

**Foothill-De Anza Retirees Association Scholarship**  
**May 2017 - 4 @ \$1,250**

## **Foothill**

**(1) Missy**

**Major: Psychology**

**My Story:**

I would like to start this by sharing with you all that coming to Foothill College saved my life. Statistically I shouldn't be where I am today and even if I made it into college I should of dropped out after the first year, but here I am today defying the odds and building a future with the adversity of my past. Foothill College has given me the opportunity to make everything I went through worth it by opening the door to making a difference in the world while earning a higher education.

My beautiful struggle began the moment my father committed suicide when I was just a year old. With my father gone his family made the decision to not be apart of my life for the next seventeen years. I was primarily raised by my mother and grandmother who was mentally ill. My mother was a single mother who would work two to three jobs just to make ends meet. Many nights my older brother and I would do our homework by candlelight because having a roof over our heads was more important than having electricity. With my mother working all the time to support us my grandmother would take care of my brother and I. Many days though it would be my brother and I taking care of my grandmother when she would have an episode due to her having schizophrenia.

With no real guidance at home I found my place in street gangs. Not long after I was arrested sent to juvenile hall and was adjudged a ward of the court at age eleven. For the next seven years I went through ten different group homes, twelve different high schools and various facilities all over California. When I finally turned eighteen I was released from the system with nowhere to go and no real skills to survive. Since I "aged out" of foster care while in juvenile hall I was not eligible for any of the after care programs available to foster youth, but I did not let that stop me. While homeless I worked two jobs and saved enough money to rent a room. I was finally able to go back to school to earn my high school diploma so over the next few years I worked during the day and went to school at night.

I became the first in my family to earn a high school diploma in June of 2014 and also received a small scholarship to go to college. In that moment college actually became a possibility for me, but how would I get there? I have no family support and I have to work full-time to survive. I knew deep down inside everything I went through is for a reason. I knew I wanted to work with troubled youth and the only way to achieve that goal is by gaining a higher education. I made the biggest decision of my life in November of 2014 when I quit my job and enrolled full-time at Foothill College. I did not know how I was going to pay my bills, my rent or even buy food. I just knew I was going to make it happen with a \$270 scholarship, less than \$1,000 in my bank account and a dream.

I became the first in my family to go to college January of 2015 when I started at Foothill that Winter Quarter. I ventured out into a world I knew nothing about, it felt as if I was navigating through the college system with no compass. Thankfully Foothill College has become the compass I definitely needed to be successful as a student and in life. The experience and support system I have built here at Foothill College will be the foundation of my successes in the future. Not only have I grown as a student but I have evolved as a person for the better. Foothill has given me the opportunity to thrive as a leader and become apart of something bigger than myself. I am a Student Ambassador with the Community Ambassador Program and a Peer Advisor with the Foothill Outreach Department. All the work I have done at Foothill has helped me to embrace the world of activism and I have started organizing events in my community to give back to the homeless. I hold monthly events to feed the homeless and just this past winter we created 50 care packages for the homeless in San Francisco. Everything I am experiencing and building here at Foothill I know will influence how big of an impact I will make with what I am striving to do with my life.

I am a Psychology major with a 3.6 GPA pursuing a career as an Art Therapist. I plan to transfer to UC Santa Cruz in the Fall of 2018 where I will become one of the 3% of former foster youth to complete a college education. This March I will begin teaching art classes to incarcerated girls with the Art of Yoga Project where I will make a difference and build my experience so that I can one day open a group home with an Art Therapy Program for troubled youth in the system. Art has allowed me to express what I cannot say and heal what I once pushed away, that is why I will teach troubled youth to use art as a tool for healing and create a stable family environment where they can thrive. I also plan to continue my work in the homeless community and one day open a nonprofit to help those in need in the Silicon Valley because I know with all the tech money pouring in the people who call this community home will only continue to need our help as time goes on. I am thankful for all the adversity I have faced because it has given me my purpose in life. My purpose being able to change the world be being the change I wish to see in the world. I made it through the flames of adversity to rise from the ashes so it is my responsibility to live my life now inspiring and guiding others to rise to their full potential as well.

## **(2) Matthew**

### **Major: Engineering**

#### **My Story:**

My name is Matthew Dunn I am 28 and I live in San Jose California, I am currently enrolled as an Engineering major at Foothill College. My goal is to gain an associates of Engineering and transfer to a 4 year college where I will pursue a Masters Degree. After I graduate I wish to get a job as a designer in the electronics industry. I believe that my passion for technology will be a benefit to the industry. It has long been a dream of mine to become an Electrical Engineer, and I have overcome many obstacles along the journey to where I am now. I grew up in a small town in Utah as the 8th of 12 children, my parents were members of a religious group better known as polygamy it is a very restrictive and abusive cult society, interaction with the outside world is heavily discouraged allowing socialization only with other members. The organization had a school but my parents decided to home-

school me and my siblings secluding us even from what little socialization would have been allowed. My father purchased some outdated materials and my mother began to teach us as they saw fit. My father owned a construction company and in the early years of my life my mother didn't have to work, she was home with us and was our teacher. When I was 5 years old my fathers construction company went bankrupt and my mother was forced to go out and get a job, she and my father began working full time and my siblings and I were left to our own initiative thereafter and we continued on with our school as best we could. When I was 12 my father started yet another construction company and started taking me out to work with him every day, I continued my schooling in spite of this and I was able to finish what limited school material my parents had made available. By the time I was 18 years old my brother and I were responsible for all of the day to day operations of the company; working 7 days a week and not even getting a paycheck as it was my father's believe that we didn't need to be paid until we had families. I always wanted to attend college but my father wouldn't hear of it and with the day to day stress and workload for which I was responsible, It was impossible for me to even take night classes. After a few years the construction market started to crash and my father decided it was time for him to exit leaving my brother and I with nothing to show for all we had done. At age 23 I moved out with almost nothing to my name and started looking for my first paying job. Since the job market in Utah was very bad at the time it was hard to find anything but I finally found a job out of state and travelled all over the country for the next 4 years. Having not given up on my dream of higher education I studied and achieved my GED and now having settled here in San Jose I am very excited to be attending classes and I am very positive about the future. I intend to work hard and be very involved in the community. One of my desires is to one day be able to help other people who grew up like I did because I believe that everyone should have access to higher education. I am very hopeful that I may be able to make a positive impact and help make the world a better place.

