

Name: Shanya Washington

Email Address: Shalisa.love@dalton.k12.ga.us

Cell number: 7063133396

High School you attend: Dalton High School

Graduation year: 2026

Sports: Cheerleading and Track and Field

Shanya has triumphed over difficulty. She was in a car accident with her mother and siblings when she was 8 years old. Shanya was the sole survivor among her mother and her two small siblings. Shanya's mom instructed her to unbuckle and grab her brother's bottle. When she went to grab the bottle, they were struck head on by a vehicle. Being wedged between the seats saved her. She has battled with mental health while living with her grandmother and aunt. As outlets, she turns to cheer and track.

Friday, September 16th, 2016, exactly one month and 15 days before my 8th birthday, my life was forever changed. My mom was driving me and my siblings to her friend's house, when the car began to slow down. Something was wrong with the car, and it wouldn't crank. The lights were also off. All of a sudden, BOOM! We were hit by an 18-wheeler and the car ended up flying into a ditch.

I guess I was unconscious for a little while, but when I came to, I was being pulled out of the car by a fireman. My family was airlifted to a hospital in Atlanta. I would wake up and then fall back asleep. Every time I woke up, I would see more and more family members. First, it was my grandfather, then my grandmother. Then, I saw my dad who lives in Ohio.

Eventually, the dizziness and sleepiness went away, and I was able to stay awake and have a conversation. I could tell everyone was happy that I was okay. They were asking me questions, hugging me and talking to me about what happened. I asked about my mom and siblings. Then, everyone got really quiet. Then, the nurses and my family circled around me, saying "I'm sorry," and then someone said, "they're gone." They told the rest of my family was killed in the accident by a drunk driver. At that point, I felt lost. I was a 7-year-old with no mom, no siblings and a dad who lived hours away.

After the wreck, within one year, I lost my grandfather, my grandmother and my uncle. 2016 and 2017 were very hard years for me. I was sad, but I didn't want people to feel bad for me. Despite the tragedy, I remained positive and tried to lift up others. I got an award in elementary that year for always having a positive attitude. At that time, I had no clue what that really meant, but now, I get it. I was stronger than I realized.

Since I was younger, I have been told that I was an inspiration to a lot of people because of the way that I have handled the death of my mom and siblings. I like to think of it as just blocking out all the bad and negativity. I have just always wanted to be the light in the room. I loved to make people smile and laugh. I wanted to bring an energy that wanted people to want to be around me.

As I get older, I feel like I still have those same feelings. I feel like I have plenty to be sad and depressed about. I don't have that mother to share my secrets with. I don't have the younger siblings that can annoy me, but I do have a good support system with my aunt, coaches and friend's moms. And that is something that keeps me going.

I love to tell people my story. I like to tell others that no matter the situation, YOU can make it better. There is no need to rush into healing or talk about situations they aren't ready to talk about. Life is hard and healing takes time. But it will happen if you put your mind to it.

I love making people's day. Having a positive attitude and mindset is crucial for a healthy lifestyle. I remind my cheer team to never show or have negative energy because it pulls us apart and we don't work well together. I pray for us daily and pray aloud for our team before we take the competition mat. We all want the best for each other and strive to be the best version of ourselves.

Last week, I was awarded our team's "chain". I received the "chain" for having a positive attitude

and being optimistic. We had an injury during warmups before we took the mat, and I encouraged our team to keep up our energy and keep a positive attitude.

I have also taken the role as the person who prays for our team. I pray for us at cheer practice and I pray for us at competitions. I feel that prayers are a way to grow closer to God and it also connects and strengthens my relationship with my teammates.