

Essays on adversity and achievement

by Bottom Line students

I am the

opportunity

*Now, I await that next challenge  
to engulf me*

*Afraid? No.*

*Hesitant? Of course not.*

*Ready? As I'll ever be.*



**Bottom Line**

Get in • Graduate • Go far

Success depends on you

*Worcester*

# Finding Paths to Achievement

The essays in this book were written by high school seniors from Worcester's class of 2011 in Bottom Line's College Access Program. With Bottom Line's support, these students learned to navigate complex college research, application, and financial aid processes. Perhaps the most challenging task of the application was perfecting the college essay. This is a piece of writing unlike anything each student had ever written: a 500-word statement that represents their past, present and future. These brief statements cannot fully describe the multi-dimensional students who wrote them, but they do offer a glimpse of their strength, courage and perseverance.

Most Bottom Line students are in the first generation of their family to attend college. Many have been in the United States for only a few years. Others play a critical role in providing financial support and other resources to their families. They are all remarkable young adults. Their dedication drives them to spend hours with Bottom Line to complete their college applications. Their hard work pays off: 98% are accepted to at least one college.

Founded in Boston in 1997, Bottom Line is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life in urban communities through higher education. In July 2008, Bottom Line opened a satellite office in Worcester, Massachusetts. During the site's third year, our staff provided 143 low-income and first-generation high school seniors with the opportunity to lead successful lives by earning a college degree.

With support programs and personalized attention, Bottom Line helps students overcome the formidable barriers to "get in" and graduate. Our students earn college degrees at more than twice the rate of the national average for their peer group. Bottom Line alumni overcome incredible personal hurdles and become role models for their community and sources of inspiration for their families and peers.

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# After the Smoke Cleared

By Dung Mai Tran



Dung is an honor roll student at the University Park Campus School, where she is also president of her class and secretary of the National Honor Society. A bright girl with a great sense of humor, Dung is always busy with extracurriculars, such as volleyball, and her part-time job as a translator at a dental office. She was accepted to Assumption College, Quinnipiac University, Bridgewater State University, Lasell College, University of New Haven, and Worcester State.

I rubbed my eyes as I walked into a dimly lit room. The aroma of cigarette smoke filled the air, making it muggy. It wrapped around me, making it harder to breathe from behind the doorway where I hid. I was oblivious at first to what was going on in the living room. Clothes were being put into boxes as harsh words were being thrown back and forth between my mother and my father. It was like a war in my living room. Bombs and bullets were thrown and shot across the room, and every word wounded me as they left my parents' mouths. I had nowhere to duck and hide.

I remember that night as if it had happened yesterday. I was about seven years old and brave enough to come out from behind that doorway to help him carry his belongings from our third floor condo to the ground. As I walked behind him down the stairs, his cigarette smoke irritated my eyes, making them water. Though his habit of smoking was the source of my asthma, I knew that this was the last of his muggy aura I would ever encounter, and so I inhaled.

Upon coming up the stairs and entering my almost vacant home, I headed straight for the balcony and looked down upon the parking lot. I watched as my "father" pulled out and drove away in his white Mitsubishi. I felt a lump in my heart, but for some odd reason I found that I had stopped crying. My tears had run dry.

Turning around, I saw that the same did not hold true for my mother. She sat upon the sofa, which still possessed the scent of cigarette smoke, her tears slowly rolling down her cheeks. "The strongest woman I know was crying?" I thought to myself. I managed to smile slightly as I headed over towards my mother. I held her close. Not a word came from either of us, though in my mind a million thoughts raced. I reminisced about all the times he pushed my mother around, how he always expected dinner to be ready, how he continued to smoke whether I was wheezing or coughing, how he used to tell my mother that women were useless, and I realized that he never respected my mother or me. I kissed my mother on her forehead, assuring her everything was going to be all right, and that together we would persevere. She embraced me. I'd never felt so safe and loved.

