

Jennifer Samimi-Maverick Thinkers event

I had prepared something to talk about that told you all about me. All about how I was abandoned by my mother when I was 16, how I got help from Urban Peak, how I went through ups and downs over the years. I was going to tell you all about how I have learned so much from the Peak, first as a client, and then an employee, and about the wonderful relationships I made there. And I was going to talk about all that I've done and all that I'm doing. How I finally graduated from Community College and now I'm attending the University of Colorado. And how it's so hard, to work and go to school at the same time, but also how rewarding it is and how my academic career is so important to me. And how, maybe after I get my political science degree, I am thinking about going to law school, if I can figure out a way. That is what I was going to talk about. But I woke up yesterday morning and realized that I could mention all those things, and still say what I really want to say, what I think is more important than talking about myself the whole time. So here it is.

To the youth of Urban Peak and all young people who have not been lifted up the way they should: Your suffering is not your fault. The abuse, hurt, fear, anger, the cold, lonely nights and days, you did not bring this upon yourself. Rather, your oppression is the result of a long-standing tradition in our society-the tradition of ignoring those of us who live in the margins. Society, you see, likes to believe that everything is o.k., and that the only people who need help are far off in some distant place. As a result, we go unnoticed, kept in the margins, where society won't have to deal with us-you and I who are really just a part of everything else. So never think for a second that your oppression is your fault. But I am not saying that you do not have to take responsibility for yourself. On the

contrary, it's the first thing you have to do. You must, right now, realize who you want to be. And you can never, ever lose sight of that. Know that you have everything you need within yourself to become the person you want to be. But if you forget-and most of us do at least once-if you forget your potential, it might cause you to fall down, to cry, to start using again, to spiral into a black depression and feel like you can never escape. If anything remotely like that happens, remember that you are lucky. We are lucky, you and I. Because there are people that care about us. There are people that love us. There are people that will show you what it really means to be accountable to someone. These people will help you to genuinely experience feelings like trust and respect for others. And it will be amazing, because you know that this has never happened to you before, and you will know that you are changing, growing, becoming more and more that person you so want to be. These people, these people who work at this place, who commit their time to this place, who send resources to this place. They do it because they notice you. So, remember yourself, and you will go far.

So, I wanted you all to hear that because I think one of the goals of the evening was for all of you to get some insight into the lives of these young people. So I hope that helped. And, I'll leave you with this- When a young person walks through the door of Urban Peak, we all know that they have a long, difficult road ahead of them. But what we often forget is the extremely long, incomprehensibly difficult and painful road they have been walking on already. This is a road that most people can never understand. So I am here tonight to ask that we all work together, to revoke that pain, and so that young people are lifted up, and never blame themselves again.