



TRAGEDY AT HOME; TRANSFORMATION AT CAL POLY

MAURICE MCCLURE DISCOVERS HIMSELF ON THE FIELD AND IN CLASS

BY STACIA MOMBURG

PHOTOS BY LAURA DICKINSON, JOE JOHNSTON AND STACIA MOMBURG

MAURICE MCCLURE SAYS THAT IF it weren't for Cal Poly, he'd be sitting on the couch playing video games at his mom's house in San Francisco.

Instead, the 23-year-old City and Regional Planning major and Mustang offensive lineman will graduate in the spring and looks forward to living a life he never thought possible.

I didn't think I was smart enough to go to college. My sister, Tàlia, got a full scholarship to UC Berkeley. As far as I was concerned, there was no way I was going to have that experience, McClure said. My mother used to apologize to me, telling me she wouldn't be able to afford to send me to college.

Happily, his mother's concerns were premature. There would be college for McClure, but not before he and his family endured tragedy, and not before a number of educators – including a high school administrator and a favorite Cal

Poly professor nicknamed Brother Wack – stepped in to provide support and opportunities that McClure eagerly seized.

McClure's journey to Cal Poly began when he was 8. His father coached youth football in San Francisco. To impress his dad, McClure decided to play.

I had to play up a level, because I was so big, he said. My dad and I would go on diets together, so I'd make weight for the division I played in.

McClure's father, a coach for 11 years, put his son through his paces. I played tackle. It taught me how to be tough. It was hard. Everyone was older and they hit really hard, but I learned to tough it out.

McClure played on his father's teams for three years. He worked hard and learned how to play both offense and defense.

LOSS

When McClure was 11, tragedy struck. His father, James "Butch" McClure had been sick with what the family thought was a bad flu virus. McClure remembers being home with his father when his dad fell violently ill and was rushed to the hospital.

"I didn't see him again after that," he said. "He had a massive heart attack brought on by advanced-stage leukemia. We had no idea."

Maurice McClure, his mother Dori and his four siblings were left behind. McClure's older brother and sister had already moved out of the family's home in San Francisco's Lakeview District. "It was me, my mom, my brother Marcus and my sister Mia," McClure said.

And McClure's football came to a dead stop: "After my dad died, I was burned out and just didn't want to play."

He played basketball at St. Emydius Junior High, though, and maintained a 3.0 GPA. That's where a school administrator saw McClure's potential and nominated him for the Achieve Program – a year-round, four-year high school scholarship and enrichment program for underserved students from low-income families.

The program selects young men and women who "are strongly motivated to put forth maximum effort to change and improve their lives," according to its mission.

Through the program, McClure attended Archbishop Rioridan High School, an all-boys Catholic school in Lakeview. He also returned to the gridiron.

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"It was time; I just wanted to play again. I played guard and tackle my freshman year."

He also wanted to keep playing basketball. And since he had to maintain a 3.0 GPA to play two sports, he was academically motivated.

The Achieve Program exposed him to cultural events and activities he might not otherwise have experienced, McClure said. "I also got to play in the West Catholic League for football, which is much more competitive than the public school leagues in Lakeview."



EFFORT AND TEAMWORK

In his senior year, the school hired a new football coaching staff who would help McClure grow to be a better player, and that was the trail that eventually led to Cal Poly.

"I was lazy," McClure said. "Mike Langridge pushed me hard. He inspired me to be better and taught me to push through being tired on field."

In exchange for that 100 percent on-field effort, Langridge promised he would work hard to get McClure a scholarship.

When San Jose State passed on McClure because of a broken ankle and a previous rotator cuff injury, Langridge contacted former Cal Poly football coach Rich Ellison, who offered McClure a full scholarship and red-shirted the 6-foot-2-inch, 305-pound freshman.

"Being red-shirted gave me an opportunity to hone my skills and lose 40 pounds," said McClure, who is now down to 280 pounds.

Current Cal Poly football Coach Tim Walsh said McClure could have been selected All-America if not for a series of injuries. He also said McClure's "do-what-is-best-for-the-team attitude" has earned his teammates' respect.

LEARNING CONFIDENCE

McClure said it was only when he arrived at Cal Poly that he began to understand he really was smart enough to go to college. "I didn't have faith in how smart I was, and it's been great to learn that if I really like something, I can be really good at it."



He admits he was distracted when he first arrived at Cal Poly. At an all-boys school, McClure noted, girls weren't a daily diversion. He said he also lacked good time-management skills when he arrived.

Eventually the distractions caught up with him, and he realized he needed to focus.

"I used to be a huge procrastinator. Now I work hard to get my work out of the way so I can enjoy the fun stuff that much more," he said. "The day I chose studying over Xbox was the day I realized I was a real student."

Now in his fifth year, McClure is fascinated with urban transportation systems. "After taking a few classes, I remember going home to San Francisco and being able to truly under-

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stand how and why the city's roads and transportation systems work," he said.

He also enjoys urban planning and development. "I wouldn't mind working for a nonprofit that builds low-income housing that doesn't look like low-income housing – places where people want to live and take pride in their homes," he said.

McClure attributes much of his success to the dedication of the City and Regional Planning faculty.

"Professors in my department go out of their way to help students succeed – whether you take their classes or not. They want us to succeed so that we can help others succeed," he said.

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He is particularly fond of "Brother Wack" – Professor Paul Wack in the CRP Department. "He helped me out a lot," McClure said "When I first got here, I found the tests really hard. Brother Wack would talk me through the material; he would take the time to help me understand it. We just clicked."

BROTHERHOOD

McClure also has found support in two very close friends – his roommates and fellow football team members Jarred Houston and Darryl Williams. "I came here by myself, but I will leave here with two brothers – my family," McClure said.

"Darryl goes out of his way to make me laugh and always tells me the truth – no matter how harsh – because he doesn't want to see me mess up. Jared has my back no matter what and would follow a friend to the end of Earth. The support they give me drives me to make good decisions and be responsible for my actions daily.

The three travel in a pack, are avid movie watchers, and love hip-hop and R&B music.

And both Darryl and Jarred agree that when it comes to McClure, "He's a big teddy bear, everybody loves Maurice," they said.

McClure looks forward to graduation in June and then a wide-open future.

"I want to keep training and maybe try out for the Canadian Football League," he said. "I want to go home, but I also want to travel to Spain or Italy. Maybe I'll land a job."

Wherever he goes, he'll carry his Cal Poly experience with him.

"The people here are so nice. It's a relaxing place to be. So much is so good about Cal Poly." □

