

Turning setback into service

After a near-fatal accident sidetracked her athletic career, Avrey Goodgame ('24) pivoted to helping others.

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On Halloween night of her freshman year, Avrey Goodgame ('24) indulged in a 12-count of nuggets from Chick-fil-A. That outing would change her life.

Later that evening, while trick-or-treating with her friends in West University Place, Goodgame tripped over a parking stopper and fell onto a cement parking block. She felt a sharp pain in her abdomen and went home, where her parents insisted they take her to the emergency room. There, doctors discovered her stomach had burst and her spleen was lacerated.

Goodgame's injuries required extensive surgery, which her mother Pauline described as a harrowing four-hour event.

"She was lying there, still in her Halloween costume, screaming in pain."

Six weeks later, Goodgame was diagnosed with Mycobacterium abscessus, a type of infection in the tuberculosis family usually found in the lungs. Avrey, however, had a rare case in her liver. For over a year, she visited more than 10 specialists across the country in search of treatment.

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AVREY GOODGAME

Before the accident, Goodgame was a Texas Pride field hockey player with aspirations of playing in college, but her condition made that goal seem impossible.

Goodgame had a PICC line in her right upper arm through which she received at-home antibiotic infusions for seven hours a day over the next nine months. Her mother would wake up in the middle of the night to prepare the medication before administering it from 3-7 a.m. before school and 4-7 p.m. after school.



STICKING WITH IT
After an accident her freshman year at SJS, Avrey Goodgame went on to play field hockey at Haverford College.

Photos courtesy of Avrey Goodgame

Avrey also endured four lengthy hospitalizations. Still, she found ways to join classes via Zoom and attend in-person whenever possible. Even after doctors told her they were "running out of options," Goodgame did her best to maintain a positive and curious mindset.

While undergoing treatment, she had long conversations with doctors, learning as much as possible about her condition. She also began conducting her own research, yet often had trouble understanding complex scientific jargon, so she turned to her biology teacher, Neha Mathur, for help. During their weekly Sunday Zoom calls over the summer, Mathur explained Goodgame's diagnosis and the potential effects of different treatments.

"The fact that she took joy in her learning was amazing – that is what keeps a teacher going," Mathur said. "As much as I tried not to be emotional, it did affect me. She was just so inspirational."

Mathur encouraged Goodgame to take the Scientific Research and Design class her sophomore year and continue her deep dive into the study of Mycobacterium abscessus and antibiotic resistance.

While navigating hospitals, brutal side effects and rigorous schoolwork, Goodgame remained focused on returning to field hockey.

"The thought that I could get back to playing a sport, being normal and being recruited, was the only thing keeping me going for a while," Goodgame said.

Fourteen months after that fateful Halloween

night, Goodgame completed her treatment regimen. She continued training, made varsity her senior year and was recruited to play at Haverford College in Pennsylvania.

It might have been a happy ending. But Goodgame wanted something different.

After a year of living on a campus with fewer than 1,500 students, Goodgame transferred to the University of North Carolina in search of more research and extracurricular opportunities.

At UNC, she plays field hockey on the club team and is currently pursuing a major in chemistry on the pre-med track, a subject she "fell in love

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NEHA MATHUR
SCIENCE TEACHER

with" after taking the course with Sarwat Jafry her sophomore year.

"Her tenacity, her determination, her drive – it was all just amazing to see," Jafry said. "She never accepted any special favors, and she taught me important lessons about having more understanding and patience as a teacher."

Goodgame has conducted research in a chemistry lab at Haverford and the drug discovery lab at UNC. She is planning to do volunteer research this summer in a Philadelphia lab.

"I'm so glad she is doing research because she is who we need," Mathur said. "We need a true scientist like her."

Goodgame is a certified Emergency Medical Technician and Wilderness First Responder. At Haverford, she worked as an EMT, gaining hands-on experience in the medical field during her weekly six-hour ambulance shifts.

"Avrey got a second chance at life, and that gave her passion and maturity," Pauline Goodgame said. "She grew up real fast and developed goals and a strong determination. With so many people helping her with her illness, she wanted to be able to help others, too."

Now in North Carolina, Goodgame volunteers as a wilderness EMT for the Swift Water Rescue Squad, where her team gets called to respond to emergency situations.

"My passion for medicine and helping others drives me forward," she said. "I now have a very clear purpose in life."

SWIFT RECOVERY
Goodgame (top middle) and the North Carolina Swift Water Rescue Squad practice stabilizing a patient.

