It was five a.m. when the five-year-old blonde girl effortlessly glided onto the ice just like she had done every morning. Staring into her reflection painted in the foggy glass, she could vividly see her dreams flash before her eyes. The girl floated across the ice with stunning presence and grace, her mother sitting in the stands, selflessly supporting her daughter’s desire to figure skate even though it put a great financial strain on their family. With her hair tied up in a sleek bun, the gifted skater did not want to leave the ice, despite the fact it was time to go to school. In her cozy first grade classroom, her perplexed classmates struggled to comprehend why she had gotten up so early every day instead of sleeping in like everyone else. It would not take for the little girl to realize she was, in fact, not like everyone else.

The little girl is me, now seventeen, still spinning my seemingly impossible dreams into reality through hard work, dedication, and perseverance. I attribute so many of my accomplishments to the valuable lessons and experiences that I have gained over the past twelve years of being a competitive figure skater. Always striving towards achieving a perfect performance, I focus on executing each demanding jump and spin with a million-dollar smile, just like true performers do. I have implemented this facet of skating into my life by remaining positive and optimistic in the face of adversity. Even when I fall, I have found it important to get back up and maintain composure. There have been times I felt defeated, but my skating background has always reminded me to remain poised.

An ideal example of this composure was when I reached a defining step in my skating career at the age of ten. The dreaded pre-juvenile moves in the field test was a point at which many skaters often quit because of the difficulty and low passing rate. Like the other girls testing that day, I failed. However, while some skaters cried, and others decided to give up, I did not let this setback infringe upon my dreams. I left the arena undeterred, collected, and reinvigorated with a renewed determination to succeed. I worked harder than ever, practicing before and after school, transforming a bitter disappointment into an unstoppable drive to reach my goal. My commitment to my training soon paid off as I passed the test with a perfect score.

Throughout my unforgettable journey, I have also been afforded countless opportunities, which have inspired my future career plans. Every year, my mother made it a mission to attend the annual gala presented by the Ice Theatre of New York. Even though I was only a volunteer, I took advantage of this time to interview iconic professional skaters, a chance that would open up many doors for me. At the time, I was unaware that the love for my sport and communicating with others would launch my future career ambitions.

In this moment, I am gliding on the most perfect surface of ice, staring into my reflection once more. I see my older, much taller self, in a tight, black jacket bearing not only my name but also the words “U.S Figure Skating Triple Gold Medalist” embroidered in gold stitching. Although immersed in an icy fog, I can also envision my younger self, whose passion became embedded in her identity. This identity extends beyond the rink, as I have taken the lessons I have gained from being a competitive figure skater into everything I set my mind to in life. Looking back through the lens of figure skating, I have gained a profound understanding of not only how I developed into the confident individual I am today but also the person I can see myself becoming as I skate to the next chapter in my life.

Growing older, learning more about myself and the constantly evolving world around me, my thoughts captivate me as I consider my identity. It begins with intense nostalgia overpowering me as I reminisce on my childhood. My first time hearing the inspiring story of my parents’ journey from the Ukraine to the United States, I understood the significance of being an American citizen, especially as the first in my family. Even more so now, I appreciate the opportunities most people never have the chance to cherish. I recognize individuality as being the most significant contributor to building an inclusive community. At the core, we all share the same aspirations. We desire a chance to be valued and respected by those around us. We long for our differences to be embraced as strengths, and most importantly we yearn for happiness.

Being multilingual, I have long understood the importance of knowing how to use language carefully and effectively. Language is a valuable tool by means which we can meet people of all backgrounds and appreciate their unique stories. By sharing our inimitable perspectives with one another, we can discover a common ground in order to solve divergent issues. Being able to communicate with consideration and respect is a key element to this inclusivity we long for because everyone has a voice that deserves to be heard. For a community to thrive, members must overcome their differences by breaking through ignorance with tolerance, animosity with compassion, and insularity with open dialogue all amongst the framework of language focused upon inclusion.

I find myself grateful for my experiences that inspire me to do as much as I can to be a constructive contributor in creating a positive and safe atmosphere for others. I strive to live in a society where all diversity is encouraged acceptance no matter gender, religion, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, political views, or socio-economic status. Over the course of my visits and time spent learning about the institution, I believe without a doubt that American University is uniquely poised to model how a diverse and accepting community should function, and I cannot wait to contribute to this vision.