They say "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," and for my life this holds true. It has been eleven years and I have only looked forward. Every morning I look into the mirror, proud of the young woman I have become. I know that women are not useless, because the strong individual he called useless eleven years ago raised a self-respecting, intelligent young woman on her own. Because of my experience, I have developed the ability to persevere through any circumstance life hands me. Although my father was not ideal, and the past experiences I shared with him were not picture perfect, he has helped shape who I am today. Despite all that has happened, I am able to succeed in all I do; I am the youngest employee at my workplace, and though at first I found it difficult to adapt, I sought out more experienced workers for help and advice. While being patient with both myself and those around me, I was able to overcome many obstacles, and soon found myself up to speed. My experiences have made me strong. They compel me to work harder to become someone my mother will be proud of, but most importantly, I am working towards being someone who I myself will be proud of.

# The Haircut

By Naghmeh Eskandari



Naghmeh immigrated with her family from Iran to Worcester seven years ago. She attends University Park Campus School, where she is a member of the Math Team and plays basketball. She also tutors recently arrived refugees through the African Community Education program. Naghmeh was accepted to UMass Dartmouth, St. John's University, Salem State, Worcester State, American International College and SUNY Old Westbury.

When I was four and living in my native country of Iran, I had a boy's haircut. Many children experience the agony of having a haircut they don't like, but my situation was different; my haircut was liberating. Wrestling is a very popular sport in Iran and my father wanted to show me what a live match looked like. The problem was that women and girls were not allowed inside of stadiums. Dressed up as a boy and sporting a short haircut, I attended a wrestling match, and thus encountered freedom for the first time.

When I was ten, my family made a major decision to move from Iran to Worcester, Massachusetts. In Iran my family was well-off, I was surrounded by all of my relatives, and I spoke Farsi. My father wanted to move to the United States so that he could further his education at Clark University. This move would not only affect my father, it would be a life-changing event for my entire family.

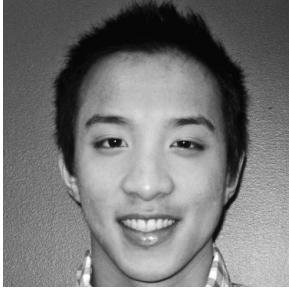
Worcester was entirely different from anything I had known before. In Iran, I attended an all-girls school where we were required to wear the traditional Hijab. In Worcester, I went to a school with girls and boys in the same classroom and English was the language that everyone spoke. It took a while for me to learn the new language and to get used to my surroundings. I felt like an outsider in my school. Sometimes, I longed for the familiarity of Iran. I missed the traditions and holidays we had, as well as spending time with my family, going on hikes or having picnics. I missed Iran and its rich culture.

Although it wasn't easy, I eventually adapted to my new life. I also took advantage of the opportunities that I gained from the move to the United States. As a woman living in Iran I would not have the same rights a man would. I would not be able to get the same education or pursue the same career as a man in my community. I would not be able to pursue my dreams and live the life that I want to live. Here, however, I have all the freedom to reach my highest potential. My gender is no longer holding me back.

I'm going to use the opportunities given to me to achieve a higher education. In the future I want to work towards helping kids like myself who have moved to a new country. I would like to make it easier for them to adjust to the new language and culture. I would also encourage these children to hold on to their roots, and embrace the culture of the places where they have come from. I have learned that although moving to the United States was challenging, it was definitely worth the trouble. I look forward to a college education and a meaningful career, which is more than that little girl with the boy's haircut could have ever dreamed of.

# Character Through Adversity

By Vinh Nguyen



Vinh attends South High Community School, where he earns excellent grades and challenges himself through Advanced Placement coursework. He is involved in many activities including band, mock trial and the Community Service Learning club. He also plays oboe for the Metrowest Symphony Orchestra and is president of the Tri-M Music Honors Society. Vinh was accepted to Boston College, Clark University, Providence College, UMass Amherst, Brandeis University and Holy Cross. Vinh plans to study biology and attend medical school.

