**SN&R’s 2012 College Essay Contest first place**

This article was published on [05.03.12](http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/2012-05-03/archive).

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| http://www.newsreview.com/imager/snrs-2012-college-essay-contest/b/original/5892654/733d/1.jpeg  **Name: Danish Farzad**  **Now attending: Cosumnes Oaks High School**  **College she’ll attend: Saint Mary’s College of California or University of the Pacific**  **Plans to study: Pre-med, with plans to become a pediatrician**  **Personal Motto: “Speak a new language so that the world will be a new world.” —Rumi**  **PHOTO BY PRISCILLA GARCIA** |
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**First Place**

**“Amreeka”**

**As I wiped the sweat off of my glistening** forehead, I heard the girl, about my age, laughing at me. I had never felt so belittled before as I stood there watching my older brother and father clean up the treasures that I call junk from our rented space in the flea market. This incident took place a few years ago, however, to this day I have never felt so humbled. Unknowingly, this incident would be embedded in my brain, helping me sift into the mature young lady I am now.

I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, where my father was a well-known architect and my mother was an OB/GYN. We were treated like royalty there, and we were very comfortable. But then the Taliban started taking over bits and pieces of Afghanistan, and my parents were getting worried. They knew that if they were to stay there, my brother and I would not have the best situation to grow up in, so we immigrated to the amazing “Amreeka.”

We found an apartment in the depths of Hayward [Calif.] and began our new lives there. My mother’s medical degree and my father’s architectural degree was not enough in America, so my parents went back to school. Every Saturday, we would look for garage sales and purchase items we thought people would really like, and we sold those miscellaneous items at a booth in the flea market every Sunday. We would use this money to make ends meet.

Every few years we would move to a different city, from Hayward, to Oakland, to Union City and eventually to Elk Grove. Throughout my interaction with customers at the flea market and the many times we moved, I have encountered people from all walks of life which have given me a well-rounded perception of life and my goals.

I was raised solely speaking Farsi. It was not until I started school that I first began learning English. From then on, I started to become increasingly Westernized, which began to concern my parents. The adolescent years have definitely been the toughest years of my life. It was as though I was in two paradigms: At home I was the typical Afghan daughter that was foreign to the outside world, and at school I was the typical modern American teenager.

As I entered high school, I began to realize why my parents were so stringent with me. They did not want me to drown myself in drugs, sex, alcohol and every other threat out there in our society. This has shaped my aspirations in the sense that I do not want to conform to society’s standards or be a “slave” to the system. I want to be a leader in all realms of my life, whether it is professionally or socially, so that I may guide others into the path of success.

Most Afghans my age are typical kids that have no direction in life and are caught up with the two minutes of fun. I, on the other hand, am a complete contradiction of this stereotype. I am yearning to do something for this world that is falling apart before our eyes, yet I am unable, without the proper education, to do so.

At whatever school I go to, I will make sure that I succeed in many ways. My long-term goal is to build hospitals for women and children in underrepresented Third World countries. I feel like that is my calling to the world. I have a very strong connection with my home country, and I have to do something about the way of life there.

**SN&R’s 2012 College Essay Contest second place**

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| http://www.newsreview.com/imager/snrs-2012-college-essay-contest/b/original/5892653/875f/2.jpeg  **Name: Marina Korniychuk**  **Now attending: San Juan High School**  **College she’ll attend: Sacramento State**  **Plans to study: Nursing**  **Personal Motto: “Make a difference in the world by simply helping others. Brighten the world by simply smiling to others. Change the world by simply achieving your goals.”**  **PHOTO BY PRISCILLA GARCIA** |
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**Second Place**

**“A calling to help others”**

It was a cold November in Ukraine. My feet fell into the freezing, fluffy snow. Cold heavy air took my breath as I sprinted to my neighbor’s house. As I approached the house, my neighbor came out; it seemed as if she was waiting for me.

“Call the ambulance,” I said with a trembling voice, “My mom is dying.”

I stood transfixed as the white and red blinking lights faded into the cold bitter night, taking my mom away. Tears rolled down my cheeks, I wanted to help, take the pain away, but what could I do, being only 6? This was the moment I realized, I could maybe do more than just bring her pills nightly for her illness.

