, G'57 has continued to do.

A treasured Syracuse University alumna and active Trustee, Seinfeld has plenty of experience in perseverance. As a young woman, she left a much-loved teaching career to help run her family's fragrance business when her father became ill. Shortly after, her first husband, real estate investor David Greenberg, was diagnosed with cancer. She stepped up to the challenge of taking on her husband's business at a time when there were very few women in the board room. When Greenberg passed away, Seinfeld was left to raise her two sons. She used that moment of tragedy in their lives to offer a valuable lesson, that "happiness is how you respond to suffering," she explains.

She would go on to be revered as a successful businesswoman, artist, mother, author, and wife once again to another extraordinary man, Dr. Robert Seinfeld. However, she suffered another loss with his passing 15 years into their marriage. Her response, as with all of the adversity she's faced, was to pick herself back up and focus on the beauty in life.

With Seinfeld's story comes immense gratitude. She continues to give back to Syracuse through the Seinfeld Prize for education students, and the Judith Greenberg Seinfeld Distinguished Fellowships, which School of Education faculty members Sharif Bey and Marcelle Haddix have received. She attributes her decision to establish the awards to a lesson her father taught her. "When someone takes the time to say that you're doing a great job," she says, "it can take you far."

Maurer relates Seinfeld's resilience to the process of emerging from her shell and finding her place at Syracuse. She transferred into the School of Education and took on the English education major, where she started making deeper connections with peers who shared her newfound passion for teaching.

Maurer ultimately secured a position as a resident advisor in the Education Living Learning Community. "I figured, what better way to dive into this new discipline than to live with other people who were passionate about teaching, inclusion, and social justice?" explains Maurer.

With her academic and career goals in focus, a network of like-minded friends and classmates, and reduced financial

burdens because of her new RA position, Maurer was overcoming her self-doubt and navigating obstacles with grace and optimism.

School of Education administration and faculty members took notice of Maurer's growth and nominated her for the award given to women who have overcome adversity and exhibited the spirit of resilience during difficult times, as Seinfeld had.

Maurer says that being in a leadership role as an RA, where she not only organizes group activities for residents but also counsels those having a hard time as she did, has shaped the kind of educator that she hopes to be. "In order to grow we need to put ourselves in spaces that might seem anxiety-inducing. Leading others through these experiences has become a way that I have been able to tackle some of my own fears while showing my first-year residents how valuable enthusiasm and support from peers can be when we face a challenge." ●

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