

I still remember the starry night sky that met my gaze as I looked out the window of the airplane that brought me to the United States. I was four years old and didn't know where I was going or for how long I'd be away. I didn't have an ounce of comprehension on what difficulties I would face due to my place of birth. It's been eleven years since I stepped down from that airplane but the difference from then and now is that I have a clear direction in where I'm heading.

A common saying is where you come from doesn't determine where you're going. I'm a fifteen-year-old Hispanic female that came to the U.S. for a better future. It's not easy to forget that I am labeled an illegal immigrant. Yet, I don't feel like an illegal person. I'm a human being that deserves an equal chance at becoming an educated person in the country that I grew up in. My dreams and aspirations weren't shaped by the label of being an illegal but rather by my entire being.

I was brought to the U.S. from Guatemala when I was four years old. My family came here for a chance at a better life. Being an immigrant family, our chances of having economic stability is low due to few job opportunities for undocumented immigrants. At the age of ten, my father lost his job and I realized that we weren't wanted in this country. He faced difficulties finding a job that would accept a mechanic with no documentation. For a few years, my family barely scraped by since we were not granted government help. I suddenly became aware of the stereotypes placed on Hispanic immigrants. Among them were the stereotypes of female Hispanic immigrants being meant to work as housekeepers and maids. I became unmotivated by those harsh stereotypes especially since I didn't have the economic assets to go to a university. One thing that helped me maintain a positive identity was dance.

Going to dance classes placed me in an environment where I could express myself without worrying about stereotypes. While I struggled with my immigrant identity, the dance studio and the translation of music into my body was the reawakening I needed. My confidence in dancing stimulated my belief in achieving a higher education, despite the stereotypes of my background.

Since I was a child, I was entranced by the stories that words created. It's amazing how little black characters on a page can create a vivid world of color. That fascination led me to a passion of reading and learning. In 2013, I had an appendectomy and was admitted into the hospital. Despite the pain I was feeling at that time, I was hooked into the world a hospital could offer. The moment I was wheeled into the operation room, I knew it was my life's mission to become a surgeon and save lives. Entering high school, I became aware of the countless children in underdeveloped regions unable to receive operations they need due to their economic conditions. The desire to learn transformed into the desire to help. I found my purpose in helping people, which has been my driving force into doing well in my academics.

This school year has proven to me that I'm capable of achieving the things that others tell me I won't. As a sophomore, I decided to take AP European History, one of the hardest, and few AP courses in my school. Prior to taking the course, older students repeatedly stated I wouldn't be able to handle it. I proved the students and the stereotypes wrong. I did more than just handle it, I excelled at it. I proved to myself that no one determines if I'll succeed except for me.

Today, my involvement in Youth and Power, Gertz Nerds, and middle school tutoring is contributing to my development as an engaged citizen in my community. Through these opportunities I have the chance to fundraise for charities like "*MyFace*", help my school community develop technological skills, and support middle school children in their

mathematical classes. I know I will take the lessons I am learning today and build upon my experiences as I continue on my path to becoming a surgeon. My aspirations to support under-resourced families in Los Angeles and the world will remain a core value in my education and career as I continue to break through the stereotypes that surround my background.