## **De Anza**

### **(1) Graciela**

**Major: Liberal Arts**

**My Story:**

I am the first generation Latina in my family looking for higher education and what I am bringing along with me is my cultural values. I am looking to inspire Students to understand my culture and change the opinion in what the stereotype of Latinos are. I am going to inspire students like I have in college because I am here to listen and help my classmates understand my culture because of the rich information it comes with. Latinos in the educational system are getting marginalized; this leaves them unmotivated to continue getting a higher education. Showing their history of ancestry and by having a group of minorities will make students feel more welcomed in the educational system. I lead groups with information about opportunities and resources for minorities specifically Latinos since some feel no motivation to go to school, which creates a cycle for future generations. When I round up my community of Latinos students together in the same area we would not feel alone, since there are others like us in the same situation.

What people know about me is that I love to try new things and see if I can put in my skill to make it better. I have composed myself to be the person everyone wants in their group because of the capability and responsibility I have worked for. I am the person everyone comes to for help because I have open arms for support. I encouraged and motivated people to be successful, to never give up and to believe in themselves because I have been in their place and know their struggles. I am giving the experience of hope for the future, to encourage students to do better. I use my leadership to show that I am not just a leader but I am just like them having the same struggles through difficult obstacles.

I help students in my community with academic work and advising on high school to college life since my students are coming from lower schools. I am helping students understand the decisions they will make for their academic future. I am the counselor to the students once they enter High School because there are two academic counselors in the entire high school. I help my students get into the right classes that match their academic achievements. There are people who do not want to help the community of Latinos; my students need personal insight from people who understand our culture. Unlike the educators that let the stereotype of Latinos cloud their judgment. The lower class community we live in does not come with resources on inspire us to continue to go farther, we are only expected to graduate high school. The students parents did not go to college nor complete high school; while my students are first generation who are going through these experiences alone because some are the oldest in their families. I know their stories because I am currently living through the same situation as them. I became the person that I wanted when I was their age, and with my inspiration, my student will continue to do the same for future generations.

People inside the system believe they are helping the students learn but in reality the students feel marginalized. The minority group we get put into has it conditions to not help you because you have to break the cycle that past generations have created. Many students do not have the motivation to continue to achieve a higher education because they feel like their job is to follow they stereotype the educational system has made for students of minorities. Putting my classmates together in the same study group would not make them feel alone because there are others with them in the same situation. Students want to learn and showing their history of ancestry and having our advisor make my classmates feel welcomed in the educational system. Teaching our students that our minority group is huge and can take over can inspire students to achieve a higher education, we can break the cycle.

## **(2) Koorosh**

### **Major: Biological Sciences**

#### **My Story:**

When I moved to the U.S., I was amazed by the diversity of the majors that existed here. I originally believed that engineering was the path for me; my father was a mechanical engineer in Iran and my mother held a degree in Physics. But as I started to take classes, I realized that I wanted to find my real passion. A part-time job at CVS led me to Biochemistry. Like many other college students, I needed to work part time to pay my bills. After working in real estate, business, and with an electrician, I started working for CVS

Pharmacy as a Pharm Tech Trainee in March of 2015. I became fascinated by the work and spent time information about the diseases that our customers dealt with, and medicine in general. Cancer – ranging from skin cancer to brain cancer – was the most common. Talking to my customers while they waited gave me a glimpse into their lives and I wanted to do more. This feeling led me to take biology classes the following academic term. The memories of my customers helped me to overcome the difficulty of the courses, especially with the English barrier. After a while I started enjoying the context. The context opened a window to a new world for me. It was interesting for me to imagine the microscopic world and how it functions by also applying the concepts of chemistry and physics. The more courses I took, the more I was intrigued by this world. During the last summer, I began volunteering at a hospital in order to learn how this microscopic world affects our lives while helping the community as well. I also became a TA in a college biology class to gain more knowledge, especially during the labs, by listening to the instructor and helping the students in the class. Laboratory felt like my playground. Answering the students' questions made me more curious about the core functions of biology. By finishing my lower division classes successfully, I am ready to take the next step to further my ambitions of one day conducting research.

Moving to the U.S. from Iran was a major step in my life because my family and I applied for asylum in May of 2014. It took almost two years for us to get approved. Our circumstances made it difficult for us to bring enough money to settle down. My parents and I applied for work permits. I did not know whether the court would accept us or not, but that did not stop me from registering for De Anza; I wanted to have a chance to study in the U.S., but I was constantly worried about our status. By the time our asylum was approved, I was in my seventh quarter at De Anza. Before this time, I could not apply for financial aid and had to pay international student fees. I opened six credit cards for myself and four credit cards for my father to help pay for school. Because I spoke the best English in our family, I had to help my parents to get jobs and on other issues. I knew we would make it work, but it was very hard initially. Waiting for the courts was not a sensible option and I had to make decisions quickly and strategically.

As of now, I have obtained a GPA of 3.86 and I want to get into a good UC in the following year. I want to be able to further my education and follow my dreams, finding a cure for cancer. However, the worrisome fact being my family's current financial issues, would potentially stop me from pursuing my dream.