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By Vanessa Suazo

Vanessa is a second-year student in a postsecondary transition program called **Panther LIFE** at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, FL. Every semester the students are assigned to read a book and participate in a book club. During the Fall 2013 semester, the book that was chosen was [Wine to Water](#) by Doc Hendley. Vanessa was very moved and inspired by this book and wanted to share her story of its impact.

**W**ine to Water is a very inspiring book. It talks about the challenges, goals, and passions of an international aid organization to provide clean water access worldwide. Before reading this book I did not have any knowledge about the water crisis that many countries faced. Once I knew that this huge effort to provide clean water was taking place, I began to think of how I could help. The first step I took was hearing Doc Hendley's story.

I first went to Doc Hendley's book signing at FIU and listened to his presentation that touched my heart. I remember Doc Hendley speaking of how lost he felt throughout high school, because he was not good at any particular subject or sport. Doc Hendley felt so small because his brother was an amazing athlete, and his sister was a very dedicated student. He felt average compared to his siblings.

As Doc Hendley spoke, I wondered how he could think he was average. To me he was an above average individual with such a giving organization. His only focus was to help the world gain access to clean water. I once had felt just like Doc Hendley.

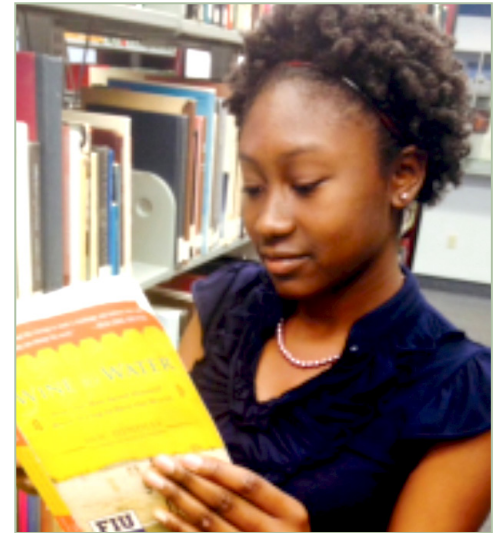
**...from here on out the sky is the limit!**

I could relate to Doc Hendley in many ways. When I was in high school I felt lower than anyone else. I felt very different. My self-confidence was low, and I was worried I would not achieve anything after high school. This was nowhere near the truth.

During my senior year in high school, I was invited to attend a meeting on Project Victory. At first I was nervous and not sure about the program since it was new to me. It was my senior year, and I did not plan on starting any new programs.

But once I found out about Project Victory, I quickly accepted the opportunity to be a part of the program. It was a chance to grow and improve myself. Project Victory helped me succeed in high school and as my senior year finished Ms. Cohen, my Project Victory teacher, informed me about a new university program called Panther LIFE.

I was like Doc Hendley in that I did not believe in myself. Ms. Cohen encouraged me to learn more about Panther LIFE, and told me how she saw so much potential in me. Her encouragement helped me to attend a meeting and learn more about the program, and how she would guide me through the application and interview process.



Vanessa reads Wine to Water in the college library

I remember attending the meeting with my brother Mario and feeling thrilled by what the program included and could offer me. I would get to attend Florida International University and expand my knowledge. Panther LIFE was necessary in me growing.

Doc was just like me in that his sister also saw his potential. She felt he could be more than a bartender. If Ms. Cohen had not believed in me, just like Tasha believed in Doc, I would be having an average life just as Doc would have as a bartender.

I experienced many of the same feelings as Doc when I started Panther LIFE. Like Doc when he was asked to work for the organization I was excited because I knew I was on the right path and nervous because it was something new. When I was accepted into the program, I was ready to start this new journey.

When Doc went to Africa to start working on his project, he created his group that would assist him in reaching his goals. His teammates Ismael and Amir helped him fix the wells and accomplish his vision. He had the support of a village, which helped him to be successful.

In Panther LIFE I have a support team and a project coordinator. I have an academic mentor, faculty advisor, peer coach, and tons of friends that support my dreams and me. They all support me and help me succeed. Since I joined Panther LIFE, my reading and spelling have improved. I feel blessed just as Doc does, and from here on out the sky is the limit.