

Derrius Quarles has a million reasons to jump for joy.



### Words in Action Vocabulary

**drug addict:** someone who feels a strong need to use drugs regularly  
**foster home:** a home where a child is placed for care  
**biology:** the study of living things  
**potential:** ability that can grow  
**applications:** forms to be filled out when asking for money, help, or a job

# One in a Million

Derrius turned his life around—and won more than a million dollars for college!

Derrius Quarles, 19, had a tough childhood. With his dad dead and his mom on drugs, you might think he never had a chance. But the Chicago teen didn't see it that way.

When Derrius decided to reach for his dreams, his whole life changed. He went on to win 1 million dollars in college scholarships! Now Derrius is a successful college student with a bright future.

### Feeling Different

When Derrius was 4, his father was killed. His mother, a **drug addict**, couldn't take care of him. Derrius and his 9-year-old brother sometimes had to steal food to eat. "My brother was kind of like my caretaker," says Derrius.

At age 5, Derrius went to live with his aunt. He missed his mom and dad, and no one seemed to understand.

Derrius felt different from other kids. He began to act

out. "I would fight a lot," he says. "I was always mad."

### Among Strangers

In seventh grade, Derrius went to live in a **foster home**. His foster parents weren't nice to him. They would get angry and yell at him. One even threw a dresser drawer at him. They told him that he'd never be anything in life.

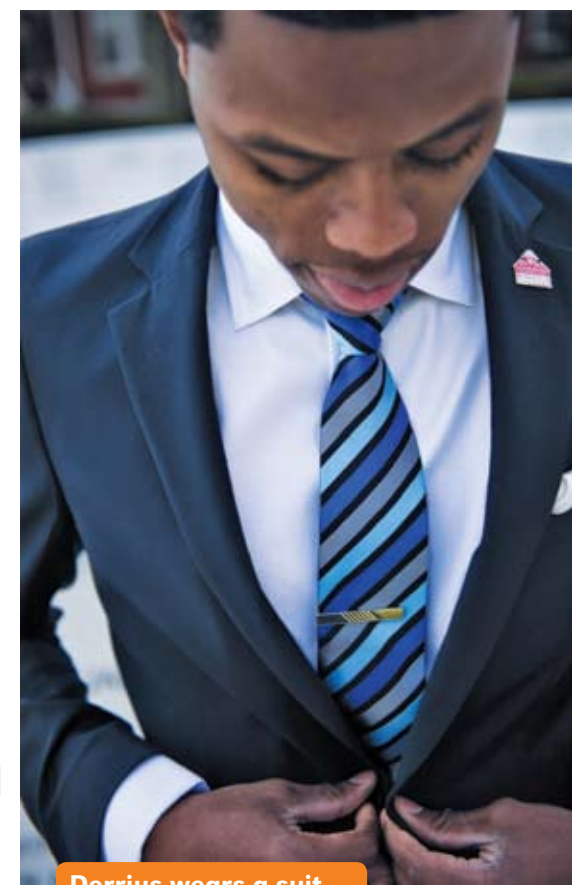
Derrius ran away from the foster home. He moved in with his grandmother. He never forgot what his foster parents had said.

### A Whole New World

Derrius didn't do his best in school. He didn't see the point. The summer after ninth grade, that changed.

Derrius had signed up for a summer **biology** class. He didn't go to class the first day. On the second day, he showed up late.

His teacher took him



Derrius wears a suit every day. It gives him a feeling of pride.

outside. She told him he was smart, but that he was wasting his **potential**.

"Those words dug at my heart," says Derrius. "This

was somebody that I looked up to, telling me that I had potential. I never showed up late again.”

The talk with his teacher showed Derrius that he could be anything if he worked hard enough.

Derrius remembered how his foster parents had said he’d never be anything. He planned to prove them wrong.

### Million-Dollar Teen

Adults at a summer program helped Derrius find out about scholarships he could earn to pay for college.

In his senior year, Derrius filled out piles of **applications**. He told his friends, “Don’t expect me to come out. You’re not going to see me for a long time.”

Derrius’s hard work paid off. He won more than \$1 million in scholarships! It



Derrius believes every student should have a computer.

was more money than he could use. He accepted as many scholarships as he needed to pay for college.

Derrius is now a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He has a lot to be proud of. But he’s most proud of helping

others. Derrius gives speeches to teens, telling them how to find scholarships.

### Giving Back

In high school, Derrius got help buying a computer. “I didn’t have a computer at home until my junior year,” he remembers. He says that having one at home made a big difference to him.

Derrius wanted to help others in the same situation. Last year, he gave two laptops to high school students who needed them.

Derrius isn’t done helping people. He plans to become a doctor. There’s a lot of work in his future. Derrius doesn’t mind—hard work got him where he is today. He knows it can take him anywhere.

—Christy Damio



 **VIDEO:** Watch Derrius explain how he won his scholarships. [scholastic.com/actionlink](http://scholastic.com/actionlink)

Being a student at Morehouse College is a dream come true for Derrius, right.