

WHY I AM WHO I AM

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Beirut, Lebanon — my first home. I was born in the Middle East, in a small country called Lebanon. There is this misconception that the Middle East is filled with war and underdeveloped nations, leading people to believe that those countries are miserable and worthless. To be honest, there are a lot of problems in the Middle East, but regardless, the most mesmerizing countries are found there, like Lebanon. My house is right in the city, a 2-minute walk to the sea and a 1–3-hour drive from the mountains. In every corner of the country lies history, beauty, and life: the cedar-filled forests, royal blue sea, and tall mountains render the country’s scenery unique where it cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world. The night life does not sleep until 6 AM and the fashion scene is always innovative. It is really my dream country.

Unfortunately, with all this glamor comes its downsides. Once known as the “Paris of the Middle East,” the country now suffers from crippling corruption that has led to a detrimental ongoing financial crisis (Karem, 2022). Currently, nearly 80% of Lebanon’s population lives under the poverty line, the value of the national currency has dropped by 99%, there is an alarming power outage and education crisis, and the Lebanese parliament failed to elect a President this year (Husain, 2022; Khurma, 2023; Prentis, 2023). Foreshadowing Lebanon’s downfall, my parents decided to move us to the United States.

It was not until I moved to Massachusetts that I realized how differently I had been living. From crosswalk rules to constitutional rights, the order surprised me. In Lebanon, rules were not enforced, women were not seen as equal to men, and the government was, and still is, corrupt. Half of the country did not have access to

running water, electricity, proper food– these ‘luxuries’ were very expensive. It was then that my 12-year-old self grew sad about the situation back home. The US felt stable, safe, and comfortable. I remember thinking to myself: “Why do we not have this system in Lebanon?” Right then and there, I decided to become a lawyer to fix all the problems that the Lebanese people faced and to defend their rights in court. Since then, I have not changed my mind one bit.

My parents raised me to stand up for myself and believe in my capabilities. This led me to develop a strong mindset and an art for arguing in an articulated way. Whenever my parents have to call for a refund, I am always relied upon to successfully secure it. Even then, they had always tried to convince me to attend medical school and become a pediatrician. My choice to become a lawyer did not appeal to my parents at first. My mom expressed that she would be worried for my safety, sanity, and conscience as the field of law can be mentally and emotionally challenging. She did not want me to sacrifice my good heart for a career. My dad agreed with my mom but also wanted to support my ambitions. Once I began applying to college, many of those difficult conversations followed but it was obvious that I had made up my mind. My background fueled me to build the confidence and mentality that becomes a lawyer– us Lebanese people endure more than people see. Even after successfully moving countries, there is still the aspect of missing family, feeling like an outsider, and sacrificing happiness for stability. The fact that my parents let go of their life for my siblings and I to gain a better education and more opportunities still haunts me to this day. It pushed me to become a high achiever to make their sacrifice worth it.

Every day, I wake up making sure I am trying my best and doing the most I can to be successful and render my parents proud. While that might be a highly appreciated characteristic, it is also

exhausting. Knowing how much we Lebanese struggle is painful, which is why I vow to do something about it, not just for the Lebanese, but for every immigrant population.

So, I knew my end goal was law school, but what was I supposed to do in between for my undergraduate degree? I wanted to learn valuable skills that I could utilize in law school and make sure to have an added area of expertise. One day I researched “What do students going to law school major in?” and the basics popped up: Political Science, History, Psychology... I did not love my history classes and thought I could read about politics and psychology informally instead of studying them professionally. So, I was puzzled. But this is when I remembered the field of economics. I had taken AP economics my senior year and LOVED it. Understanding the trends of the economy due to people’s choices and pinpointing the reasons for its declines was fascinating to me. I thought this skill would help me understand why the state of Lebanon’s economy was the way it was. So, it was decided then: I would major in economics.

