

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/pain-leads-to-passion>

Stockton City Councilman Michael Tubbs describes his unlikely path from a single-parent household in a tough neighborhood to a White House internship that first showed him he could be a civic leader. The Stanford graduate says the pains of his childhood and challenges in his community fueled his passion to return to Stockton to help make a difference.



Transcript

If someone would have told me, my freshman year at Stanford, that I would be a city council person in Stockton, I would've looked at them and told them they were crazy.. I had no intention of coming back to Stockton.. I was kind of upset Stanford was so close to home.. I wanted to be as far away from home as possible.. And it's not because home was a bad place or a place I didn't love or it didn't have people I liked, but it was because home was difficult and challenging.. But I realized at Stanford that a lot of my passions came from, sort of, the pains.. Growing up in poverty with a single parent and incarcerated father made me really, really passionate about things like inequality, things like poverty, things like mass incarceration.. And I realized, even before I ran for office, that, sort of, my pain points were leading me to what I think, or thought, my passion or purpose might be.. And then my junior year, I was interning in the White House to the staff in a government program, and my job was when the office of intergovernmental affairs and I was supposed to work with mayors and council members nationwide.. Crazy foreshadowing and I hated it, which is also, kind of, foreshadowing..

No, I'm joking.. But I hated it.. I spent 12 hours a day googling what the mayor of Laredo, Texas was doing, or googling what Cory Booker was doing in Newark, or what Kasim Reed was doing in Atlanta and it was so, so, so boring, but it opened my eyes to how people are making big changes at a small, really local level that no one really knew or cared about.. So I remember talking to my boss and saying, you know what, one day I'm going to support people in Stockton, because Stockton is my hometown, it's my community, and it's a place in need of good governance.. So I thought I would be the donor, the funder, and then someone else could do the messy work of going to the meetings and dealing with people who you may or may not like.. And then around the same time, on Halloween, one of my first cousins was murdered at a house party in Stockton.. And sadly in Stockton, even today, we've made some strides, but for far too many young people, especially young men of color, homicides or premature death are almost a fact of life.. But it was the first time it was someone in my family so it hit me really personally.. And I remember flying back home for the funeral and dealing with the pain, and the anger, and the frustration, like why did this happen.. I remember having to console my aunt, and my mother, and my cousins, and had to squelch beef and make sure people didn't retaliate..

And I realized that all the great time I was having at Stanford, whether it was interning at Google, or being in the White House, or having access to great speakers and lecture series like this had to be for much more than my own personal fulfillment.. It had to be so much bigger than me getting the degrees and making a lot of money that for some reason that my part, or the stage, which I was supposed to play in my life, meant that I would have to go back to Stockton and run for office, one day.. So I told my mom, you know what mom, one day when I'm 30, 34, 38, 42, 50 I'll come back to Stockton and help out because the city really needs help.. But then, my senior year, I was applying for fellowships and jobs, and I didn't get what I thought was mine.. I was an entitled Stanford student, I had good grades, I had worked hard, I had the best recs, I had the best resume, I thought for sure that was my job, and my purpose in life, to be a Rhodes Scholar and that's just what was going to happen for me.. So I put all my eggs in that basket and then it didn't work out for me.. So then I remember being so upset, so hurt, like I thought I found my purpose, this is what I'm supposed to be doing, and now I can't do it.. And I start with that because in all of these valley experiences, all these low points, whether growing up in poverty, or losing my cousin, or not getting the fellowship that really clarified the path I was going to take...