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Three months ago, I was in Dr. Talal Nizameddin's office (our Dean of Student Affairs) and after an hour-long conversation, he asked me: Rim, what is your ambition?

The question caught me off-guard. What is my ambition? I did not wake up one day and say, you know what, I want to graduate as an honors student, have two degrees, travel the world to represent my university, be on the Rugby League varsity team, win awards – and I certainly did not say, you know what, I want to be valedictorian of the class of 2017 (although I must say I am not particularly saddened by it).

So how did all of that happen, I wondered? Did I consciously pursue these goals? Or were they the by-product of the way I led my life?

When I look back at every semester I spent at AUB, I see an image of myself: arms fully extended, body fully engaged, focused, intent, pushing through a raging sea of stress and pressure over deadlines, exams, commitments, expectations, problems with family, friends, peers, colleagues, classmates, professors, health issues, hospital beds... the list really is endless.

How did I do it? How did we do it?

My answer to that question can be summed up in two words: perspective and purpose.

Three years ago, I was hit by three cars on a highway leading to Dawra, aka the highway of death. I was crushed between two cars when trying to get away from all the skidding cars. Two hits, and I was down on the asphalt, my back twisted, bones broken. I was still alive, but my fate was still unclear. In that moment, I thought, “Is this it? Is it over? Will I ever be able to walk again? Will a car run over my head and kill me any second?” I tried to lift my arm up, tried to reach my back to understand what was going on. I will spare you the gory details- things were not clear back there. After three months in bed, unable to even sit up, a month in a wheelchair, and two more in crutches – three years later, here I am. During my recovery time, everyone told me the same thing: life is so short, isn't it? In the blink of an eye, all can come undone... or something along those lines. That was worlds away from the way I felt. Yes, maybe life is short in the number of seconds, minutes and hours we get to have, but it is infinite and eternal in meaning and value. I emerged from this accident, believe it or not, in one piece and with an undefeatable resolve. I took nothing for granted. To my eyes, everything was an opportunity to seize: being alive, having the support of my family and friends and most importantly having access to a quality higher education here at AUB. Every living, breathing minute was an opportunity to fully realize my potential as a human being- that was my perspective, which ultimately allowed me to discover my purpose.

With this in mind, I decided to be both the protagonist and the author of my own story. I decided not to let life just happen to me. By doing so, I claimed the rights to my story and made it my own, unique tale. I did not care that I did not become the doctor my mother wanted me to be, or the engineer my high school professors wanted me to be. I was completely fine with being that sort of disappointment, because I knew that I was not mediocre. I did not do things to

please anyone or to live up to their expectations. I did things because in them I saw something worthy, something that made my story unique, my own.

There were moments of doubt, believe me. I had plenty of those. Every decision I made was unsafe because it challenged the norm or the supposed secured path to success (so they think!). Then I would remember that I have one purpose, truly only one, and it is to fulfill the highest most truthful expression of myself as a human being. Today, as a political studies major at AUB, I can say that I didn't let people define who I am because of the major I pursued. I did even more than that, I let them wonder: how is a PS major Valedictorian?

Don't let people define who you are, class of 2017. Don't let them reduce you to the major you are in. You are much more than that. You define the value of the major you are in, you write your own chapters. So make them unique. The world needs this diversity. Your country needs this diversity. It does not need armies of: scientists, social and natural, doctors, engineers... you get the picture. It needs real, exceptional individuals with dreams, visions and ambitions of their own.

Think, dream, pursue and achieve, class of 2017. Be critical thinkers. Be the generation that made the change by being that change. Come alive, for this is only the beginning!