

Hello! My name is Alyssa Arias, and I am a seventeen-year-old senior at Julian High School. I may look like your everyday teenager, but under the surface, I have a story that is unique and full of fun experiences that I am grateful to have had. These experiences in my life have shaped me into who I am today and who I plan to become.

One experience in particular completely changed the course of my life. Seven years ago, I was diagnosed with steatohepatitis. It is a disease that causes inflammation, damage, and potentially life-threatening cirrhosis to the liver. These past few years have been anything but easy, but I have learned to live a more balanced lifestyle, ask for help when needed, and I have become a more compassionate person. Our circumstances may seem uncontrollable, but what you can control is your mindset, so I have chosen to have a more positive outlook on the whole situation. Going through this physical pain made me realize that I wanted to help people in their time of need. So many people helped me in my time of need, so I want to use my profession to pay it forward.

The other influential experience that has made me into the person I am today is being a first-generation student. I am the daughter of two immigrants. My mother immigrated from Oaxaca, Mexico when she was 20 years old. She worked as a nanny, learned English, and used her skills to become a paraprofessional. My father immigrated from El Salvador at the age of 16 to escape the Salvadoran Civil War. He eventually started working for Julian High School and is now the head of maintenance. Even though they're successful people today, the journey on the way to success was not always easy. There were times when all we ate were PB&J sandwiches just to make the mortgage payment.

Growing up, I knew that the best way for me to create a better life for myself was to pursue some form of post-secondary education. I plan to pursue a career in Chicano Studies or in International Agricultural Development at the University of California (Davis or Los Angeles- still undecided) and use my degree to help others in need. After college, I plan to attend law school. I want to become an immigration lawyer to help people like my parents. People who want to come to the US to change their lives. People that want their children to have better access to healthcare. People that want to escape poverty. People that believe in the American Dream.

I may be a small-town girl, first-generation student, child of an immigrant, nobody, but I am not going to let my past define my future. I will take the lessons I learned from the hardships, and push forward to do whatever it takes to succeed.