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Strength Through Adversity

My earliest memories are of the rural fields and verdant pastures of Ecuador. I was born in Guayaquil, where I spent the first three years of my life before moving to the United States. While short-lived, my years in Ecuador allowed me to experience a unique culture unparalleled by that in any other region. As a kid, rather than having a dog or cat as a pet, I had baby chickens and roosters. I recognized Spongebob as “La Esponja Bob” and little red riding hood as “La Caperusita Roja.” I played with cotton dolls and wooden dollhouses, and toy wagons made out of cardboard.

I had a very humble upbringing, but the modest childhood I had in Ecuador was very different from the one I had in the U.S. When I was three years old, my parents made the decision to immigrate to America in search of the “American Dream.” They sacrificed everything: their money, their family, and their stability. My dad left his job as a surgeon in Ecuador, and my mom left her job as a pediatrician to pursue a better life for us in America. With no license to practice in America, my parents couldn’t continue their medical careers. My parents couldn’t afford childcare, so my dad resorted to working in construction, and my mother as a stay-at-home mom, jobs that served no merit for the years of medical education that they both had.

Our first year in America was very difficult; with poor planning, my family and I spent our first few months living with my aunt and her family in a one-bedroom apartment in NYC, fighting for

whatever space we had. It was during these difficult financial times that I learned to cherish the simple pleasures in life and developed a strong sense of humility.

Despite many difficulties, my father worked hard to provide a better life for us away from the constrained one bedroom apartment we lived in. We were able to afford a house in the suburbs of New Jersey after a couple of years but attaining such a luxury came with a cost, as the stress of 16-hour shifts and financial pressures weighed down heavily on my dad.

It was mere months after we moved into our home that my dad suffered from renal failure. This was a very difficult time as my father, being the sole provider for our family, could barely even lift himself from the hospital bed. My mom became preoccupied

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with caring for my dad and so my older sister and I took on much of the financial responsibility and that of raising our younger sister. I distinctly remember spending nights at the hospital by my father's side as a teenager; I barely understood what was happening, focused on the blood-soaked bag hanging from his bed or my mother's muffled cries in the middle of the night. It was during this time that I learned the true meaning of hardship: financially, physically, and emotionally.

I have grown a lot since then and I can now look back and see the ways in which my experiences have shaped who I am. I have learned that the greatest pleasures come from ordinary things. I have learned that I am inquisitive; the natural scientist in me constantly imagines, tests, and dispels theories in my mind. I have learned that I am compassionate; I gladly sacrifice my weekends to feed the homeless, volunteers my time to teach others. I am the humanitarian who cares and visits the sick. I have learned that I am resilient, motivated and adaptable. Facing adversity does not destroy me, but rather empowers me to be greater.

I continue to work hard to be the model student, friend, sister, and daughter in my community. My life experiences motivate me to improve quality of life through medicine, particularly among the underserved communities. I have struggled in many ways that my communities have, as I am an immigrant coming from a family that has faced much hardship. My experiences are the strong foundation on which I can stand as a leader and advocate for those who need my help.

As a future physician, I understand that my duties lie well beyond the clinic and involve a dynamic balance between scientific inquiry, patient care, and service. I aim to integrate these practices seamlessly to improve medical care in all aspects of society. My experiences have shown me that I can succeed in my pursuit of medicine, as I have become a resilient, empathic woman and am driven to work with those who share similar struggles.