Growing up, I was always reminded of the expectation to succeed in a land that provided the means to do so. My parents understood well how inadequate life in Viet Nam could be. When I was six, we left the faces of our family and came to America with the expectation of a better life.

Shortly after coming to America, my mom left my dad. I had not yet adjusted to the foreignness of American culture, or the coldness of winter, and now there was something else I was not yet used to: the absence of my mom. The fact that my parents separated only contributed to the feeling of loneliness in this land distant from home. It meant one less pair of hands to cling onto, one less face to greet me in a language I understood and one less person in my life.

After my mom left, my dad was never the same. I remember coming home from school to see him sitting in the kitchen. Sometimes he would be crying, sometimes in pensive silence, other times talking to himself. It was unknown to me then that in front of my eight-year-old eyes was the image of my dad losing himself to chronic bipolar depression. I would watch him slip back and forth between his mental state and I, too, would slip back and forth to UMass Memorial Hospital.

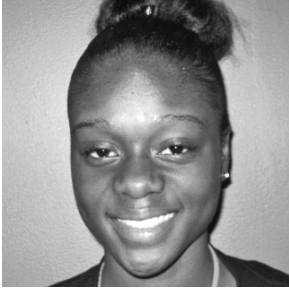
When I came to America I had no idea of the path ahead of me. I thought everything was going to fall into place. I thought my dad was the one who was going to take care of me and not the other way around. At an early age, I had to be independent for the well-being of my dad. Even if it was the smallest details, like making sure he took his medicine, or being attentive to his behavior, I learned early that my dad needed me.

When high school started, it became increasingly harder to balance home life with school life. The relapsing of my dad's illness made it more challenging. I can remember hearing the sound of his hysteric laughter from my room and the feeling of my heart sinking with heaviness. I learned to use my struggle as a drive to do well in school. Education would be the means in which I could help my dad later in life. For now, if I see my dad slip, I will be his support.

It is through adversity that true character and talents are formed. The adversity that came with my dad's illness has brought out my compassionate nature. I want to use my compassion for those with childhoods mirroring mine as the inspiration and motivation to be an educator and researcher in the field of medical biology. As an educator it will be possible for me to bring awareness to the bipolar condition. The circumstances in which I have grown up have been a catalyst for my passion to find more answers about these diseases and maybe, if I work hard enough, a cure.

# Making Dad Proud

By Danielle Bloh



Danielle is a very good student at Burncoat High School. Most of her extracurricular involvement has focused on college preparation. Besides Bottom Line, she has been involved with Let's Get Ready and the Collegiate Success Institute. She also tutors other students in Latin and is a member of the Yearbook Committee. Danielle works at Hanover Insurance and was awarded one of their annual scholarships. She was accepted to Salem State University and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

"Danielle," my mom calls. She places me on her lap. Although I am only four years old, I can tell something is wrong because tears are falling down her cheeks. "Danielle," she takes a long pause before finishing, "Your father died." I feel warm tears roll down my cheek. "But, Mommy, who's going to take care of me?" "God will take care of us," she replies. That day, our worlds crashed. Although I did not know how different my life would be, my mother did. She no longer had an income and immediately had to assume the role of mother, father, and provider for three kids.

After my father died, things got worse. First we were kicked out of my uncle's house in Missouri, where we knew no one else. We then moved to Worcester to live with my other uncle. We moved a couple more times, but we were always evicted because my mom could not contribute financially. When the situation seemed hopeless, my mom found a social worker who helped her get a job and a suitable apartment.

