

My name is Heber Oviedo and I was born on Oct 15, 2004 in Honduras. Sadly when I was born, I was diagnosed with a hernia and needed to have surgery which my family could not afford. For that reason, my father had to leave our country, for a potentially better future for our family as well as money for the surgery I needed. My father left when I was 14 months old, and once he arrived in the United States, he worked hard to afford the surgery. I was able to have the surgery I needed and it was very successful. My dad stayed in the United States and continued sending money to Honduras to ensure that my mother and I lived a good life. Honduras is a developing country, so security is not always available and I grew up in a hazardous area where my mom had to pick me up and drop me off at school every day because gangs would capture children and either sell them off, or use them for illegal things such as transporting drugs.

My mother and I continued to live in Honduras on our own and I went to school while she stayed at home. Everyday, my mother told me how important school was and how that was the only way I could become someone with a promising career. My mother's words and continuous pushing and support helped me do well in school. I remember waking up every day two hours before school started so I could review and study for tests. I continuously pushed myself physically and mentally to achieve excellent academic goals, which I still do now. I would always pass my tests with high grades and was one of the top three students in my school. This was comforting because I'd get a diploma every year for being amongst the three best students in my grade. It might be a bit prideful of me, but I enjoyed being one of the best students in my school; It felt rewarding getting so much praise from everyone at school and my mom. I did very well in school until I had to leave to travel to the United States.

I had never left Honduras before, and now my mom was telling me that we would reunite with my father once we moved to the United States. Traveling to the United States was one of the most eventful and terrifying experiences I ever had. We left early in the morning, and we made it through Guatemala to the Mexican border. The group we were traveling in went through many issues. We traveled by car, buses and walked in the middle of nowhere at night avoiding things that could harm us. I constantly saw how miserable things were for some people living in those countries, and I saw many things that I wouldn't forget, such as how skinny people who were from traveling and living on the streets. It brought sadness to my heart seeing how miserable those people were, and how they had no one to help them. Sadly, my group and I were caught by immigration in Mexico and had to return to Honduras. Unlike many others, my mom and I were not given the luxury of traveling by aircraft back to Honduras, instead, we had to take buses and walk back, and not really knowing the way back made things much scarier since we had been separated from the others, and now it was only my mom and I. Once we made it to our home in Honduras, we spent one night there and started traveling to the United States again the following day.

Our second trip felt much easier and faster, but I still saw everything I'd seen before, such as poverty and often would hear gunshots that made the group, my mother, and I run to safety. We spent months traveling under hot and cold temperatures, we even went through a flood that reached up to my mom's legs, and almost up to my stomach. Once again, we made it

to Mexico, but this time we managed to cross the river with a raft. I must admit that we got lucky because many don't have the opportunity of taking a raft and instead most have to swim against a terrifying current. I remember seeing my mother praying as we crossed the river when a sudden bump came from underneath the raft we were on, which we assumed was an alligator. Luckily for us, the raft didn't capsize, and we crossed into Mexico safely. Once we were on the other side, we waited for hours for the United States immigration officers to process us. Once Immigration had processed us, they took us to an extremely cold jail, and all they gave us was an aluminum foil blanket, water, and a small burrito with not much inside. My mother and I were separated from our group, and luckily we were there for only two days. Next we were taken to another jail, and placed there for two until we were dropped off at a bus station by a jail bus.

My mother and I felt scared since we didn't speak English, and there weren't many people who could help us get to where we needed to be. Lost as we were, my mom had memorized my dad's phone number, and she would call him to ask for directions using a telephone whenever we saw one. My dad would tell my mom what bus we were supposed to take and when, and where to get off. Following his direction was tricky since we were in a place where we had no one to talk to or receive help from. One way or another, we made it close enough by traveling by bus, and my dad picked us up from a bus station. I had never seen my father in person, and seeing him for the first time was very emotional for me. I remember that my dad drove us for hours, and since I hadn't eaten in days, he stopped by a McDonalds', which was my first time having that. I remember how good the food tasted due to my hunger, and once I had finished eating, we made it to where my dad was living.

