

I have overcome many obstacles in my life, but facing adversity has only left me more determined to help others. I have already completed two internships with environmental advocacy nonprofits and hope to continue this work after I receive my Masters in Public Health. My academic plans also include obtaining a PhD with the intent to develop a research agenda focused on environmental risk management. My overall career plans are dedicated to improving the reliability of exposure and risk assessment techniques and reducing associated mortality and loss of quality of life, particularly in low-income and disadvantaged communities confronted with environmental health problems.

My own life began inauspiciously. I was born and raised in Marin County by my mother, a single parent, separated from my father, who was Iranian, and who later passed on. My mother restricted communications with my father's side of the family as she did not understand their traditional attitude towards women and wanted me to grow up with the freedoms of an American child. Unfortunately, my mother had trouble supporting us and for two years we were homeless until she disappeared altogether and CPS placed me in foster care. After many years of neglect and difficulties, I finally felt safe and I thrived. I went on to complete high school, community college and then UC Berkeley, where I majored in Society and the Environment in the College of Natural Resources.

Recently, I returned to Shiraz and Tehran to meet my uncle, aunt, brother, sister-in-law, and nephew and to explore my connections to my estranged family. I visited the cultural and historical sites of Persepolis and the Vakil Bazaar, and experienced Iranian views, customs, and culture, getting an eye-opening experience on the Middle East seen by few Americans. The trip broadened my view of the world, brought some needed closure to questions I've had about my family, and gave me a deep appreciation of my rights as a citizen of the United States and as a woman currently living in this country. Now, I am determined to continue pursuing an education in an environment where I am expected to ask questions and think critically.

As a homeless child with an unreliable mother, I felt helpless, vulnerable and defenseless, and I have felt those same emotions in the communities in which I have interned as an environmental advocate. As a child, I had no resources that would help me have control over my situation. Similarly, many communities do not have the necessary resources to defend against the chemicals they are being exposed to and that are impacting their health. My own experiences and research have left me motivated and determined to gain the education I need to help protect and restore environmental and human health in disadvantaged communities.