

Khaliyl Lane: Graduating Against The Odds



RICK HARTFORD | RHARTFORD@HARTFORDCOURANT.COM
WHEN KHALIYL LANE, center, moved in with Barbara Allison, right, and her son, Mike, he found the structure he needed and got into UCONN.

When Khaliyl Lane was a little boy, he liked to ride his bike down the road to visit his good friend, Mike Allison. "I'd take a peek at what a real family is supposed to look like," Lane said. "I was always envious of the fact that they had so much love for one another."

Though he was only age 6 or 7, Lane knew his life wasn't normal. His mother didn't pay much attention to him or his younger brother. He didn't know the word neglect, but he knew his mother acted differently from other mothers.

She didn't seem to care if he did his homework, and when he got older, she didn't keep track of him the way other mothers did.

By freshman year in high school, he was flunking some courses. Later that year, in May, his mother decided she couldn't care for her children anymore and kicked Lane, then 14, and his younger brother out of their home in Marlborough.

That was when Allison's mother, Barbara, asked if Lane wanted to live with them, at least to finish out freshman year. Lane jumped at the opportunity, although he knew life would be very different at the Allison's. He was used to doing pretty much whatever he wanted after school, and sometimes he skipping school. "That wasn't flying with Barbara," said Lane, who is now 22.

Allison ran her house on a strict schedule: Mike and his younger brother, Ryan, and Khaliyl would all play sports after school every day; then, home for dinner and homework.

Barbara Allison remembers asking Lane after dinner in those first weeks together, "Do you have homework?"

"Oh my God, I haven't been asked that question since I was in second grade," she remembers him responding.

"Deep down, I knew it was what I really needed," Lane said of the structure in the Allison's home. "I knew I needed a basis to turn my life around in a sense before it got out of hand. I always believed it was never too late to start. ... You might have had a rough time growing up, but things can always change in your favor."

The spring and summer worked out so well that Lane simply stayed on. Barbara Allison, realizing she'd need help with health insurance and other expenses, applied to become a foster parent for Lane. In his new home, Lane's performance at school greatly improved. He went to summer school, got extra help.

He hadn't thought much about college before. If anything, he thought he might go to a technical school, but now Allison was talking to him about college. "She kind of saw what was in me that I didn't even see was in me myself," he said.

He also excelled on the football field, where his coach was talking to him about playing in college. Still, Lane said, when he got his acceptance letter to the University of Connecticut, "I was really sincerely shocked. It was like a dream come true."

Allison helped him find the federal and state grants he needed to attend.

In college, he found that the adversity he had suffered as a child actually served him well in some ways. "With a lot of kids who kind of were silver-spooned a bit, they don't really know how to deal with adversity. They don't do well on a test. ... They want to give up and cry to their mom. I never really had that opportunity and I felt like you got to deal with your problems on your own and keep fighting."

Lane was a walk-on player the football team in his freshman year at UCONN and played with the team through his junior season, while managing to do well as a communications major and sociology minor. He has a job that he'll start in a few weeks with Wells Fargo bank.

"I always knew deep down that I could do it, but I needed a push and once I got that push," Lane said. "That's kind of why I took off."