

The sky is really gray where I am from. Lima is a noisy, over-populated city, covered by a smog-ridden sky; a place where women are valued by how they look and how good their cooking is. Being the only child of a drug addict and a single mother who suffered from depression, my family never expected much of me. For years, we would visit my father in rehab centers every Sunday, until one day the visits stopped. My father had left Peru to start a new life in a place called Tulsa, Oklahoma. When I looked at the map, I imagined this place to be full of cowboys and horses. In my mind, it was a beautiful place, because it was the place where my father would start his new life. In the year 2003, as soon as I turned 16, I got a tourist visa, and decided to visit my father.

By the time I arrived in Tulsa, my father was married to a Baptist American woman, who wanted me to stay in the United States. To convince me, they enrolled me in a private Christian high school and allowed me to get a job. As soon as I started making my own money, I decided to stay. Why would I go back to Peru? My friends were getting nose jobs as their sweet 16 gifts, they were dreaming of their weddings, and preparing to attend private universities. I did not want any of those things, except the last one, which was not a dream I could afford. Everything was going well, until one day my father was arrested for driving under the influence. I called a cab, got my father's paycheck from his workplace, asked one of his friends to pay for bail, and managed to get my father released from jail. I was only 17. The emotional pressure of having to deal with his alcoholism pushed me away from him.

I never graduated from Mingo Christian School. Instead, I moved to California with 35 dollars in my pocket, six books in my backpack, and my green card in my wallet. I started waiting tables, and soon made enough money to rent a room in downtown Berkeley. I worked during the day, and devoured books at night. One day a customer told me about Berkeley City

College (BCC), a place where I could take classes and meet interesting people. When I found out that BCC was temporarily located in the basement of a *Ross, Dress for Less store* I was disappointed. Still, I signed up for classes. Little did I know that the classes in that basement would completely change my life.

At BCC, I met professors with political ideas I had never heard of before, and I started to see the world from a more informed perspective. My professors encouraged me to pursue my love for languages, and in 2007 I took a hiatus from my studies and moved to Shanghai, China, for a year to teach English and become fluent in Mandarin. Once back in the United States, I grew into my identity as a Latina immigrant woman. I was part of an undereducated, underrepresented minority, and affording an education in a top university would not be easy. With this in mind, I joined with others to found the Latin American Students Association at BCC. Our goal was to increase the transfer rate of Latino students to the University of California system. We prepared applications and edited our work together, and made a commitment to keep our GPAs high.

In 2010, I became a U.S. citizen and was admitted to the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), to pursue a B.A. in Sociology. Upon admittance, I was awarded the Cal Alumni Association Achievement Award, a scholarship for high-achieving, community-minded students, which helped me fund my education. At UCB, I threw myself wholeheartedly into the world of research. The first study I participated in was a two-year project that explored how Latino and White workers make sense of social hierarchy in America. I interviewed California workers in order to comprehend how they perceived themselves in relation to the racial distinctions that shaped U.S. politics. After working in this project for a semester, I decided to focus on drafting my own research proposal.

In the spring of 2011, I was awarded the Robert & Colleen Haas Fellowship, for a project that examined the importance of organizational ties in the lives of Andean women in Ayacucho, Peru. This region was the most heavily affected by the armed internal conflict that took place for over two decades (1980-2000) throughout the country. For three months I conducted qualitative fieldwork in Ayacucho, finding that participation in organizations allowed women to access resources that affected their quality of life in a positive manner as long as they remained active in them. This project became my senior honors thesis, which was awarded high honors and published in Volume 25, Issue 2 of the *Berkeley Undergraduate Journal*.

After conducting research in a rural setting, I felt motivated to understand how immigrant women living in poverty in the U.S. organized in urban settings. Thus, I applied to the McNair Scholars Program, which prepares low-income undergraduates for doctoral studies. Upon acceptance, I investigated how participation in grass-roots organizations in San Francisco affected the ability of immigrant Latina women to access a variety of resources. My involvement in research and my work ethic paid off when I graduated with high honors in Sociology and distinction in general scholarship from UCB.

Looking back, I see myself as a resilient young woman who exceeded everyone's expectations. Yet, I have come to realize that my achievements are also a byproduct of the support of my professors and the resources I have accessed through networks and institutions such as BCC and UCB. Through pursuit of graduate studies and a career as a university professor, I wish to continue making a positive contribution to my community, the academic world, and the United States of America.