

## The Fight for My Future

At seventeen, I can look back on my life and see I have been fighting in a war that still rages on. Battling poverty, homelessness, and family strife, my road to success has been all but easy. I am Nikia Durgin – daughter of a single mother of four kids and a deceased father.

At a very young age I was exposed to the harsh realities of poverty. My father was not a part of my life due to his incarceration, and my mother was either working or using drugs. We were constantly moving because we were unable to pay our rent, and it was extremely stressful because we never had a stable living situation. Many times throughout my childhood we lived out of our car, in motels or in homeless shelters. When I was six, we were living out of our car and we would go to a local McDonald's to wash up in the sink. I was considered a truant for much grade school because of constantly being tardy or absent. At the age of fourteen, I was so angry and hopeless that I became obnoxious towards my teachers and peers, and rebelled by cutting my classes. I would start arguments with my mother because I blamed her for our struggles. I was exhausted with this lifestyle. When we moved into another homeless shelter, I called Child Protective Services and requested to be placed in foster care. While in foster care, I was able to secure my academic success and feel like a normal teen; however, being from an extremely dysfunctional family, I longed for belonging and love. Soon, I made a decision that impacted my life greatly: I became pregnant. While many teens resent the sacrifices required when having a child, I embraced them. I wanted to become a good mother to my child, and I began to gain a new perspective on my life. I became more mature and responsible: getting a job, focusing on my education, and preparing for my child to come.

Since my son's birth, I have maintained a 3.0 Grade Point Average, worked two part-time jobs in non-profit organizations, and pursued living independently to ensure a healthy lifestyle for my new family.

Having a child has greatly impacted my decision to go to college – it has made college the most important goal to achieve. College used to be a dream, but now it is imperative. I have experienced poverty, and the life it creates: struggling to pay rent, feed my family, and surviving from paycheck to paycheck. I want my son to live a comfortable life, and one of the first steps to ensure that is a college degree. With a college education I hope to make a dramatic change in my life, as well as in the life of others. I would like to continue giving back to my community by working in the non-profit sector and eventually run for a seat on San Francisco's Board of Supervisors. Being someone who has suffered the hardships of poverty, I am dedicated to promoting reform in my community through elective politics. Aside from my political goals, I will also continue writing. I want to write a memoir about my life. I have overcome so many obstacles; I feel my story should be told.

Being a young mother, full time student, and a part time employee requires strength and perseverance. Juggling all this as a college freshman will be challenging, but I am determined to overcome this because I do not want my son to become another victim of poverty.

Since this war called my life has been waged, I have become a different person. Growing from a child to a young woman, I have learned confidence, strength, empathy, and patience. I have become one of the top students at my school, a great mother to my son, a contributing member to my community, and a praised employee at my workplace.

Just recently, I have had my petition for emancipation granted by the Superior Court of San Francisco, which shows me there are others that have confidence in my ability to live independently and successfully to achieve my goals as a young scholar and as a young mother. I have been a soldier in a war that I cannot control, and on a battlefield that is ever changing; however, I have learned never to give up and to keep fighting until I win, for the sake of my future and most importantly for the sake of my son.