

Danniela Nieto

*Si se puede mija* is something I have been told countless times throughout my life. It translates: Yes, you can daughter. I have been told this by my mother and father, and by my extended family, as I tell them the ambitious opportunities I set out to accomplish.

Growing up my mother had always taught us to be quiet, respectful, pleasant and most importantly, to depend on the men in our family. My father even emboldened this narrative with statements like “Oh well only if you were a boy” and “Mija it’s different because you are a girl”. I knew from a young age I would not stay on the path of being the traditional Mexican daughter abiding by my parents' wishes to be unseen and unnoticed. Being the eldest sister of four has proven to be an opportunity to transform the narrative of what it means to be a daughter in a Mexican household. As a young, progressive Latina, I want to break the generational norms that have been passed on from ancestral generation to generation. I decided to do the opposite of my parents' wishes to be the quiet, submissive, ideal Mexican daughter and be loud, strong-willed, and most importantly, independent. I do this to stay true to who I am and who I want to be but to also demonstrate to my sisters they can create their own storyline without predestined chapters. I continued my own story by being the first in my family to attend and graduate college.

The greatest accomplishment I have achieved in my life has been earning my Bachelor’s of Science in Public Health at the University of Arizona. As a first-generation college student, navigating academia was extremely difficult. I often felt alone as many of my counterparts had the financial support and guidance of their parents who went to college. This only made me want to work harder to prove that I deserved the same opportunity for an education. I worked 2 part-time jobs totaling a 40+ hour work week and enrolled as a full-time student. *Con todas mis ganas*, with all my desire, I wanted to show myself I could do it, and I did. I maintained a GPA above 3.0, lived independently away from home, and paid for every bill and living expense on

my own. My college experience truly exemplified my independence and resiliency in the face of adversity.

After graduation I moved from Tucson to Phoenix Arizona to work as a case manager in an outpatient behavioral health clinic. I work with those diagnosed with a severe mental illness by the state of Arizona. As a case manager, I am expected to not only maintain weekly contact with my members, but also assist them in navigating community resources that would benefit them such as: housing, employment, counseling, and educational opportunities. My time as a case manager has been nothing short of unexpected. There are days I am in the community responding to crisis calls involving an actively suicidal member, and other days I am coordinating with an inpatient team at a local hospital to plan a safe discharge home. Working in the behavioral health field has shown me the emotional perseverance I encompass, my dedication to helping others, and continues to be a job I love doing every day.

The summer of 2020 is truly where I found my passion in life. This is the summer protest began erupting throughout the nation due to the murder of George Floyd. I went through a strain of emotions including anger, sadness, disgust, fear, and most importantly confusion. I was disgusted at the lack of accountability and immunity law enforcement received and the racist rhetoric that had been encouraged in our nation. I wanted to do more for my community and spread awareness on the effects of systemic racism and how they affect people of color every day. I began working with a local organization, The W.E Rising Project, which held weekly community lead demonstrations to address systematic racism and police brutality.

On July 20th, 2020 while attending a protest requesting the Phoenix Police Department release bodycam footage of the night Dion Johnson who was killed during a traffic stop, I alongside hundreds of others were abruptly met with tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets.

The nonviolent protest erupted into a panicked crowd not able to see, hear nor breathe. I was angry that I was being silenced by physical means, but also by the fact it would later come on to the nightly news to say we had been non-compliant and the aggressors. This night along with many other emotionally and physically taxing demonstrations, held in the 100+ degree Phoenix summer, only incited my passion to continue the fight to protect those who suffer from the effects of systematic racism.

After thorough self-introspection and research, I found one of the best places to advocate for change and serve those of our community is in the field of law. I never once thought I would have the opportunity to turn a passion into a career. This is why I am choosing to pursue my Juris Doctorate, to not only push myself to accomplish another goal but to enact my passion into a long-term career that will be fulfilling in multiple ways. Once again, I am embarking on a journey without guidance, but if there is one thing I have learned in my 23 years of life, *yo, si puedo*, I can.