In addition, I liked the idea of potentially working in the White House, United Nations, or International Monetary Fund/World Bank after practicing law for a bit, so my economics degree would prove handy if I had to make that transition. This goal for my future profession was based on my idol, Amal Clooney. She is a Lebanese lawyer and works in the UN sector of women’s rights. After reading about her path and her accomplishments working for women in underrepresented countries, I was inspired to follow in her footsteps. My dream job then became working for the World Bank as the Lebanese representative all while trying to find a solution to the corruption using my legal background, after fighting for immigration rights in the US. So, since I figured I would end up working in an international organization, I decided studying international affairs would be beneficial and added that to my

degree. Diplomacy and world relations are interesting because partnerships and alliances between countries can sometimes indicate the status and wealth of a nation. So, after all that careful deliberation, had a plan for my college career.

As would be expected of a high school graduate, I was incredibly excited to start my first semester at Northeastern University. However, to my chagrin, less than a month before the beginning of the semester, I received horrible news. Per immigration requirements, I needed to submit documents to the US government to prove that I would be attending college and needed to wait for their approval before I was allowed to start. As this was the summer of 2020 under the presidency of Donald Trump, processing times for those applications had increased to around 15 months, when they would have usually taken a few weeks. As you can imagine, I did not receive my approved documents in time for the start of my first semester, nor even my second. Both semesters, I had to take part time classes from home when I had initially planned to graduate without having to take summer classes or follow a 5-year path due to co-op. That setback haunts me still today as I race to graduate in 4 years, forced to take classes during the summer and co-op with absolutely no break. At that point in my freshman year, I was worried I would not be able to take full time classes for the next year as well due to the 15 months turnaround time. However, I was not going to let my future be jeopardized after all my hard work. The Lebanese in me pushed through the frustration and decided to call the office that handles the legal paperwork (USCIS) every day and asked for help from congressional offices. And then what seemed like a miracle happened. On one of those days when I called USCIS, the person on the other end of the call explained to me that he was in the same position I was in. He passed me to a higher up, which was never done for me before. After a conversation I had with them, I grew optimistic. The officer I spoke to did not guarantee I would receive

my approval earlier but alluded to it. Finally, one summer day during July of 2021, I received an email informing me that my paperwork had been approved and that I was able to attend university. Never had I been happier. All of my depression, anxiety, uncertainty, worry, sadness, anger, and fear faded away– I was secure.

This event fueled me to over-perform even more. I needed to make up for that year I had lost for no real justification. I deserved to be a freshman like everyone else, but that was stripped from me. I could never forget that, for it was one of the worst years of my life. Regardless, I was finally allowed to move into university housing, to take a full load of classes, another luxury I had not foreseen as a privilege. This is when I realized I needed to understand the legal system more deeply, and so discovered the Law and Public Policy minor. I became an Economics major with minors in International Affairs and Law and Public Policy. Currently, I am a fourth year 4.0 student on co-op at BCG's legal team and will be on co-op at Wellington's legal team in the future. I hold leadership positions in 3 student organizations, including being President of the pre-law frat on campus. I volunteer on the side and always try to help people who face difficulties in their lives. I am proud of what I have done so far, yet still I feel I have not accomplished my goals. I won't feel that I have until I attend law school and fight for my people and country. So yes, 8 years after making my decision, I am still very much set on attending law school. Sometimes, I entertain the idea of leaning towards my economics degree and working at the Federal Reserve, but my passion for representing my country and aiding people who were in similar situations as me still prevails and overshadows any other possible career path. I know I would not feel like I have done the good in the world that I would do as a lawyer or diplomat. I still miss home, and one day, I hope Lebanon is stable enough for me to go back and raise a family there. I guess we will see where

life leads me to. Until then, these are my aspirations laid out. I know I have a lot on my bucket list, but this keeps me going amidst all the chaos. Once I am closer to my goals, I will look back and read this to assess what my past self wanted for me. Lawyer, Economist, and Diplomat – triple threat?

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