

I believe that the obstacles I have overcome have left me determined and motivated to help others. I have developed an immense concern for broad issues concerned with human health and global well-being and have completed worked as an intern for two environmental advocacy nonprofits. Seeing the helplessness that many communities feel when faced with overwhelming environmental health problems motivates me to learn more about the complexity of the surrounding issues. I am amazed at the achievements I have made given my own tenuous start in life and know that further education will allow me to help others in substantive and profound ways.

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. For some youth, this can be traumatic, but in my case, I thrived, graduating from high school early with straight As, while also working a part-time job. I received college scholarships from the John Burton Foundation, the Momeni Foundation, and Oracle Independent Study and enrolled in community college with the support of my foster family. After graduating from the College of Marin with a degree in Natural Sciences, I went on to major in Society and the Environment at UC Berkeley's College of Natural Resources, where I was a part of the Honors Program, independently wrote a thesis and received the Society and Environment Citation Award. I have excelled in my academic studies in high school and college, yet throughout my upbringing, I was always discouraged from taking standardized tests because of the alternative beliefs of my schools and foster family. As a result, my grades are a better reflection of my interests and abilities than my GRE scores .

After finishing my undergraduate studies, I became interested in building a connection with my Iranian family and heritage although I can remember being confused on those rare occasions when I spoke with them. Their expressions of love were always tempered with admonishments to act properly, stop questioning what men and my elders say, and wear conservative garments. Yet the pull of family is deep, and in May of 2014, I traveled to Shiraz and Tehran to meet my uncle, aunt, brother, sister-in-law, and nephew where I learned about my family history. 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. These communities often lack the knowledge needed to recognize the factors impacting their health, the money necessary to move away from polluted areas, the education needed to venture into occupations with less chemical exposure, and perhaps most importantly, the ability to change the environmental health policies that impact their lives. 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.