

Why College is Important to Me  
by Fjolla Quqalla

You probably think I'm an ordinary kid just like everybody else. In most ways I am, but I have also experienced a lot of things most teenagers my age have not. People that know me see me as being more mature than my peers. I have learned to appreciate life because I know what it's like to have nothing at all. No food, no clothes, no place to sleep.

When my Mother was seventeen she fell in love with a guy in her class. He was very handsome, popular, and a very good soccer player. Flaws, unfortunately, also came with his perfections. He wasn't interested in school, and his family didn't seem to care either. He was what you would call a bum. Nobody in his family went to college, but my Mother loved him anyway. They started dating and their relationship was pretty serious. Five years later, they decided to get married. That guy is my Father.

When my Mom's parents found out about it they were horrified and disgusted with my Mom's decisions. They disowned her and never wanted to speak with her again. Mom didn't seem to care at first because everything seemed perfect, until reality hit her. My Dad's family was huge, and they all lived in one house. They all expected my Mom to clean; cook; wash clothes and do other household duties. She grew tired of it very quickly. She still didn't want out. In 1989 she gave birth to the first grandchild on my Dad's side of the family. It was my sister. Everybody loved and took care of her. Then in 1993 she gave birth to another girl; that was me.

They were not too happy about me being born. They wanted a grandson and couldn't afford for my Mom to have a lot of children. They even thought about selling me. My Dad wasn't there when I was born. He was in the military and my Mom was left alone to raise me and my sister. Finally in 1996 my brother was born and it was the happiest moment in my family's life. That didn't last for long. My Mom was struggling financially. Neither one of my parents had a job, so we were surviving on the little

money my Grandpa would give us. My parents, siblings and I all slept in one room. We had limited amounts of food we were allowed to eat each day because there wasn't enough to go around. Then something very tragic happened in my country of Kosovo; changing my family's life for the better.

In 1999 Serbian forces bombed our country. Still, to this day, I remember the sound of the bombs, the unfamiliar language the Serbian officers were yelling at us, the dead bodies lying all over. I was only six years old. I have a particular image that I will never get out of my head. A man in his mid-30's was trying to find his son and he turned back to look for him; that made the Serbian officer so angry that he cut off the man's ear in front of everybody for not listening.

We slept with our clothes and shoes on for weeks. Finally one day, the UNMK came and took us to a refugee camp. We lived in a tent for three months. We had to use public restrooms that you could smell from a mile away; our showers were taken in a small lake and we ate food once a day. We were on the waiting list to go to another country. They were taking us all over the world.

Finally, after three months, they told us to pack our stuff because we were heading to America in two hours. We were excited to leave that filthy place; however, we were also horrified because the US was so far away. We did not know anyone there. How were we going to contact our families? A lot of mixed feelings were going on in my head. I was small, I didn't understand a lot, but I understood that I was going to a faraway place with people so different from me. Are they going to like me? Will I get teased? Am I going to see my family again?

After a nine hour flight we finally arrived in New Jersey. They took us to a big building where they were taking all the refugees. Each family had a room. Even though it was a plain, simple room with bunk beds, to me it was the most amazing room I had ever seen. I finally had a bed of my own to sleep in. We ate as much as we wanted and had a place to play with other kids. We had a life, a normal life. We had everything we wanted.

We had been living there for five months when one of the doctors there that really liked our family suggested that we move to Florida where he lived. He said it's a beautiful place and he would help us get settled, find jobs for my parents, and take me, my brother and sister to school. My parents agreed and before we knew it we were in New Port Richey, Florida. None of us could believe how amazingly beautiful it was. I saw the beach for the first time in my life. I was living a dream.

By this time the war back in Kosovo was over. We lived in Florida for a year before we decided to move back home because my Grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and my Mom wanted to be there for her. I was despondent to leave Florida. But we didn't move there for eternity. In 2003 my Grandmother died and a year later we moved back to Florida; this time it was in Largo.

We rented an apartment with the help of Ron, the doctor. I enrolled in the fifth grade now at Bellair Elementary. I spoke no English at all. My first day of school was very tough. I walked in and my teacher introduced me to the class. I said "hello" and all the students were murmuring about something I couldn't understand. I sat down at a desk in front of my teacher and felt all eyes on me. I was very uncomfortable. I knew I was a little different from everybody else. However, that didn't stop me from learning English. I love Math and since it's the same all over the world I was very good at it. That year I won many awards in school including second place in the spelling bee contest. From that moment everything started improving. My English was so much better and I made friends. I graduated the fifth grade with the principal's award. My parents were so proud of me, but most importantly I was proud of myself; proud of not giving up.

I enrolled in Largo Middle School. There are my best memories because I had no worries except to do well in school. I never felt so normal in my life, and it felt amazing.

To me education is very important because I have experienced what it's like to have no job or a stable home because of lack of education. I know that if I want to become something or someone I

need to go to college and work hard to pursue my dreams. I want to have a family of my own and give them everything I can.