

The Stories Behind the Spartans



Presented By:



"The Stories Behind the Spartans" is a campaign that is working to show what drives the passions of those that make up the Spartan community.

We aim to capture each individual's unique past, how that has affected their experience at Michigan State University, and how it continues to shape their future goals.

Thank you to all those who have participated!

Kelley Fitzpatrick

○ Senior ○ Interdisciplinary Studies ○

ASMSU, Alpha Iota Sigma, Human Resource Association



*"When I came to MSU, I thought I would be going to college and that I would be learning things in my classes and just getting basic knowledge and that this knowledge would help me get a job in the future; that was kind of my whole goal of being here. But when I actually got here, I realized that that's not the reason that I came here and the reason that I stayed here. Ultimately, being at MSU has exposed me to so many different cultures, and so many different people. I realized that my ultimate purpose anymore wasn't just going to class and taking notes; **my ultimate purpose was to take this opportunity to learn from the students around me and to learn about the different cultures and people's different backgrounds.** I came from a really small town, a suburb of northern Detroit. Don't get me wrong, I love my hometown with all of my heart, but it was and still is a very homogenous community. Nearly every person is white, nearly everyone is protestant. I came from a place that made me feel like everyone is going to be the same. You come here, and everything is just completely different. That epiphany has absolutely shaped my future. I have been studying human resources since I've been here, but when I graduate I am going to be going into diversity and inclusion.*

Terrance Beebe

○ Sophomore ○ Food Industry Management ○

Council of Students with Disabilities

“On top of being the first to go to college in my family and working hard for myself and my family, I make larger strides because of my physical disability. There are so many people who see the physical disability and register it as something that affects the mental processes or that in some way I am incapable of working hard, handling conflicts, or even making it through college. Of course this is my assumption of how others perceive me but I know that some people do actually hold that belief. And that in itself, the misunderstanding from someone else in my abilities because of my physical disability makes me want to work even harder, to prove those people wrong who doubt or pity me for being disabled.”

I am not an inspiration for living my life as a functional person with a disability but I am inspirational because I am doing so much to impact my community aside from the disability. It's important to take that idea and the strength I have from fighting every day with myself and my physical disability and push through. But above that, I need to use my strength and my hardships as a way to educate others. The problems I face with people's assumptions of my physical being is what people across marginalized groups experience just in a different way than how I do. As a Spartan in these very trying times for our society, it is pivotal to recognize those assumptions and demonstrate united fronts of solidarity even within the margins.”



Sarah Vang

○ Junior ○ Public Policy ○

Asian Pacific American Student Organization (APASO)



*"It was hard to me as a little kid to explain to people that I'm not Chinese, Japanese or Korean; **I'm actually Hmong**. Not a lot of people know about the Hmong ethnicity. I always questioned, **how do I fit in?** When we learn about history, it usually just covers what we find in history classes. You never really hear about Asian Americans being involved with that. The only time that we are mentioned is when talking about the silk road, or trade. I don't really connect with that.*

My journey in discovering what it means to be Asian American actually kicked off when I got to high school. It's interesting because back at home, people saw me as the only 'Chinese' girl, but coming here people usually mistake me for being international. It doesn't really help too that Hmong people, we don't have a country. So when people ask me "where are your parents from?", I say that my parents came from Laos because that's where a lot of Hmong people reside, in South-East Asia. But my parents are not Laotian. We don't have a country, we don't have a homeland.

So if you ask me where I'm from I say I'm from Detroit, because that's really where I'm from. But if you ask me what is my motherland, I can't give you an answer."

Ahmad Abo Al-Borgol

○ Senior ○ Supply Chain Management ○

International Student Association

*"I like to think that I am very lucky. When I was applying to college, I applied to like thirty universities all in the US. I was applying to be a pre-med student at the time. I wanted to be a neurosurgeon. I got accepted to Michigan State University, and it was the best university I got accepted to. **I wasn't even supposed to come to MSU** because I had already accepted an offer in New York. My father thought it was the right thing for me because MSU is a much better university. I didn't want it at first, because I really wanted to be in New York. Then I came to Michigan State and I took my first science class; it wasn't even anything intense, just general chemistry. I know everyone says that class is horrible, but it is really hard. I tried, and I failed that class.*



***If I couldn't pass this chemistry class, how am I going to pass the next eight years of school?** I went back in the summer and I was thinking about switching to business, which is something I always wanted to do. But as an international student, if you're going to do something like business you might as well just stay.*

***I say that I'm lucky because I found myself in a university that has the #1 Supply Chain Management program.** It worked out great for me. I am doing what I love to do. I am learning more about business and more about supply chain and supply chain security. I love it. I went from thinking that I am going to be forced into 8 years of schooling versus now I am doing what I love; I am doing business, and hopefully starting something big."*

Emily Liebau

◉ Junior ◉ International Journalism ◉

Mestiza Community, Asian Pacific American Club, Pilipino American Student Society, VIM fashion magazine and RHA



