

I genuinely did not believe this was an opportunity I would be privy to in my lifetime, and I am so much more than grateful to be here. My family immigrated here from Lima, Peru when I was 6 years old. For generations, my family lived off pure resilience, not wealth. My parents decided our best chance for education and opportunity was to move to the USA. I can remember seeing leaves change color for the first time and developing my need-to-know personality which snowballed into a craving to learn. I quickly started first grade and even though there was a language barrier at the start, I did very well throughout school.

I would always apply myself hoping that my academic record would make it possible for me to achieve an academic scholarship to gain a higher education – after all, my parents didn't have a higher education so they were only able to just provide our necessities. Without a college fund, an academic scholarship was the only way I thought I could attend college.

I graduated a year earlier than expected, my academic future seemed within grasp – then a series of unfortunate events changed my life's path. After being thrown off my path and being thrown into the adult world before I was prepared, I did not believe that I, a Hispanic woman who was barely making ends meet working long hours at minimum wage would ever be able to achieve the goals I had growing up.

Fast forward 10 years, I am 26 years old and am finally able to attend college by being awarded the Pell grant and foundations scholarship. I really didn't believe this was going to happen for me, so, describing the gratitude I have for this opportunity is not something I can put into words, but I am not letting it go. With the knowledge I gain with my education, I dream that I'll be able to assist in resolving some of the ecological issues we're experiencing due the damage caused by humans. Though finances are a bigger problem than ever for me now, I am happier and more fulfilled than I've been in over a decade because I'm finally making strides to making my dreams of giving back in a big way come true.

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