

## **Raya Sadighian**

### **Coronado High School**

Essay - (500-750 words) - Explain a situation where you had to overcome an adversity.

Growing up, my biggest role model was always my mom. She raised me alone, and after years of not knowing my dad very well, she filled the role of both parents. Both of them were born and raised in Iran, as were their parents until they moved to the USA and had me. Every kid would adore having double the holidays with different cultures and growing up with amazing food was not taken for granted. There are so many amazing things that are worth being proud of, but that doesn't mean it's never hurt me.

The underlying prejudices left from living under the Islamic Republic aren't things people are always self-aware about. Mental illness, sex, gender, sexuality, and freedom are all more stigmatized in Middle Eastern communities than ever before. As a queer, mentally ill, and non-binary student, improving around people who deny my existence is devastating. Growing up in public school and with more open-minded connections to people than any generation before me because of the internet led me to have passionate beliefs about the freedoms and treatment everyone deserves, despite what my culture says to the contrary.

Personal experience has taught me how much pretending there are no problems in my life hurt everyone. My mom recently told me more about my father and all of the ways he did us wrong, treating her horribly and trying to hurt her, and it made why she lashes out at me make so much sense. Middle Eastern culture teaches shame over being hurt, like being a victim is a sign of weakness, and even though I'm so proud of my heritage, I know when it's time to reject the parts that are hurting me since it's the only way for me to move on from the shackles that my brain puts on itself. My mother continues to make excuses for the man that hurt her, and she doesn't understand how painful it is for her mentally ill child to hear her rationalize and pardon him because he was mentally ill. She doesn't even remember when she rejected me going to therapy again. She said it was only for people who aren't normal because she said I was fixed. Mental illness is genetic, and I can't help but wonder if she imagines the awful things my dad did that she brushes aside because of his mental health whenever I bring up mine.

It's heartbreaking that my mom has to hide her pain, not only because she doesn't deserve to feel ashamed but because she can't see beyond herself. Knowing my parent's relationship, she was never listened to. Now, when she tells me that yelling is the only way to get me to listen even after bringing up how negatively it's impacting my mental health, her denial and anger make painful sense. Fighting against my urge to treat myself poorly is only part of the battle, there are so many things I have to watch for to make sure I don't hurt others and pass on the pain to someone else, and to break the cycle. The only word that properly describes my view of my mom is complex, our relationship is complicated. My Senior year of high school pushed things to their breaking point, as she wasn't ready to accept the idea that I could be leaving her. She fought so hard, attacking my mental state and my skills as reasons why living away from her would be impossible, and tried to shackle me down to the choices she wanted to make. There was a period when looking her in the face was hard, let alone being happy around her.

Sometimes it surprises me that I made it this far, middle school me didn't even expect to make it past 6th grade, but I fought tooth and nail to survive. Although my country isn't fighting and my life is peaceful, there's a constant war in my mind that has been soothed by determination.

My friends and I have always supported each other, even when we couldn't do much for ourselves, and the resources online with advice on healthy coping mechanisms have helped more times than I can count. Immersing myself in media, the very content that motivates me to pursue college so I can create something like it has been a critical aspect of my journey of recovery, one that'll never end. After all, being unique is truer to me than being normal.