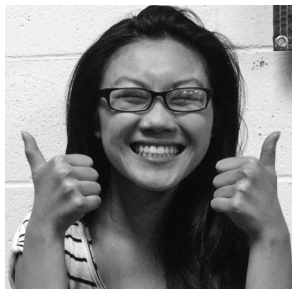
I will always remember that apartment. It had only one bedroom where my mom, my little brother, and I slept, while my older brother slept in the living room. We had no furniture except for a bed and an old black and white television and the apartment was infested with cockroaches. Regardless of the situation, we were happy to have a place to sleep and the company of each other. When my older brother moved out, my mother got a three bedroom apartment and we have lived there ever since.

Although the housing problem was over, life still was hard. When I first started going to school I didn't talk to anyone. I never had a chance to build any relationships because we had moved so much. By the time I was in the fifth grade, I had gone to about seven different schools and as the years went on I grew angrier. I got in trouble in school and fought with the other kids. My grades weren't great and I could tell my mother was disappointed. I didn't care how much trouble I got in, nor did I care about school, but one day that all changed. I got into a really big fight and my mother had to get me from school. Normally she would yell and punish me, but that time was different. My mom sat down in the living room for an hour and didn't say anything to me. Suddenly she began to cry. She started telling me how my dad would not have been happy with how I was handling things and would've wanted me to do well in school and make something of myself.

From that moment on, I decided that I did not want to be angry anymore and that I wanted to be a person of whom my mother and father could be proud. That conversation influenced me to start doing well in school. Although it was not an easy transformation and there were some obstacles I had to overcome, I got the improvement award in the eighth grade and graduated with all A's and B's. My freshman year started off a little rough, but I was able to turn it around and start doing well, which provided me lots of opportunities. I got an internship at the Hanover Insurance Group and also joined two college prep programs. This made me realize that not only could I have a better life than my mother, but also that with a better education, my mother's hardship would not have been in vain. All these struggles in my life proved to me that I can get through anything and fueled my determination to work hard in school so I can have a better future.

# My Parents' Gift

By Hoai Quach



Hoai has lived in Worcester her whole life and is near the top of her class at Worcester Technical High School. She is involved in a variety of activities, including the drama club, student council, yearbook, and the National Honor Society. As Vice President of Community Outreach, she coordinates opportunities for students to volunteer with the elderly at the nearby Christopher House. Hoai was accepted to UMass Amherst, UMass Lowell, Bryant University, Providence College, Emmanuel College, and Emerson College. She hopes to major in communications.

The tree is up and the scent of pine fills the room. "It's time to decorate!" my brother screams in utter excitement. We place the lights and glossy ornaments on the tree. As my brother places the star on the top, I think back to the halcyon days of my childhood. I realize that there is only one thing missing – my parents.

I could not be any older than the age of four, but I remember the day as if it was inscribed on the back of my palm. I stood next to the luggage cart while my mother spoke in a low whisper to an airport employee. When she walked toward me I saw the despondency and frustration in her eyes; she faked a smile. I knew we were not going back to Massachusetts. My mother stayed past the expiration date on her Visa and we could not board the plane. My mother and father were both born in Viet Nam – my mother migrated to the United States before I was born, but my father had always lived there. I, on the other hand, was back at the airport with a family friend within a few weeks to go back to home. As I boarded the plane, I did not realize that would be the last time in ten years that I would see my parents.

I was given the opportunity to visit my parents the summer of my freshman year. The plane ride was twenty-two hours long: twenty-two hours of enthusiasm, twenty-two hours of anticipation, and twenty-two hours of insanity. It was safe to say I went crazy thinking about everything that could happen. Would they recognize me? Would they be proud? Would they be disappointed? I prepared for this moment too many times to count, but as I stepped out of the airport door, I was bombarded with love. People stared, people whispered, but I could care less. There was no better feeling than standing there as a family – for the first time, in a very long time – just me, my brother, my mother, and father.

