

Alice falls down the rabbit hole. Milo drives through the tollbooth. Dorothy is swept up in the tornado. Neo takes the red pill. Don't tell us about another world you've imagined, heard about, or created. Rather, tell us about its portal. Sure, some people think of our University as a portal to their future, but please choose another portal to write about.

While his parents and siblings lived in Iran for my grandfather's work, my father was shuttled between virtual strangers' houses in India- as if a foster child. Not too long ago, I complained about attending afternoon daycare, not having an after-school snack awaiting me after a rough day of coloring and recess, and never having my mom a member of the PTA.

My mother was made to prioritize fulfilling her house chores of cooking and cleaning over attending school. I groan about mopping up the messes *I* made and studying for tests that will serve to safeguard only *my* future.

My sister spent a large part of her childhood in the care of relatives because my parents could not adequately care for her during their medical training. She also changed school districts ten times throughout her twelve years of grade school, moving between southern India, London, Dublin, Brooklyn, and Queens as my parents completed their residencies abroad but were forced to *recertify* their medical licenses in the states. I cry about moving one town over and the prospect of retaking my SAT college entrance exam.

My family members talk about living in near-poverty in Waterford- homeless men literally on their doorstep and McDonald's fast food on Friday evening being a luxury. My sister also recounts brushing shoulders with a gunshooter fleeing the cops when she was waiting on line alone to buy pizza in Brooklyn.

The reason I bring all of this up is not to remind myself of what, in one form or another, is reiterated to me nearly every day of my life. My natural teenage instinct is to retort that it wasn't *my* fault that my immediate family experienced this turbulence- it was just a strange twist of luck and fate beyond my control that privileged me with a smooth ascent into being. But after really thinking about it, it was really the grit of my parents and the role of my sister that did it.

Besides the recollections that my parents speak about to me, I have traversed some portals that have granted me some greater measure of insight into the struggles that they had- the

inward gliding doors of a public transportation bus, the turnstiles in the subway stations below Manhattan, the street-long wait to enter a naturalization office, and the highway exit separating the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens from suburban Long Island. Crossing these portals has instilled truly inalienable values of hard work, love, gratitude, awareness, and humility within me. The concept of the 'slumdog millionaire' is not a foreign but a familiar one- not something that I first learned from the box-office hit, but rather encoded in the base-pairs of my DNA. I've come to learn that only pure determination can elevate you from having your 'school bus' be yellow rickshaws on the dusty roads of India to having your older daughter complete one of the most competitive residencies a decade earlier than you did. This encourages me to broaden my mind to the grander scheme of things, to realize that- while it may sound extreme- without my parents' perseverance, the alternative could have been being placed in an orphanage, or being married off for a small dowry.

I hope to gain this same capacity of self-sacrificing for no reason other than the sake of protecting one's posterity. I've figured that if my parents had such a stake in the futures of a mere ten-year-old and an unborn child being distinctly easier than their own, the least I could do is be my own self-advocate, and not allow my able mind and body to atrophy from disuse and laziness. Hence, while my clothing, my speech, my palate, my thought patterns, and my hobbies may be incredibly modern and Americanized, it's undeniable that any success of mine is directly attributed to the people surrounding me.