My dad always wanted to become a doctor. He enjoyed helping people, but his life led him down a different path. Just like my dad, my mom also wanted to be a doctor. But growing up in a Christian family in the USSR, it was prohibited for Christians to work in hospitals during that time. As a child, I watched doctors helping people, knowing that it could have been my mom or dad. My passion for becoming a doctor grew bigger and bigger. Doctors are my heroes; I’m impressed with their accomplishments.

My mom always suffered from high blood pressure. Every time she was taken to the hospital, I was there with her. I wanted to help her out in any way possible. I rejoiced when she came home alive. It gave me a feeling of success, because my dream was to help people. We had a family of seven who always supported my dreams and inspired me to be a good student in school.

My parents always said, “Your knowledge will follow you until the end.” Living in a low-income family made me try harder to fulfill my dream of being in health care, to help sick people all over the world. My dream is to go to poor countries and help people who can’t afford professional medical care. This is my passion, from that night; I became interested in helping people.

As a child, I pretended I was a doctor in play, and every time someone actually needed help, I was there to apply a Band-Aid or give my mom, brothers and sisters their medicine. This is what made me a stronger person.

In my church, we often go visiting older people that are paralyzed; I love helping them, spending time with them, and watching their lovely smiles appear quickly on their faces: Hearing their appreciative voice saying “Thank you” or “God bless you,” warms my heart.

I enjoy helping people. It helps me go through different challenges in school, like taking AP classes, as well as at home helping my family. I’ve learned the inner feeling or reward of helping others and receiving help in return.

To see my dream become alive, I joined AVID (a program for college-bound students) and became an example to other students. When I go to college, I will do everything possible to fulfill my dream that was born that bitter night when I was only 6. I have learned that, although I could not help my mother get better when I was 6, I can help others now. By helping others in the medical field, I will be able to help them in ways I couldn’t help my mom. Not only will this make my parents proud, but it will also allow me to help other children living a similar experience.

**‘I started to realize my sexual orientation’**

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| http://www.newsreview.com/imager/snr-39-s-2014-college-essay-contest/b/original/13573820/b5ee/cover-1.jpg  First place: Connor Nelson  PHOTO BY SERENE LUSANO |
| spacer Name: **Connor Nelson**  Now attending: **C.K. McClatchy High School**  College he’ll attend: **University of San Francisco**  Plans to study: **International business**  Personal motto: **“If there is a will, there is a way.”** |

I didn’t start thinking about myself and who I was until fall of 2012. During this season, I was used to hearing the rustling of leaves, yet nowhere close to suspecting the expression of nature inside of me finally bursting out. I was contemplating actions I would make in the near future that would have a major effect on my life.

I was officially starting to identify myself as a gay individual and simultaneously completing my Eagle Scout project. I was conflicted by one major decision I needed to make: stay hidden in the closet—pretend I was straight—while completing my final steps in achieving the highest rank a Boy Scout can attain, or finally come out as gay and support the gay community in its desperate struggle for equality.

I started to realize my sexual orientation in late middle school and early high school. I swept these feelings aside, ashamed I could be anything deemed so horrible by society. But as time progressed, the feelings started to feel much stronger and prominent. I realized I was gay. Still, too terrified of the reaction my family and friends would have if I were to come out as gay, I began to form the idea that I could pretend I was a straight man my whole life; marry a wife, have kids, and it would all go away.

As time progressed and I continued to work on my Eagle Scout project, it became evident to me how prejudiced the Scouting community was. A petition on [Change.org](http://change.org/) with over 400,000 signatures pressing to remove the Scouts anti-gay policy proved ineffective to changing the Scout leaders’ opinion. I was hopeless: If that many people couldn’t change the policy, I would be forced to stay in the closet or come out as gay and be kicked out of the Boy Scouts, something my family and I would be very disappointed of.

I’ve been involved in the Boy Scout community since I was 6 years old. This was something my parents and I were very excited about; it was a family tradition, and many of my family members had been in Boy Scouts and had become Eagle Scouts. Naturally, as I grew up, my family expected me to become an Eagle Scout. The one thing I feared most was that this developing self-identity would restrict my capability to complete this monumental accomplishment, something I had been practically working for my whole life.

The first time I had the courage to do anything toward fully accepting myself was when I met my first boyfriend, Eddie. He gave me the courage to come out, not only from his support, but also from the time I spent around him. I realized that he was well-loved by many people. He had lots of friends and was very successful in what I thought was a very “prejudiced” society, eliminating my main fear, that of not being accepted.