Holidays have always been tough since it is a time dedicated to family. I made do with endless phone calls and letters, but nothing was the same as their presence. The worst feeling was seeing all my friends talk about spending Christmas Eve and Christmas morning with their mother and father. I would spend those moments with my brother, aunt, and grandfather – the people who have provided stability and love in my life. Even though many people would see a life without their parents as a bane, it made me appreciate them even more. Instead of letting me stay in Viet Nam, they loved me enough to send me back to the United States to better my life. Living without my parents has provided me with great fortitude; their absence has given me the motivation to succeed. Success in my eyes, is not the amount of money an individual has, it is the education and happiness he has.

"Hoai! Hoai! I think we're done decorating!" It was my brother. I snapped out of my flashback and we both stared in awe when he turned on the Christmas lights. We sat down on the disastrous floor covered with the unused decorations and began reminiscing about the times we spent with our parents. Similar to the tree which symbolizes everlasting life, the love I have for my parents will never die. Even in the coldest of times, I will remember their gift of opportunity for me and my brother.



# Lessons in Strength

By Brittany Kacevich



Brittany was born in Kansas, but has lived in Worcester for most of her life. She attends Worcester Technical High School, where she is one of few girls in the Computer Aided Design and Drafting field. Her extracurricular activities include field hockey and robotics as well as community service. During shop weeks, she works as a drafter at Siemens. Brittany will be attending UMass Lowell, where she will pursue her dream of becoming an engineer. She also hopes to start a club to connect with other students who share her Native American background.

Peers who have heard my story assume that I feel resentment towards my mother for her abandonment, but I feel nothing but gratitude. I had lived with my mother until I was eight years old before she left me freezing on the porch of my sister's aunt. I was scared, but hers was an easy void to fill because she was never much of a mother; the drugs consumed her mind. I realize that she did not exactly accomplish anything honorable; however, I feel by her being the epitome of everything I do not want to be, she has helped me to better myself. Therefore, I thank my mother for her absence because it has heavily influenced me on my path to becoming the strong and driven young woman I am today.

As a little girl I never realized that the daze my mother was in was due to heavy drug use. I just figured that she did not care to be around me. I would do anything for her attention. I remember throwing temper tantrums; however, as soon as I hit the first grade, I realized that by doing well I could get all the attention I needed from my teachers. I would complete my homework, study, and even create my own work. School became my niche and it still remains a place where I feel more accepted than in my own home. Though it is unfortunate that my mother's addiction drove us apart, it also helped me foster a love for learning and determine that I will never let drugs control my life. I will finish school and not allow anything to consume my potential.

The abuse that my mother tolerated from her boyfriend has always made me feel sick, even when I was little. I remember standing outside by the car after a horrible fight they had, being relieved to get away from him, when my mother just changed her mind and walked back in. Everything he did dragged my mother down further. Seeing how she became dependent upon a man that treated her so horribly made me realize that for happiness I do not need any single person but myself. While most girls roam the halls of my high school complaining about how they need boyfriends I feel the exact opposite; I would prefer a person who needs me.

Because of my mother's weakness I feel as if I am more independent and need to remain strong and not allow others to negatively influence my decisions. My mother's drug addiction and tolerance of physical abuse has impacted everything about the way I think today. Through her I have become strong enough to be able to stand up for myself against abuse and resist the temptation to join my peers in reckless behavior. These are lessons that most kids do not fully grasp, but that makes them all the more important.

# Choosing My Battles

By Patricia Feraud



Not only is Patricia a top student at South High, but she makes it a priority to involve herself in her school and in the greater Worcester community. She plays soccer, is a member of Mock Trial and Community Service Learning, was an organizer for the Save Our Pools Coalition, and helped start a mentoring program for freshmen at her school. She is also treasurer for the Worcester Roots Project, an organization focused on environmental, economic, and social justice organizing in Worcester. Patricia was accepted to eight colleges, including Boston College, Babson College, UMass Amherst, and Holy Cross. She hopes to become a lawyer.

Because of my love for social justice, people always assume my inspiration is Martin Luther King or Ghandi. My true inspiration is my uncle Michael. My inspiration is far from perfect with his lengthy rap sheet: a school dropout, a drug-user, and a fighter who was frequently in trouble with the law. Nevertheless, he is my inspiration because despite the mistakes he has made, he guided me to the right path.

