

Becoming a “Life Learner”

Thinking about my past, takes me back to my childhood memories and the times when my grandmother would pick up her small brown book and read me the “Aesop’s Fables”. She taught me how to be respectful to people, responsible for my actions, as well as strong and optimistic in difficult times. She helped me shape my personality, excel as an individual, and become the person that I am today! Born in Albania, she lived most of her life under communist domination where her family was persecuted for their democratic ideals. She raised her children and grandchildren in poverty and hunger; however, she always remained tough, hopeful and positive. After the fall of the communist regime, my family and I migrated to Greece seeking for a better life. Since then, my family’s strong ethics have been a guide in my excellence as an individual – demonstrating high academic achievements and emphasizing good morals and values. Their advice, love and support still remain a steering wheel to my personal and educational path in the United States. Now, more than ever, as a result of being away from my family, I continuously set an example for the younger generations in our community.

Since I was a child, I have always had two goals: to attain the highest education possible by becoming a “life learner” and to integrate my education into my life by sharing it with others. I have always felt that giving back to my community is a great gift and it makes me very happy helping those in need. I am mostly interested in volunteering opportunities that can be a boon for a person and shape his/her personality and good character. Getting involved in volunteering activities allows me to enjoy experiences that I might otherwise never have had, and gives me a sense of being invested in something bigger than myself.

When I first arrived in the United States three years ago, I had no friends, had no job and knew no one to help me. After 2 months of cultural shock and trying to find a school to pursue my degree in Business Administration, I finally got accepted at Monroe Community College. It was then when I started participating in different college activities and volunteering in the Rochester and the local Greek community. I became one of the mentors for the English Tutoring Program for Turkish, Ethiopian and Iraqi refugees, organized by the St. Louis Catholic Church, and the Saints Place. Meanwhile, I was an active member of the Student Organization of Women Leaders assisting abused women through the Alternatives for Battered Women and organizing fundraising events for the organization. Through our Greek Orthodox Church programs, I still enjoy mentoring our youth by promoting them the values of life, teaching them Greek language, dance and culture, as well as sharing my talents in order to improve our community. The past two years, I have often been organizing fundraising events that have been very profitable for our Church and Greek Festivals.

It’s not easy to leave your home, migrate in a search of a better life, adapt to a new environment, a new language, and a new culture. However, it is easier when you find someone to help you make your first steps; someone that is able to help you start a new life! Being an international student is an amazing experience that has taught me to be responsible, to be more open-minded and to see the world from a different and positive perspective. I have learned to appreciate what I have right now, but I know I still have many things to learn. There are many paths lying in front of me and all I have to do is follow the right one and watch out for the obstacles to be encountered. I know I will keep growing mentally and spiritually and I will do everything in my hands to keep going forward.

List of my community activities as of today:

- Fundraised \$11,500 for the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit by coordinating the *Souvenir Program Book 2009* (May 2009 – August 2009)
- Fundraised \$11,000 for the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit by coordinating the *Souvenir Program Book 2008* (June 2008 – August 2008)
- Teaching Greek language, dance and cultural elements to young children at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit (Fall 2006 – Present)
- Member, Management Club, St. John Fisher College (Fall 2008 – Present)
- Serve at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit annual festival (Sep 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009)
- Serve as a translator on behalf of refugees and/or students from Albania and Greece.
- Volunteered for the English Tutoring Program for refugees, organized by the St. Louis Catholic Church, and the Saints Place (Fall 2006-2008)
- Presented "Statistics of Sexual Abuse in USA" at the "Take Back the Night" event organized by the Student Organization of Women Leaders at Monroe Community College (April 2007).
- Member, Student Organization of Women Leaders, Monroe Community College, 2007
- Member, Global Union International Students Association, Monroe Community College, 2006
- Presented Team Building Management, to several sessions of English 101 course in St. John Fisher College, in behalf of the professor Lori Nolasco (September 2006).

List of my honors/recognition/awards as of today:

- Scholarship, American Albanian National Organization, St. John Fisher College, July 2009
- Scholarship, The Marion F. Hersey Scholarship, St. John Fisher College, May 2009
- Member, Dean's List, St. John Fisher College, Spring 2009
- Scholarship, American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, St. John Fisher College, Jan 2009
- Member, Dean's List, St. John Fisher College, Fall 2008
- Scholarship, Dr. Katherine E. Keough Memorial Award, St. John Fisher College, October 2008
- Scholarship, Transfer Achievement Scholarship, St. John Fisher College, September 2008
- Scholarship, Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, St. John Fisher College, September 2008
- Scholarship, International Business Council of Greater Rochester, St. John Fisher College, May 2008
- Member, Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society at Monroe Community College, 2007
- Member, Dean's List, Monroe Community College, Fall 2006 and Spring 2007
- Member, Dean's List, American College of Thessaloniki, 2004-2006
- Scholarship, "Michael Anagnos Schools Foundation", American College of Thessaloniki, 2004-2006