Later I found out we were in a state named Virginia, which back then, I had never heard of. I remember that by the time I had gotten to Virginia, school was out for the summer, so I got to enjoy my new surroundings for several weeks before starting something new. After an exhausting and terrifying trip it was a relief to be able to relax for a while. School was about to begin a couple weeks later, and I would be entering a school in Fairfax County called Cardinal Forest Elementary. I was anxious to start classes because everything was new to me, and the communication barrier made things more complicated. It was a bit humiliating at first not being able to communicate or do the things that others could, but eventually I got used to how things were in my new school. I knew it would take me time to learn English, but I challenged myself to learn as much as I could as fast as I could, so I could avoid having that feeling of humiliation. I remember that I pushed myself as much as I could in School, and I would as well at home. I would watch shows and movies in English and put subtitles in Spanish to try and learn faster. I would read and translate books, especially the book series The Magic Tree House. The staff at Cardinal Forest were very helpful and made things much easier for me. Mrs. Richter and Ms. Kalka were always there for me when I needed help. My fourth grade teacher also helped me a lot. She once made the students in my class complete a worksheet in Spanish so they could understand how it felt to work at a slower pace with a language you could not understand. Many of my classmates were bothered by my presence and would often tease me, which I would be annoyed by.

Moreover, after I finished fourth grade, my efforts paid off, and I learned English rather well, making it easier to keep up with the class. Still, I had improvements to make, which I focused on for the next two years. By the time I graduated from Cardinal Forest in the sixth grade, I had learned a lot. One of my favorite accomplishments that year was entering the art pyramid exhibition, as I have always been rather passionate about art since I was young.

When I entered middle school, improving my English was my main priority. The first middle school I attended was Irving middle school. I did very well at Irving. Seventh grade was the last year I had to be in an English Language Development class, and passing that class and finally being seen as someone who was at an adequate level in English made me feel accomplished. Now I could finally begin eighth grade at the same level as my peers. Attending Irving Middle School, gave me the courage I needed for the following year.

For Eighth grade, I moved to Annandale and attended Poe Middle School. Once, while I was in seventh grade, I remembered another student commented about how he was more intelligent than me, since he was taking honors classes and I was not. That comment didn't do so well with the type of person I am, and although I was now in a different middle school, I wanted to prove to him and myself that I could be so much more than what everyone expected of me. That goal helped me to make the decision to take one honors class in eighth grade. The honors class that I took was a science course. Having been to the first honors classes I'd ever taken, and by the things I had heard from everyone who was taking honors classes, I was expecting the class to be challenging. However, I adjusted to it, and got an A at the end of the year. I also got all A's for my other classes, ending my final year of middle school on a high note.

The following year, I started my high school career at Annandale High School. Having challenged myself the past year and succeeded, I wanted to see how much I could handle when it came to academics. In my freshman year, I took two honors classes and since I did well in those classes, I decided to take two more honors classes during my sophomore year, in which I also did very well in. During my sophomore year I was told about the highly rigorous International Baccalaureate program. I decided that I would enter this program since not only did I want to be challenged, I also wanted to receive the IB diploma. While I unfortunately was not eligible for an IB diploma due to circumstances out of my control, I still pushed myself and took four IB classes, all of which I passed. Now in senior year, I am taking five IB classes and currently passing all of them. My friends sometimes question why I'm enrolled in all my IB classes since I'm not even eligible for the IB diploma, but I tell them that I mainly do it to challenge myself. I have had many obstacles, such as time management. For my first three years mainly because I participated in marching band. I also wanted to participate in sports for school, such as wrestling, tennis, and potentially baseball, but was unable to participate since I didn't have health insurance or a social security number, which I only obtained around the last months of my senior year.

Moreover, my main obstacle since I arrived in the United States has been the need for more paperwork. Not having a social security number was the main reason I was being held back since I could not get health insurance, participate in school sports, or apply for

scholarships. Also, having to pay the immigration lawyers for our legal paper takes a lot of money, so we are always financially struggling. My curiosity has led me to desire many hobbies, such as learning to play the violin, piano and even learn archery. Now that my paperwork is in process and improving, I will be able to achieve so much more. One day, I will become a United States citizen, and have all the same opportunities as those who were born here. My drive and desire to succeed helped me in my acceptance to George Mason University, where I will study Legal Studies in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. I am planning on majoring in law and minoring in business as a means to inspire, help and provide opportunities to those who have been misjudged, underestimated, and seek to challenge themselves to reach heights that even they are unaware of. I have proved it over and over again by challenging myself and succeeding in the goals I set, which means other people can do it as well. I often wonder if I would be in the same place I am right now if I had been born here in the United States, or if I would have achieved more, but at the same time, I realize that my life experiences are the reason why I am the way I am, and that without them, I may not have the same drive to succeed that I have now. If there is something I have learned from my past experiences, it is that I can break any boundary that is in my way. I seek to succeed, I will, for the sake of my parents and siblings, as well as everyone else who needs a helping hand, and although I may struggle financially with my university finances due to not being able to apply for scholarships early on, I will overcome that as well, so that in the future, my siblings won't have to endure the hardships I had to go through. I'm sure that my achievements may not be as great as those of others, and that many had had more hardships than I have, but this is what I have achieved, and I am proud of who I am.