“How is it that firefighters can run into a burning building, while everyone else is running out?” I am asked this question repeatedly while I serve the members of my community. Starting out as a junior member of the South Onondaga Fire Department in the year of 2007, I knew firefighting was my life. Still in high school and only 16, I was unable to do all the work that other members were able to do at the fire department. Anxiously I waited, and I strived to achieve high academic achievement in the mean time. Today, thanks to my education and training, I am an interior firefighter and able to do everything at the fire department. My future goal in life is to continue my education and become a career firefighter for a nearby city.

Being in the fire department at a young age exposes you to many things a normal teenager would not experience. When the pager goes off, and we hear the alarm, we can only wonder how this one is going to turn out. So here I go, I roll out of bed at two thirty in the morning, half asleep, quickly put on the clothes I laid out the night before, hop in my car; which if you live in New York is covered in snow, I clean off the snow, drive two miles to the fire house, throw my gear on, jump on a fire truck, and I’m off to someone who desperately needs my help. From mangled motor vehicle collisions to raging, ripping structure fires, we still face the unexpected on a fire scene. I have been on many emergency calls and I have seen many different scenarios. One day we will have a dog stuck under the floor of a shed and the next day we will have a fatal motor vehicle collision. It can all go from laughs to cries so easily. Yet as a firefighter I somehow find a way to cope with each kind of emergency call. Due to obvious reasons, I cannot discuss specifics on emergency calls I have had. Cases like a freak fatal accident scene, where a past member of our fire department was killed, send me over the edge. Though as we
grieve and the alarms go off again, we are right back out there to face another emergency
that has been handed our way. People always ask me what my favorite type of call is.
Most firefighters will say, “Oh those devil burning house fires!” I just tell them my
favorite types of calls are the ones where everyone goes home safe.

I am currently a first year student at OCC in the Fire Protection Technology
major. My reasons for choosing this major are not only because of my desire to help my
community, but for my desire to help the community the correct way. This major is
giving me the information I need to be able to get the job done safely. After my first
semester I have already received a GPA of 3.94, displaying my desire to educate myself
as much as possible in the fire service. Receiving that GPA has made me eligible for the
honor society at OCC called Phi Theta Kappa. It was an honor to become a part of this
group. Even though I may not be able to pronounce the name of the honor society
correctly, I know that my high academic achievement will help me to continue learning
as much as I can about the fire department. As I learn more and more about firefighting,
I bring back my information and share it with the firefighters at my department, so we are
able to serve our community better. There will never be anything you can’t learn in the
fire service. Training is a continuous part of firefighting to keep us on our toes and ready
for anything. There are many jokes to tell you how you know if you’re a firefighter or
not. Most of these jokes can only be understood by other firefighters. Despite those jokes,
you do know you’re a firefighter if you sound like Darth Vader when you walk around in
your turnout gear.

Being a female firefighter you would think we are not able do as much as male
firefighters would. Well in my case, I am going to prove to everyone, that select females
are just as capable of the “rough and tough” tasks involved in the fire department. This past summer I took a level one firefighter’s class. In the class of 24, a majority of the students were male with the exception of three females including myself. Throughout the class, I was able to go above and beyond some of the males, and I received recognition according to my instructor because, “a girl showed up a guy at a guy’s job.” I have a tendency to want to show up the men in my department during training. Some may find that funny or selfish, but I find it as a way to motivate my learning capability. You’re likely to learn more about what you’re doing if you’re having fun and competing while you’re doing it. Today’s fire service has changed drastically. It is more common to find increasing amounts of female firefighters in the world. As a female firefighter myself, I am one of these increasing statistics interested in continuing education in the fire service.

Everything I have experienced in my two years of the fire service has had an influence on my life and future goals. A career as a firefighter is what I have always dreamed of. Every other day I face set backs and advances, but through the obstacles, I was able to make it this far. I need to be able to put all I can into being a career firefighter. Receiving this scholarship will help me continue my education and fulfill that dream. So, how is it that firefighters can run into a burning building when everyone else is running out? I can answer this question with the simple fact that when my pager goes off, my duty as a firefighter from there out, is to serve my community to the best of my abilities.