



JESSICA AYALA | CLASS OF 2013

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What have you been up to since DMSF?

Since being a Daniel Murphy scholar at Loyola, so many doors have opened for me. After caddying at LaGrange through the DMSF Summer Caddie Program, I was fortunate to receive the Evans Scholarship to Marquette University to pursue a career in Advertising and Psychology. Throughout my time at Marquette, I was able to run community service mentoring programs, handle the marketing materials for my clubs of interest, MC cultural shows on campus, serve on the Executive Board in my Evans Scholar community, intern for some amazing companies of Wisconsin, and bring a non-profit that is so near and dear to me to campus: Camp Kesem. Currently, I am thoroughly enjoying being a counselor for the Caddie Program – having done this camp back in the day, I knew this would be a meaningful job for me. After the summertime, I will be settling back in Milwaukee to kick off my career in ad.

Could you explain Camp Kesem and your role within the organization?

Camp Kesem ([website](#), [Facebook page](#)) is a nationwide, non-profit steered by passionate college students, that supports children through and beyond their parent's cancer. Camp Kesem operates in over 80 universities, providing free summer camps and year-long support for kids ages 6-16. It is the only nonprofit of its kind dedicated to this unique population, and for those participating, their Camp Kesem experience is a life-changing one. Student leaders get to coordinate and execute every single logistic of camp – from fundraising and gaining company sponsorships to reaching families and planning each activity during camp. All the work we put forth creates a community of kids where they can relate and empathize with each other while being in a safe environment for some camp fun that they are so deserving of.

I got involved with the organization thanks to a close friend of mine who told me to google it. We grew up together and she witnessed how I struggled to cope with the loss of my own dad to cancer. When I learned about Camp Kesem's unique approach and the profound impact it makes on the long-term scale, I realized that this is the kind of help I wish I had when I was mourning.

As Co-Founder and Co-Director of our chapter, I led operations with recruiting our student leadership, working with advisors who are professionals in the community, pitching what we stand for to people who have never heard of Camp Kesem, etc. It was a role that allowed me to wear many hats, an experience that helped me grow professionally as well as emotionally. This past June, I had the honor of being a counselor of our youngest girls at camp, where I got to have direct relationships with them and provide guidance along the way. Our chapter has served over 50 kids since 2016, something we are immensely proud of and excited for as we see our chapter grow year by year!

What is one of your favorite memories from your experiences at Camp Kesem?

In the middle of the week of camp, we hold one special activity where we get to talk about why we are all at camp in the first place, called Empowerment. Hearing kids as young as 6 years old share how they have navigated seeing their parents experience something so difficult is as shocking as it is inspiring. During this activity, I got to hear so many perspectives, many ways of coping, and witness a resiliency that I didn't think kids so young were capable of having. It's a time of many tears, many hugs, and many affirmations but in the end, our kiddos are more united than ever.

What is one lesson you've learned from your Camp Kesem experiences?

I learned that one can transform a dark situation into one that fuels and illuminates you. We were able to make something beautiful out of our pain. Camp Kesem made me realize the importance of fostering community because with that, we get to grow in ways we couldn't imagine otherwise. The community I was able to establish at Camp, on campus and in Milwaukee proves just how special Camp Kesem is. *Kesem* means *magic* in Hebrew. Needless to say, it truly lives up to its name.

What are your future goals and dreams?

As far as my future, I will be working in the ad and marketing industries for about two years and then go to graduate school for a Master's in Business Administration and Social Policy. I intend to work in an industry as exciting and innovative as advertising to open doors for other women and other Latinx individuals, to help create representative and memorable marketing tactics, to give back to organizations that have touched my life in enormous ways, and to serve others in the best way I can. I am excited to see my career kick off and gain new perspectives along the way.

What advice would you offer to Murphy Alumni or current Murphy Scholars?

I once saw a quote that read, "If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door." These words ring true to me because I've always been a person that aims to make strides each day, even if it means starting from zero. Making opportunities for myself, building my network, taking on big roles, and being open to challenges is what has made me successful, and I'm excited to see the younger ones in my family set high standards for themselves too. Everything I've done as a first generation student has been to give me a prosperous future, to make my family proud, and to change the course of my family's future. In short, never be afraid to go above and beyond for yourself.