

2008 COLLEGE SURVIVAL CONFERENCE

KAHUKU, O'AHU, HAWAII

WHEN LIFE HANDS YOU LEMONS, MAKE LEMONADE

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What really defines success? According to the dictionary, it just states a degree of being successful. It varies for all people. Success could be from winning a baseball game, or graduating high school. For everyone, success has a different meaning but yet the same value. The feeling of accomplishments and getting through hardships, and coming out on top for me are my ultimate feelings of success.

I was born in Crete, Greece, and I lived there until I was four. My father decided that he wanted a better living for his family and made the choice to move to the states. We moved to New Jersey and started a whole other life. It was hard at first being a child from another country not knowing how to speak English and play with the other kids. I can remember my mother sitting me, my brother, and sister down trying to teach us English. My mother is Italian but lived in the States for a few years, so she knew more English than anyone else. We would sit down for hours and turn the TV on just to try and see if we could recognize any of the words the people would be saying. I can remember hearing on a TV show the saying, "When life hands you lemons, make lemonade," but never really understanding the real meaning of it, and after a little while it started to become easier and easier, until finally we became fluent in the English language.

Being foreign in a completely different country is not an easy concept. I remember going into kindergarten at the age of five and kids teasing me because I had somewhat of an accent. It was like there was no pleasing anybody. First, I was getting made fun of and had no friends because I couldn't speak the language, and then I was still getting made fun of because I had an accent. Luckily the day started at eight and ended at twelve. I used to sit down with my mother and ask her how I could fit in with everyone else and not feel so alienated and different, and she would always tell me you don't need to try and be someone you are not. You are Greek and you should be proud, no one should make you feel ashamed of what you are. She was right; from that moment forward I was done trying to impress people just so they would like me. People should like me just how I am.

As I was going through school, it started to become a lot easier, maybe because I was more open and proud of who I was, or maybe because as we developed we became more accepting and open to others. Whatever the case was, school was not as bad as it started out to be. My last year of high school, I applied to only one college. It was a fashion college in New York City. I would anticipate the day I would get the big envelope that said, "CONGRATULATIONS! You have been accepted," and when that day came, my heart stopped. This is what I had worked my whole high school career around and now it was finally happening. My twin sister applied to Penn State and she got accepted. The only downfall with that is both of those schools are highly expensive and my parents did not have enough money for both of us to go to our ideal college. I decided I would give my school up because, I mean, how many people really get accepted to Penn State? I was upset about it but I knew it was the right

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thing. I figured I could just get all my prerequisites done and then if I still wanted to go, I could go ahead and do it a few years later.

I am a nineteen-year-old college student living on my own. I work forty hours a week and maintain a 15-hour course schedule for school. From the moment I was brought into this country it has felt like I have only been surrounded by hardships and obstacles, but with all of those hardships, from the young age of four I have defeated and overcome, and to me that feeling of power and achievement is the definition of success. Like the saying always goes, "When life hands you lemons, make lemonade."