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## From homeless at 14 to working at Apple and Tesla

***Despite their age (19), US twins Mark and Andrew Ansell have already lived rollercoaster lives, going from being homeless at 14 to interning at some of the biggest companies in Silicon Valley.***

When sitting with Mark and Andrew Ansell, it's hard to imagine that these two enthusiastic and incredibly intelligent young men have lived their lives accompanied by regular struggle.

Currently, on a student exchange at Trinity College, from UC Berkeley in California, Mark and Andrew's family became homeless in 2014 and spent more than a year moving around and receiving support before regaining stability. "Our family has always had some sort of financial struggle and that year was the climax of all of that. We arrived home one day and found an eviction notice on our door and as 14-year-olds we didn't know what was going to happen," says Mark.

After spending four months living in a church, the Ansell family were relocated to a motel which is a period to forget for the twins. "That was a totally different experience because we used to come home from school feeling so embarrassed and hoping none of our peers would see us running into this motel room that we called home. It was a tough time," says Andrew.

Amazingly, Mark and Andrew were able to maintain their impressive academic record and chose to focus all of their energy on their school work. They now study mechanical engineering and business administration at UC Berkeley and were the first students in the college to study two degrees simultaneously. “We applied to all of our colleges in search of mechanical engineering degrees, but we always wanted to pair that with business because our parents have their own businesses. We were told it wouldn’t be possible to do simultaneous degrees and that it would affect our graduation, but here we are three years in and still going,” says Andrew.

The first real success for the twins came in 2015, just one year after becoming homeless when Mark overcame odds of 20,000/1 to win the Elks Most Valuable Student Scholarship and land \$50,000 in the process. “So I made the top 20 students and was flown to Chicago for a weekend and it was basically an interview where they assess the candidates. I remember getting the call to say I won and I burst out crying and it was at that moment where I first realised that I could have an impact on the world,” says Mark.

Both Mark and Andrew are on full scholarships in UC Berkeley, something which they had planned since high school. “One of our main goals going into college was that we wouldn’t be paying for any of it. At the moment we have multiple scholarships that when added up they basically become a full scholarship. Essentially, we don’t pay anything for our education. We’re lucky because we won’t graduate with any debt, which is a big issue for students in the United States,” adds Mark.

Last year, the twins worked as interns with two of the biggest companies in Silicon Valley – Apple and Tesla – and it fills both of them with a real sense of pride having come a long way in such a short time. “The internship was such an incredible experience. When you walk through the doors, everyone is of such a high calibre and dedicated to the same mission. It’s amazing to see how everyone shares a common goal that has an impact on millions of people,” says Andrew. “Apple was the exact same. I remember getting there and listening to people talk about Steve Jobs and all the work he did, and I got to hear Tim Cook (current CEO of Apple) speak many times so I’m incredibly fortunate to be able to say that. Everyday I’d have to take a step back and just appreciate where I was working. Never in a million years did I think we would make it to there,” added Mark. This summer, Andrew will be following in Mark’s footsteps by interning at Apple, while Mark will be working in Microsoft.

The twins have set up their own YouTube channel called *The Tech Twins* where they inspire people who have an ambition to work in the tech sector and demystify the attitude that if you’re not in that sphere, there’s no place for you. They have also established the Momentum Speaker Series in UC Berkeley, something they plan to rollout globally in the future. “This is something we started at Berkeley during our second year of college because we found that we were asking a lot of our older peers for advice and trying to learn how they got to where they are. But a lot of other people didn’t have these resources and were confused on how to get to the next level. Our first talk was called the ‘Intern Perspective’ and we brought people from Google, Facebook, Apple, etc. to discuss how they got their internships, what they learned and also how to turn an internship into a job offer or being asked back for a second internship. It’s worked really well in Berkeley and we want to bring it to the leading universities in the US and hopefully globally,” says Andrew.

While supporting their fellow students through their YouTube channel and the Momentum Speaker Series, it’s the very same students that Mark and Andrew draw their inspiration from. “I’m really inspired by what my peers are doing in universities, supporting their communities and making a change,” says Mark. “The student empowerment movement is very inspiring to me. Students have so much to contribute to society. A great example of this is with the Parkland High School (where the recent school shooting took place in Florida) students, were they saw that the government was letting down their community and they fought hard to make a change and address the issue,” adds Andrew.

Looking to the future, Mark and Andrew have yet to figure out what path they hope to take, but both plan on impacting the world if there is a need that fits their skillset. “I’d definitely want to be involved in entrepreneurship and starting my own company, but only if I see there’s a need that I can fulfil. However, I think we’d both want to establish ourselves in the Apples and Microsofts of the world before going down that avenue. The network you can build in these companies will be invaluable to starting our own company. I think the world needs a dynamic duo like us,” smiles Mark.

*Interview by Stephen Larkin.*

***Mark and Andrew both presented at the recent TEDx event at Trinity College, powered by Bank of Ireland. Read more [here](#).***