When I was seven, I got in a fight at school. I was excited to give Michael the full details from the way I approached the girls to the exact moves he taught me. I was proud because after being bullied by these girls, I stood up for myself. After I described the scene, instead of seeing pride on Michael's face, I only saw anger. Michael stood up into his full six feet tall muscular frame and grabbed me by the shoulder. He led me to the mirror in my room. "What do you see, Tita?" he asked, using my family nickname. I only saw a girl, wearing hand-me-down clothing and cutesy colorful barrettes. He stared at me for a long time in the mirror, still gripping my shoulders. "I see a bully, who picks on people just for fun. A big bully, who does not plan to go to college and will struggle in life like your mother and I have had to. Do you see that?" he asked. Speechless, I blinked my eyes twice. The seven year old girl disappeared and the monster he described took her place.

Michael's eyes softened; he released his grip and sat me down on my twin bed. He squatted down to my eye-level while clasping both of my hands inside his giant ones and whispered to me, "I taught you how to fight to stand up for yourself against those bullies, not to be their bully!" Michael softly shook his head, "Patricia, I know that you can do something about bullying in a different way. Unlike me, you have something way more powerful," he said, tapping my head softly. "Your brain."

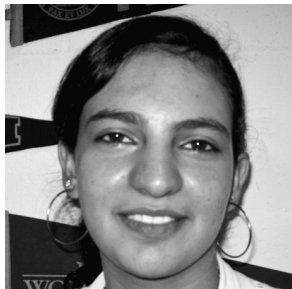
Michael made me vow to not get into any more physical fights. He said there is nothing wrong with fighting for what I am passionate about, but I had to learn how to use words. Ironically, Michael was telling me to follow a path completely opposite to his own life. Michael was known for his great physical battles and misconducts. Later that night, Michael said to me, "Instead of standing strong, narrowing your eyes, rolling your neck to the girls in your class, why don't you use those brains to take on the real bullies in society? Your classmates are not your true enemies."

Remembering what Michael said to me ten years ago is important considering I come from a place where 80% of the students receive free or reduced lunch and racial stereotypes are proven daily. Everyone from my neighborhood is struggling to survive in this world. We should not be fighting but supporting one another. Michael was the product of a cutthroat world that can bully the minorities and create monsters out of them. He inspired me to fight for social and environmental justice.

To be part of the change, I not only stopped bullying but try to advocate and empower others. I created a tutoring program—where the upperclassmen feel empowered to teach their fellow freshmen—and co-founded the Youth Empowerment and Activist team that fights for social justice for all. I plan to get a law degree in civil rights because I want to affect the lives of others, stand up for them and give them the power that they deserve, just as Michael did for me.

# Standing Tall

By Farhat Kohistani



Farhat arrived in the United States at the age of twelve. She is a very hardworking student in the top tenth of her class at South High, despite never having formal education before seventh grade. After school she spends her time tutoring and mentoring children at her apartment complex. She is also a member of the National Honor Society and the Principal's Advisory Committee. Farhat hopes to pursue interests in engineering and business. She was accepted to UMass Lowell, UMass Amherst, UMass Dartmouth, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and College of the Holy Cross.

The Statue of Liberty has been standing for almost two centuries representing hope and opportunity. This woman was broken into pieces and shipped from France to America, then was put back together and is now standing strong, in one piece, in New York City. I am much like Lady Liberty; I have been through many challenges and moved from one place to the next. At the end I am in my home with my family together again. Like Lady Liberty I stand strong and will forever.

When I was little, my father and brother had to leave Afghanistan to escape from the Taliban. I have broken memories of that horrific day, but what I remember is my mom, my sister and I crying because we were afraid that my father and brother would be killed. After that day we didn't see them again. We didn't even know if they were dead or alive. We stayed in Afghanistan for two years hoping to find them. Unfortunately, the war in my country got worse and my mother decided to move to Pakistan. After searching for them for two years, my mom decided to move to America. However, she always believed that she would find them.

