

If there is one guarantee in life, it is the inevitability of struggle, yet it is from these opportunities that I have learned and grown. I spent my early years outside of Perris, a town east of Riverside where I grew up exploring the vernal pools that formed in the springtime and walked through fields of orange poppies. We didn't have electricity or TV, so I read voraciously. Life was idyllic. In school, I excelled and skipped 1st grade.

When I turned 7, everything changed. My parents divorced and my sister and I were placed in separate foster homes. For a year I didn't attend school until shortly after my 8th birthday when my mother, an immigrant, and now a single parent, regained custody of my sister and me. My father removed himself from our lives and never paid any child support. Although we would have qualified, my mother vehemently eschewed applying for food stamps—she was too proud. Instead, she took on multiple jobs.

Working in kitchens and restaurants to support her children, my mother was my first role model, imprinting onto me values of hard work and determination. Everything she did, she did with distinction and never complained. My mother's indefatigable spirit and assiduous pursuit of excellence is one of my earliest and most potent formative experiences. It has taught me the power of self-motivation and perseverance in the face of all adversity.

My natural curiosity and studiousness, I believe, helped insulate me from the pitfalls of my hometown: gang violence, academic apathy, drugs, and teen pregnancy. Not many of my peers attended college, let alone a university. As part of the less than 1% Asian population in my town, I had my first experiences with racism in high school.

It was in high school too, that I discovered my passion for teaching. I tutored K-5 students in literacy and math for three years in high school, found opportunities to teach throughout college, and currently teach environmental science. To me, teaching is simply helping others. The teachers and mentors who took time with me were lamps illuminating my path. Through teaching, I am able to be that same light for others.

I graduated at the top of my high school class and attended UC Berkeley where in addition to teaching and research, I worked every semester. Between my third and fourth years at UC Berkeley and after 12 years, my father contacted me, as he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. Seeking a much needed sense of closure, I decided to take a year off to get to know him, confronting him as a man after living through years of struggle in his absence. To keep up with my education, I took community college classes and by the end of the year, I was able to move forward, stronger and more motivated to finish my undergraduate degree. I returned to UC Berkeley, narrowed my interests on environmental science, gained research experience in field biology, and found work as an environmental educator post-graduation.

I currently teach the next generation about the natural world and their place in preserving it for future generations. I believe in what I teach, and that it has an effect on tomorrow's decision-makers. Moreover, in this role, I have been afforded the rare opportunity to live in nature and watch the seasons change, year after year. I have developed real-world skills in teaching, public speaking, and program management, and am now driven to pursue graduate studies so that I can contribute to society as a scientist and teacher.

As a former foster child, the son of a single parent from a low-income background, and a first generation college graduate on my mother's side, I am keenly aware of a range of social inequities. These experiences have enriched my connections with others and my ability to empathize. My future goals include mentoring and supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds as a professor, and working as a professional in the field of water research and management to ensure sustainable and safe sources of water for all Californians.