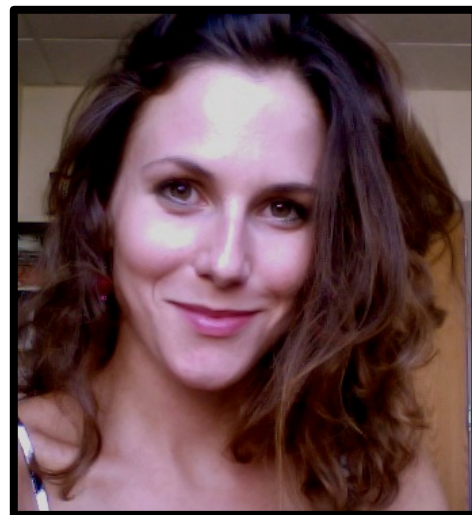


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My bank requires answers to security questions in order to access my account. One of them is, "What is your dream job?" Every time I type the answer, I smile: psychologist.

I smile because I have finally realized that dream! And, it seems such an unlikely outcome given the life I was born into. A child of two alcoholic parents, one with serious mental illness, I grew up in an atmosphere that was loving, but also often times filled with chaos and lack of resources.

Although I understood my parents were doing their best, early in life I began to seek out mentors – friends' parents, teachers, coaches – to find more of the the care and fulfillment I needed. In high school, I found an important mentor through my Talent Search counselor Steve McGrath, who helped me to navigate the path to college I was determined to pave. Neither of my parents earned a bachelor's degree, and at that time, I was nowhere near dreaming of becoming a psychologist – I just wanted to get to college. Steve helped me through every step of this process because my parents did not know how to lead me on this path. He helped me to decide which courses to take, and encouraged me to focus on my goals and the steps to achieve them. Through diligence in schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and sports I sought to show that I could create a different life for myself. When I was accepted to college my parents were homeless and altogether without resources. With Steve's help, I applied to 23 scholarships, received 13 of them, and obtained additional scholarships after my first year at University of New Hampshire (UNH.) Steve's mentorship was absolutely essential in this process – he helped me with scholarship applications, college applications, and figuring out financial transactions with UNH.

I felt immense gratitude to be in college given how unlikely it had seemed I would get there. Yet, it was difficult to have less class privilege than most of my peers and my family continued to lean on me for support. Again, it was essential that I seek out mentorship and support in order to meet my challenges. With the help of a therapist, and many other mentors, I transformed these experiences into empathy rather than bitterness. I also found a family of academic mentors and friends who guided and supported me each step of the way and who encouraged me to consider a doctoral degree in psychology, which I never would have imagined. One of those people was Randy Schroeder at UNH Student Support Services. Much like Steve in Talent Search, Randy helped me with every step of the applications to graduate school. He helped me study for the GRE (twice!), helped me write essays for all 13 applications to Ph.D. programs, and met with me countless times to make one of the most difficult decisions of my life – where to spend 6-8 years in graduate school. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to attend graduate school and I largely have Randy to thank for that.

Attending a doctoral program as a first generation college student who came from relative poverty has been an incredible honor and a formidable challenge. My family's financial and emotional difficulties continue, and I have learned a tremendous amount from supporting them while persevering through graduate school hurdles. My experiences with psychotherapy and with poverty led to my dissertation topic on how psychologists work with low-income clients; and my relationships with family members with mental health problems have inspired me to gain the tools I need to transform that suffering while working with clients.

As a psychologist. I am now humbled to be able to use my best qualities of determination, caring, gratitude, and genuineness to make myself available to others on their own journeys. I honestly have TRIO programs to thank for helping me arrive exactly where I want to be.