When we moved to the United States, my family didn't speak any English and I only spoke broken English. Working together we were able to put out news reports and inform other countries about my father and brother. Every day we prayed for the day that we might see them again. With the help of the Red Cross we found them in Germany in 2003. Tears of joy dripped from my mom's eyes when we received the news. Just like the Statue of Liberty, after eight years, our pieces were put back together. That made me realize that I will never fail, no matter what comes my way. It made me a stronger person and made me realize that if I try hard enough and never give up my dreams will come true.

Although I didn't go to school in my country, I tried my best to be successful in America. Many people didn't think that I could make it because I hadn't gone to school before. But all their words made me work harder to prove them wrong. I worked hard at school and stayed after for extra help. I only had one goal to achieve success and that was to go to college. I did everything to make sure that I would be accepted into good schools. I graduated from middle school with A's and B's. In high school, I have taken honors and AP courses. I was not afraid to challenge myself. Currently I am taking AP Physics and even though my peers have tried to convince me to drop it, I refuse to. I know it's at times hard to understand the teacher but I refuse to give up. Education is a very big deal for me because women in my country were not allowed to be educated. I try my best in school, so I can represent all the women in Afghanistan and prove to the world that we too can be successful.

Like Lady Liberty I am standing tall and will continue to stand no matter what. My whole life was a storm but with the help of my family the sun shines on me now and the storm has disappeared. Nothing can erase the memories that I hold, but if I could erase them I wouldn't because those are the things that made me the person that I am today and I never want to forget that.

# A Man Yet Still A Boy

By Zing Nawl



Zing is originally from Burma and has been living in Worcester for about two years. He is a student at University Park Campus School and loves to play soccer, his favorite sport. He would like to study engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Most importantly, he wants to give back to the community that he feels has given him so much.

My dream is to study civil engineering here in the United States. I want to make things better in the world, to make a difference and contribute to this country that has taken me in. I am from Burma, a beautiful country and lovely culture but one under oppression.

At the age of fifteen my family and I had to make the heartbreaking decision for me to leave Burma. Burma has the lowest standard of education in the world; it was clear that there was no future for me there but one of poverty and lack, possibly enslavement and even death. I loved to study and education was very important to me. In my school, there were no computers and very poor equipment for students, and I was one of the fortunate ones. Others were not able to study at all because they must pay to go to school and pay for books and uniforms. My family wanted more for me; I wanted more for me. That is when my parents and I decided that I would leave for the United States.

I overcame many difficulties to get to the United States. My family saved some money and helped me cross the border into Malaysia. I went to Malaysia and immediately registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in order to come to the United States, but I had to wait eleven months. It was very dangerous to be in Malaysia because I was an illegal immigrant and if I was caught by the Malaysian police, they could send me back to Burma. Being sent back to Burma would have been a death sentence for me. I am sure I would have been killed by the Burmese military for “betraying” my country. It was very difficult for me to live in a different country and without parents as a fifteen year old boy.

In Malaysia, I had to work to provide for myself. I had to make decisions on my own as a man yet still a boy. In Burma, my parents always gave me whatever I needed, but in Malaysia, I knew that if I didn’t work, I wouldn’t be able to eat, so I worked construction for nine months. It was hard work – carrying heavy loads, drilling concrete, working in the hot sun – but I had no choice. After eleven long months I was finally able to come to the United States. I didn’t know where I was going, or what my life would be like here in America. I knew little English and knew nothing of the culture. It has been an intense and life-changing journey but I can finally say that I am now adapting to my life here in America. I am thankful that my American family treats me like their own son.

