

PACT Scholarship Essay



My mother, Hanna, is an extremely powerful and strong woman. She was raised in Kwidzyn, Poland; a town halfway between the cities of Gdańsk and Bydgoszcz. When she lived in Poland, communism was severe under Soviet Russia and crumbs were left on the shelves in grocery stores. She didn't want that life for her children, so she and her newlywed husband escaped to Greece. They hitchhiked across middle Europe, riding with bus drivers or hopping in stranger's cars until they got to Athens, where they settled down and made a living off whatever they could find. My mom was a teacher in Poland, so she continued to do that and taught at a Polish school in Athens and also worked at a pizzeria and did maid work. All at the same time. She didn't care how tired she was or how many hours a week she worked, she did everything to

support herself and her husband. During that time, my mother suffered through depression and was racially and sexually harassed for being Polish and a woman, but she fought on. After three years of working tirelessly and enduring those pains, my parents saved up enough money to get Visas so that they could immigrate to Canada, and did so with only \$100 in their pocket. They again made a living in Canada, and my mom continued to do what she loved and taught at Polish schools in Calgary, where I was born a couple years later. My dad left my mom for a little while he went down to Houston to find a job and a home, my mom stayed back with my brother and continued to take care of us while she worked two jobs to support us. Sooner than later, we got the call from my dad and we all hopped on the plane and came to Houston. A few years after coming to the U.S, my mom was diagnosed with Stage 1 Melanoma skin cancer, and was given a 25% chance of surviving. She was devastated at first, but she endured through surgeries and chemotherapy, and is now almost 15 years cancer-free. I look back at what my mom did for me and I continue to be amazed at how strong of a woman she is. She has been through so much and still hasn't stopped and continues to amaze me everyday. She is such a strong woman that works four jobs in order to support us, now that my dad recently lost his job. My mom tutors kids and adults in a variety of subjects varying between math, grammar, and Polish. Her Saturdays are spent teaching and directing the Polish school in Houston, where the kids learn about Polish culture, language, history, and traditions. She teaches the kids how to dance traditional Polish songs such as Krakowiak or Polonez, and always has a smile on her face. My mother also teaches Polish at the Awty International School in Houston. Lastly, my mom works at Jan Schiff Elementary in the Fort Bend Independent School District, where she takes care of disabled children five days a week. My mother is such a caring and loving person with a heart that could

take in thousands of children. If she could, she would take on four more jobs and teach at four other locations, because she loves her job that much. As a mother, she made sure that Polish was the first language I learned, and I now speak, read, and write it. I am so thankful for that because I look at so many other children of Polish descent who don't even know one word of Polish, and it saddens me that they are missing out on such a vital chunk of their identity. My mom taught me various Polish traditions such as looking for Santa on Christmas Eve or going to Świąconka early Saturday morning before Easter. My mother made sure that I was proud to be Polish, proud to be Catholic, and proud to be the person that I am today. I don't know where I'd be without her, and I am so thankful for all that she has done for me.