As time slowly drew closer to the completion of my Eagle Scout rank, I grew more conflicted by the different decisions I could make. Being a significant part of the Boy Scout community was a childhood goal and meant so much to me, but being truly myself seemed that it would impact my life in a stronger way. I wanted to embrace who I truly was and didn’t want to cover it up with a facade.

I’m proud that I learned from this experience to finally accept myself for who I am, and I have become such a happier person because of it. I was able to become an Eagle Scout on November 18, and successfully came out as a gay man the day after, something that I had always dreamed of doing shortly after embracing my true self. I learned from this event to always believe in myself no matter how hard the struggle is.

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| http://www.newsreview.com/imager/snr-39-s-2013-college-essay-contest/b/original/9960092/0b69/cover-3.jpg  Alejandro Gonzalez |
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**Name**: Alejandro Gonzalez

**Now attending**: Delta High School

**College he'll attend**: California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

**Plans to study**: Mechanical engineering

**Personal motto**: “The purpose of life is a life of purpose.”

**Almost an American**

I have felt threatened and discriminated against in a country that I have lived in and called my home for as long as I can remember. I have experienced being Mexican-American during an era plagued with immigration debate, but I don't consider my background a burden. I consider it my motivation to work in the world I am in.

I didn't have the luxury of a completely carefree and joyful childhood. Even now, no matter how happy I am around family and friends, the thought of losing them and being deported haunts me. I am undocumented, and any day in America could be my last. I feel like that day may be creeping closer, and at any instant the life I know may disappear.

I have seen family friends get deported and discriminated, and feel that their despair may soon be mine. Despite the discrimination, my parents are willing to stay here in America for me to have a college education. How long their patience may last, I do not know. I know they want to leave, I can see it in their faces. Their enthusiasm and joy are decaying slowly. But every so often, when they talk to family from Mexico over the phone, I can see their delight unchained, glowing brightly for hours at a time as they exchange friendly stories. It brings a smile to my face.

I want my parents to return to Mexico safely one day. That is a life goal of mine, and I know a college education will help me. After venturing for America, my parents left almost everyone they cared for behind. Recently, that is why it was especially difficult, when a close uncle died across the border, and we could not be present at his funeral. Within a week of the tragedy, my grandmother passed away. It was overwhelming. My father cried, and my mother tried to appease him, but nothing could have soothed the pain of not having held her hand as she took her last breaths.

Some of today's immigration laws still deny freedoms, and I feel ridiculed. My differences compared to natural-born Americans aren't much, but they are enough to make me feel like I'm on another planet. I speak the language, dress more or less the same, go to school like any other kid, hang out with friends and occasionally go to the movies, so I'm definitely a part of the American culture. However, I lack basic American rights. I cannot get a license, a job, or any government benefits or rights, such as voting.

What hurts me the most is that I know I am smart, I know that if given the opportunity, I can fit in, abide by the laws, and even contribute to society. But no matter how other Americans feel, I cannot be treated like one. It's the law, it's a part of my life, and I hate it. But I am patient and know I will succeed in college. I know that, as time goes on, these kinds of laws will change for the better. I'm confident that one day I will gain those rights. Yet, it is difficult to be patient while others enjoy the rights I don't have.

Even within my own family, I am considered different. Not different in the eyes of my parents, but different in the eyes of the law. My little sisters have had more rights than me because they were born American. When they come of age, they are free to get a license and job without any hassle. They are free to travel to and from Mexico. I was 12 years old when I wondered why my sisters could visit our aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents in Mexico, but not me. It was difficult not to get jealous. I still get the stinging sensation, like a splinter in my heart, which reminded me I did not belong. It was the first time I realized I was different.

In short, the apparent rejection by the laws of a country I consider my own has not deflated me. I remain hopeful that one day I will have the peace of mind of not imagining myself on a one-way ticket to Mexico the hard way. I want a round-trip to Mexico the legal way, with my willingness, as an American citizen. Being a Mexican-American in this country shouldn't worry me, but it does. Many people in my position have returned to their native country to avoid discrimination, but not me. I embrace the challenge and opportunity of being American, and I am proud to continue fighting for my American identity