

Personal Statement

The doors of the subway closed before our eyes, separating us. It was only my mother and I. My father and my three-year-old sister were now on the train without us. It was our second day in Canada, without a word of English, or even a dollar in her pocket, my mother decided we had no option but to sit and wait where we were, hoping my father would come back for us quickly. I recognize this moment as the epiphany of the struggle of many new immigrants, just the first of many obstacles to be faced living a life diaspora, wherein the notion of home would be unclear. The feeling of helplessness and confusion that one is overcome with in an unfamiliar country would be the defining feature of my parents' struggle to adapt and give us a better life filled with opportunities, one they did not have. This struggle has been both a source of inspiration and curiosity throughout my life.

I was six years old when we immigrated to Canada, but over my lifetime my family and I have visited Iran several times, as nearly all of my relatives still live there. These trips reminded me of the life of restriction, and limited opportunities I would have been subject to as a woman in Iran. Freedom of speech, religion, and association, do not exist in Iran. In fact you are imprisoned, or worse if you speak up against the government. Each trip I was forced to endure a fraction of the social injustices that occur in Iran on a daily basis. In fear of being detained by the Basiji Militia, I experienced first-hand how it feels to be told how to dress, behave, and who to interact with. The reminder of the life I would have had engendered in me a sense of purpose to ensure that such social injustices do not occur in Canada.

The stark contrast in the rights afforded to citizens in Iran and Canada is what sparked my interest in the law. Naturally, when I learned about the law I grew to appreciate the law and democratic ideals that our legal system affords us and have been passionate about the law ever since. My Criminology studies further solidified my desire to be a lawyer. I was enamoured by the objectives and central tenets of the justice system, as well as the centrality of the system to the functioning of society. Additionally, by examining specific landmark cases such as *R v. Lavallee* [1990], I was able to appreciate the organic nature of the law. Surely I learned of the negative aspects of the justice system as well, such as the overrepresentation of minority populations in prisons, or the treatment of Aboriginal peoples throughout the justice system. Even so, this was a source of inspiration; I was inspired to be part of the change towards a more equitable justice system. My undergraduate studies have taught me to take an interdisciplinary approach to every issue, to dedicate the time to research the relevant issue thoroughly, and to critically analyze it in order to prepare an argument based upon facts.

It is also important to note the role my non-academic work has played in my life. My parents' degrees from Iran were not recognized here, which is why we have always struggled financially. As a result, I provided for my sister and myself by working as a salesperson, while at the same time, at my father's Immigration Consulting Office, without pay. Working twenty to thirty hours in a commission-driven sales environment, as well as an Immigration Office, while being dedicated to my academics, was exhausting. This had an adverse effect on my grades in my first two years, and led to a lesser course load in my second year.

Fortunately, I was able to find a balance between my academic goals and non-academic responsibilities, and thus achieve grades more representative of my ability in following years. Nevertheless I am proud to say I was able to persevere and graduate Magna Cum Laude and on the Deans Honour Roll.

I have grown and accomplished a lot since that unlucky day at the subway station. I believe that law is a central facet to the functioning of society. It can affect the whole of society by either solidifying the beliefs of citizens in the form of a law against a certain act, or prompting a cohesive response against particular aspects of the law, inaugurating its change. I wish to be a part of such a change. My interests, as a result of my experiences, lay in the protection of human rights. I aspire to play a role in ensuring that everyone is treated equally both within the justice system, and throughout society, firstly, in Canada, and eventually on an international scale.

I believe that my firsthand experience growing up in a developing country, the passion that I have for law, as well as my fluency in English and Farsi, make me uniquely suited to fulfilling this aspiration. As a minority and an immigrant, as an Iranian and a Canadian woman, my experiences have provided me with a unique lens, which I am confident I will carry through to the University of Toronto, and the legal profession as a whole.