

Danielle Lopez

Judging by my accomplishments, most people wouldn't suspect the life I've lived so far. I would speak fondly of the times I'd share with my family. Whether we slurped ramen at Little Tokyo, climbed Brianhead's ambrosia peaks, or admired the sapphire shores of Newport, he instilled my love for exploring foreign environments. But in reality, it was our escape. It became our own way of coping with the adversities of our life.

For all my life, I wanted to be seen. I wanted someone to point at me from across a room to say, "Danielle, I see you." After so many years of being your family's caretaker, you get burnt out. You get tired of Mom's abuse and drug problems. You grow fatigued as your special-needs sister keeps you up every night. Dad's sick again, and Grampu needs help finding his green card. Every single day of my life has been something new, and it's hardened me into the perfection-seeking, hard-headed woman I am now. However, it comes at the expense of sacrificing yourself. I grew up hiding my insecurities and fears because I felt like it would damage the people around me. Everyone else was dealing with worse problems – whether it was life-threatening neurological conditions like Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum or work-related sickness – so I would base my desire to speak up on severity. I don't regret anything that has come into my life, but there is no easy solution. You just keep smiling. It's not singular adversity where there has to be this one answer to make everything go away. Chawy's brain isn't going to fix itself. My dad can't just quit his job. Mom isn't going to change. But, what could a college education accomplish for a low-income, overworked caretaker in Nevada?

You pursue the things you love because it allows the true, passionate self to come out. I found linguistics and anthropology – specifically Japanese Speech – because I was always attracted to connecting language with my multicultural roots. These disciplines are rather diverse, encompassing a wide range of interdisciplinary education that differs from the monotony I'm used to. Such disciplines can only be examined more in-depth with a college education. Additionally, college allows me to enact my dreams of traveling around the world and helping disadvantaged international students. I've been thankful to say I've already started my journey, as I organize low-income mentorship programs with the help of Pioneer Academics. I conduct anthropology research following my interests in Japanese fashion, and I collaborate with international students from China, South Africa, you name it!

I don't want to settle for comfort, I want to look back on my life and say, "Yeah, I did THAT!" And I want people to remember me as someone who made a difference, not "Oh, how unfortunate." I feel that it wouldn't solve anything, that only glorifies challenges that shouldn't define my existence in the world. With this scholarship and college education, I'm rewriting my narrative. I'm exploring the dreams of my ambitions. I'm letting the whole world know that I don't take "no" for an answer, and I'll make this world better.