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Personal Statement

All my life, my mom would always say to be careful of the neighborhood. I lived in Washington Heights, but not the one Lin Manuel Miranda describes in "In the Heights."³ The Heights that I lived in was very unique and obnoxious. Washington Heights was so energetic that it is reminiscent of a Dominican Times Square. My apartment was right in the middle of this Dominican Times Square. The area I lived in wasn't what you called "friendly" and certainly not a place to raise children. I learned at a young age that the neighborhood wasn't any good when I paid closer attention to what was going on around me. However, I am who I am because of this neighborhood, and I'm thankful for that. Paying more attention made me realize how corrupt it was. Seeing local junkies smoking while shouting at no one was a daily thing. I had to learn to observe my surroundings and take detours accordingly. Living in the community taught me to be grateful and patient, for we never know what others are going through or have gone through. Everyone wanted to be at the top of the hierarchy and didn't care if they threw their lives away. This neighborhood was the definition of disastrous. At times I would think how unfair life is, how come my father has to work days without sleep, why my mother has to raise her children in this horrible environment.

I was getting sick and tired of living there. So, when I heard that we were moving closer to my father's workplace, I was beyond relieved. At first, I thought it was finally going to be safe for me and my family. However, I was completely wrong. Nothing changed except that we moved to an unbelievably small, 550 square foot apartment. This was extremely hard on us. 550 sq ft is unlivable, especially with a family of six. This was without all the furniture and everything. I don't know how my mother was able to do it for so long. We had to just accept our fate and learn how to compromise. We could be flexible with the problems inside, but we couldn't do anything about the problems outside. The neighborhood was practically the same or even worse because the entrance to our building was where a lot of gang meetups were. We lived right across low-income housing projects, and everyone would hang out at the closest grocery store, which would be under my apartment. The front of my home would always smell like weed, and it was chaotic. The people there didn't care who you were and would catch an aggravated assault just if you looked at them. This neighborhood was so out of control, that one time I experienced something that would change the way I looked at life. My neighbor tried to jump off our 6-story building. This one moment shook every bone in my body. I couldn't sleep that day. I wondered if this was all that was in store for me. I slowly started to hate this area. I noticed how my parents hated it and how they didn't want their children to witness this. I learned I needed to do better in life, so my family doesn't have to witness this anymore and so that my children don't have to go through what I did. Living there was like breathing through a plastic straw. It was getting harder, especially living in a 550 sq ft small hut. I needed to succeed in life so my family wouldn't have to struggle like this anymore.

So, I did whatever I could to progress toward what I wanted to be. I wanted to leave this life we were living, so I worked hard to accomplish many great feats. I did two years of coding with Google Code Next at their headquarters in downtown Manhattan. I taught myself a coding language called Python. So, I can use these skill sets to become a successful computer scientist. I also worked to try to improve my family's circumstances. Since I was 13, every summer I would work very long shifts at my uncle's business. It was a huge banquet hall with events every day. So I could work there every day, and I did. During this summer, I almost forgot what I was working so hard for. I was getting distracted by other people my age having fun during their summer. I made sure I didn't lose sight of what I was working so hard for. I took a summer internship with City College and did research with professors and college students. I'm thankful for Dr. Ronak Etemadpour, Ph.D., and Md. Rahman, my mentors, for helping me with my research. We created research to help clarify how water is distributed throughout California. California's droughts are worsening as reservoirs are shrinking, wildfires are becoming more dangerous, and water supplies are getting more tenuous. California isn't ready to face the consequences of the near future. Because of my rough upbringing and my past skills from internships and jobs, I learned many skills that changed the way I overcome my everyday obstacles. I learned skills in creative problem solving at Google Code Next. At Google, I learned this skill by using computer science to solve daily inconveniences. Throughout my journey as a self-taught programmer, I learned to be resilient. Even though I struggled to learn how to program in Python, I never gave up. At the Lincoln Manor Banquet Hall, I learned skills on how to become flexible and manage a group of people to successfully cater to our clients' needs at

the event. Finally, at the internship I did with City College, I learned how to be focused and flexible.

I want to keep learning, so I can become successful and help my family get out of the horrible environment I grew up in. I also want to have an impact on humanity and leave this world knowing I at least did something to contribute to the betterment of humanity. As Neil deGrasse Tyson once said , "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."