"At Michigan State you can meet anyone and do anything. You have the freedom to pick and choose not only what you want to do with your major, but you can pick what different families you want to be a part of. I'm a junior, and through this year I have met so many different people through different programs. I've worked for the fashion magazine as a photographer, I'm an RA, I'm Co-President of APASO (Asian Pacific American Student Organization); from different organizations, you can meet people like you. You can also meet people who are not like you, and connect in so many different ways. It's really exciting. I always feel like when you come in as a freshman, it's kind of overwhelming that there's so many things to do. But at the end of the day I'm still joining new things, I'm still meeting new people. I've met some people this year that are my best friends. There are a lot of opportunities. Whether you want to be involved in something that has to do with your major, or something to do with your hobby, you can. Photography is one of my hobbies, so I love shooting for the fashion magazine. I love meeting people and talking with people, because journalism is my major. Being an RA has helped me with talking to people I don't know and introducing myself to them."

Kieran Todd

○ Senior ○ Public Policy and Economics ○

Alliance of Queer and Ally Students and Queer Trans People of Color Coalition



"I am a transfer student from West Point, where I went for two years. Leaving West Point at first, I didn't know I would be at Michigan State. I had three back surgeries because of an incident that happened there, and was down in the dumps. It was a really depressive time. I was at home, I was volunteering, I taught myself guitar, I was working; I was recovering from my back surgeries. I also began dealing with a lot of gender identity things for myself, which was a lot to deal with at 19 years old.

*Coming to MSU eventually, I couldn't have asked for a better environment of the community that I found. **The LBGT resource center has been crucial and critical in shaping how I see myself, how I interact with others, and how I try to advocate for others.** They allowed me to explore within myself, and to really get a grasp on what I was feeling for years.*

I think that going forward, without the experience I've had through MSU, without the other student leaders I have met and without the friends, peers, and my partner that I've met here there is no way I would've been just as happy or happier anywhere else.

While I do think we have a ways to go here, I think that sometimes I just have to sit back and really remember just how happy I am with where I am at now."

Steve Cleaves-Jones (CJ)

○ Senior ○ Community Governance and Advocacy ○

Black Student Alliance and UAB

*"I come from a humble beginning. I'm from Detroit, I've been there all of my life. I was raised in split-parent household, so my parents had joint custody of me. Because of my family structure and how it is, I always dreamed big because I wanted a better situation. My parents are very loving, but when you're a black person in America, the struggle is just there. But I always wanted better for me and my family. I have three siblings and they're all younger than me. **I've always had this role model perspective on life, that I always have to set a strong example.**"*



Going through high school, I was a good student. I got the opportunity to start applying to college. That was something that I didn't even consider until the summer of my 11th grade year. One of my cousins who has been to college reached out to me, took me to a campus, and got that conversation started.

*I was in a lot of programs that targeted African American high school students that tried to uplift them. I applied, and was told I could get financial aid and to not be afraid of the debt; **I was told to go get a good education because it would help me in the long run. I believe that getting a higher education was the key to changing my circumstance.**"*

Olivia Brenner

◉ Junior ◉ Women's Studies ◉

Queer community, Jewish community, Women



*"I always knew that I would probably end up at MSU, I'm a local kid; I'm from Haslett. Chances were pretty great that I was going to end up here. But it wasn't anywhere that I ever really wanted to go because it is so close, and I took classes here in High School and I grew up on the campus, essentially. So I never really felt that deep connection to MSU that I feel like a lot of people do. I don't have any of the gear, I don't go the sports things. **But it really has become a bit of a home, and I'm so grateful everyday that I am able to come here.** I am a James Madison student and that has been amazing and so challenging. It's really shown me what I want to do. I want to be an activist, probably non-profit work. The type of activism I have been able to do on campus and the types of experiences I've been able to have through that has really changed me. **It has made me a better person.** I wasn't a great person in high school. I believe you could call me a bitch, very easily. I probably still am. **But I know now that there is a lot more to me, that I can be more; I have that capability.**"*

Nick Mells

◉ Senior ◉ English Major ◉

◉ American Indian and Indigenous Studies Minor ◉

Black & Queer Communities and Interfraternity Council

"I'm from Detroit, black, queer, and fashionable today, I guess. I think something that has really impacted my academic career here or just me in general are all the identities I hold, and all the things I try to manage. I think that has been more so playing a larger role in what I want to do in the future. Hopefully I'll be a lawyer someday, or a teacher, or something. I want to impact the way people live. I don't want them to go through the same experiences I did.

*I think MSU is definitely curating some of those experiences for me, so I can help other people. **If you need me, I'm here.** I have felt really outcasted before, I used to live in Williams. It was a weird time, I transferred January 2015. I knew no one. **I just started joining organizations, and I felt really enculturated here.** I feel like I owe MSU a debt of gratitude because one, Spartan Advantage is awesome; thank you. And two, they have stuck their neck out of me so I want to make it the best I can here. **It's not everyday you can go to college; it's a blessing."***

