1.Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

Last summer, I went to work on a farm in South Africa. I can clearly evocate to a hot, humid day in a small farming town, two and a half hours south of Durban. It was my first day of work on the farm and I was to be treated, not as an American teenager, but as a nut picker and farm worker. 6 AM they woke me up and I quickly got dressed and I hopped on to a tractor leading me to where I would work the rest of the day. There stood 7 other black ladies on the ground in dirty, blue aprons. The head farmer gave me my task and I was goaled to find and pick up 3,000 nuts, which had fallen to the ground, in an 8 hour span; that’s how much is expected for them to receive their salary. I began working, thinking to myself how easy this was. The ladies gave me blank stares and could not understand how a white boy like me was working on their farm. Two hours passed and my lower back was absolutely killing. I kept taking breaks and I had quite a sweat going. And then I look over to my fellow co-workers who have not taken one break. I approached one eagerly asking how many nuts they had collected. She stared blankly, not knowing a word of English. So, another hour passed and I began to wonder how these big, black women do this. I was tired and bored due to the monotony of this job, mindless and back-breaking. I began humming to the tune of twinkle twinkle little star. It gave me *something* to do. From the tree on the other side of me I heard another voice humming the same thing. And then another one, and then five more. Every single lady was humming twinkle twinkle little star with me. All in sync, they all smiled and looked at me and then at each other. They barely talked, but boy did they hum. I began to see a connection; I couldn’t speak their language and they couldn’t speak mine, but it was the music that brought us together. We picked, we hummed, we picked, we hummed. Then I started my next song, “Let the Sunshine In” and they all together joined me, in their language of course. And then they sang, they harmonized and danced while we all picked nuts. And they began singing their African songs to which I eventually learned and harmonized along. It was a complete breakthrough of communication. It was then I found out that this is what they did every single day, 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, $5 a day, most of them single moms with at least 2 kids. Even though I was sore, and exhausted, the singing and music kept me going. And yet we didn’t speak one word to one another. For the first time, I felt apart of something special that was more then just me; it was community. It was rejoice. It was refreshing. *We* are so lucky. That day on the small farm, South Africa, I came up 2,000 nuts short. Everyone received their daily salary except me. I was fortunate enough to be able to experience that and feel what they go through every day. And even though I didn’t know them at all, it was the music and the harmony that we created that bonded us. Music is a universal language. It’s a huge part of *my* life. But in that moment, it became so much bigger then listening to *my* favorite song or going to a concert. Everyone should look to find that sense of melody to live their life with and remember how blessed they truly are. Sometimes, I think we are all oblivious to another side of the world that we can’t see. We can listen to our music on our Ipods and we can attend our favorite artist’s concert, but these people have to create their own music. I finally saw how fortunate I was. But it was such a life-changing and hallowed experience, that I wanted others to feel the way I felt. I came up with the idea of PAL. Since that moment, I have sung solos at concert halls for two charity benefit concerts and I have founded and lead Players and Listeners, through HTHI, which is a community service club that goes out and performs a musical production for seniors and the underprivileged. We are set to have our third performance this summer. I aspire to bring that sense of community by giving back the same way those 7 ladies gave back to me.

2.Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

When I see thousands of fans surrounding me and blue and white uniforms take the field, I know I’m at home. With my Tony Gwynn T-Shirt and statistic sheet in hand, I watch my San Diego Padres play the game that I fell in love with from a very young age. Most people call it an obsession, I call it a way of life. I can block every sound around me and sit still through 3 hours of ball and it can fly by in seconds. This is my sanctuary. For many this is a social experience, but for me it’s a type of religion to me. I celebrate the wins and mourn the losses. I pray in the 9th inning, I rejoice in their success. Whether I’ve had a terrible day, I know I can go to the ballgame and black my life out. Many of you actually don’t know this, but I can tell you anything and everything about the padres that there is to know. I feel like I can be myself and express myself at the ballpark. It’s one of the only places where life always seems perfect.