

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

possibly having a different life than that of my parents in Mexico and here in the US. It could be one where we can go on vacations, have reliable cars, and own a house of our own. Though college was so far removed from what I knew and understood, I just knew I had to go. My siblings and I were the first in our family to have the opportunity to graduate from high school and go to college, and I was determined to take as many opportunities as possible, no matter how scary it was. Still, at that point, I did not quite comprehend in what ways a college education would change my life.

I was a responsible and diligent high school student who was involved in sports and student clubs, but I had no roadmap, or college and career guidance. Nothing was laid out for me. Thus, I felt frustrated, confused, and lost. Also, I doubted my abilities and was insecure academically and socially, so, I never spoke in class and had few friends.

During my senior year in high school, my family moved out of the ranch, and I had to change schools. There, I enrolled in a UCSB college outreach program where I was able to seek representation in higher education, visit college campuses, learn about college, and most importantly, feel understood and seen. Still, I had no idea of what I wanted to do in the future as a career; I just knew I wanted to help people and understand society. Why were things the way they were in society?

After high school, I enrolled in the local community college; transferred to UC Berkeley (and majored in sociology); took two gap years (where I worked and built community); and then enrolled in graduate school to earn my master's and Ph.D. in Education. In fact: my dad was a groundskeeper at the university where I earned my PhD! Seeing him on campus gave me the motivation to keep going when things felt challenging because it reminded me of where I came from and how much my parents had done for me. If they could leave their home, their country, and everything they knew to start a new life here, then I could give it my best to complete my PhD degree. College is significantly different from high school, and I absolutely loved it. I met amazing like-minded peers; traveled abroad twice; studied what I was passionate about; became independent; learned to show up as myself in all spaces; and got to do things I never imagined I would do. It opened a world of possibilities for me.

After I became Doctor Guerrero, I founded FirstGenResilience, a platform where I empower and provide guidance to other students like myself first-generation college students with many aspirations and little guidance. To learn more about FGR, check out my Instagram page @FirstGen_Resilience and my website FirstGen-Resilience.com.

What got me from being insecure and timid in high school to someone who empowers others? In the following chapter, I will share some habits, mindsets, and resources that have helped me—and I encourage you to take them to heart as you begin your post-high school journey. They can help you not only navigate the road ahead, but also truly enjoy the process.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the author's high school experience compare to your own?
2. Have you ever felt out of place in certain environments? How did you handle it?
3. What habits or mindsets from the chapter would you like to adopt to help you in your journey?