I left behind my family and my country in search of a better life. Saying goodbye to all that I knew and all that I loved was very difficult, but when I think now of my future and the opportunity to expand my education and fulfill my dream of becoming an engineer, it makes it all worthwhile. I still worry about my parents and often wonder when I will see them again. Sometimes I miss them but I always encourage myself to have a stronger heart. I know that my coming to America was a great sacrifice for them. Getting the best education possible and fulfilling my dream of becoming an engineer will make them happy and proud.

# A Teacher's Impact

By Fredery Munoz



Fredery has lived in Worcester since the age of six, after moving from the Dominican Republic. He is president of his class at Worcester Technical High School, where he studies Finance and Marketing. Fredery hopes to study business in college and has been accepted to UMass Amherst, Suffolk University, Bryant University, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Bucknell University, and Worcester State. His dream is to be the CFO of a Fortune 500 company.

While his steps were paced slower and his body became frail, the smile that shines across his face remained as bright as ever. It was a fall brisk day as his omnipresent figure made his way into the classroom. The look in his eyes had changed; still full of love and compassion, yet filled with a mysterious aura that I could not distinguish. As I sat at my desk dazed and confused he made his way to the center of the room and called for our attention. At once all thirty-two of the students fixed their eyes on the teacher and I could see that they too were as confused as I. His lips parted and they uttered the words "I have cancer." In an instant, thirty-two hearts sunk to the floor, and there were no dry eyes to be found. At that moment my grief was not for the pain of a teacher, but for the pain of a mentor, a friend, and a second father. As he made his way back to his desk his smile had once again found its way back onto his face. His smile reassured us that everything would be fine and that our beloved friend was strong and would never leave us. This man had a different approach to life than most; he was a sensible being whose humility was only over shown by his heart. This passion and sensibility had set an example for me to follow; the work of this man had changed not only my education, but my entire approach to life.

My first steps in school were rather slow ones; I was a young man in bliss with only distant dreams running through my mind. As fate would have it, I then met Mr. Mehringer who showed me that these elusive goals were not as distant as I had thought. These dreams were in my own hand and it was just a matter of learning how to grasp them. With this new found hope, I quickly dove into as many extracurricular activities as possible. I ran for class president, joined student government, and took on other political endeavors. His guidance and support helped me become an ethical and responsible leader with my school peers as well as in my community. In the few years that I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Mehringer, he served as my support system and guided me in my triumphs and failures.

As I began my fourth and last year of high school, his life sadly ended. His beloved smile will be forever in my memory, standing alongside me, providing guidance and an example to follow. Although his life has ended, the impact he had on mine has not; I feel a renewal of life within me. I feel the urge to succeed, that need to make something of myself; to chase and capture those once elusive dreams. When I look in the mirror I do not see a naïve young boy but a young man full of potential and intelligence. This experience has given me the will to persevere and become a successful and ethically responsible leader.

# How You Can Help

Thank you for taking the time to read the essays in this book. We hope you agree that the preceding pages tell the stories of some remarkable young adults. Each of these students was fortunate to have the support of a Bottom Line counselor throughout the college admission process. Unfortunately, the reality of the overall situation is quite daunting:

- ◆ There are 1,600 high school seniors in the Worcester Public Schools
- ◆ Only about 40% of them will enroll in a four-year college
- ◆ Out of the 40% that enroll, many less will actually graduate

Worcester students need better help getting into the right schools, and many of them need ongoing support while in college. Bottom Line's proven programming model addresses these formidable issues. We work with students to help them gain access to college and maintain a constant presence in their lives until they graduate.

For the last fourteen years in Boston and three years in Worcester, we have been able to offer a high-quality advising service at no cost to the students. Word has spread quickly among our constituents about the work we do and the demand for our program has never been greater. In Worcester, we have been able to serve more than 230 students during our third year. In the coming years, we hope to work with additional Worcester students to serve all those who seek our help.

To learn more about how you can help at-risk students get in to college, graduate from college and go far in life, please contact us or visit our office. We look forward to hearing from you.

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