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The World Health Organization's mission to eradicate disease and improve the quality of human life aligns with my passions and personal values, and it is with great honor that I am an intern at the World Health Organization. I could not be more thankful of such an opportunity.

It comes full circle to be immersed in the world's most up-to-date health issues and public health emergencies, especially being from a family that sought refuge because of a public health emergency in the first place. My family experienced the Cambodian Genocide, also known as the Khmer Rouge. They lived in poverty-stricken communities of Cambodia and risked their lives trekking miles to the border of Thailand to seek refuge from the genocide. The high mortality rates and poverty caused from genocidal violence of the Khmer Rouge made it an enormous public health emergency, much like other wars and genocides to this date.

My father as a young boy, his aunt, and cousins escaped the inhumane conditions in which they were forced to work and live. They were forced to hide their identities because of the fear to be killed for the religion that they believed or the culture that they practiced. They went through great lengths in order to come to the United States with the goal in mind that their future children and grandchildren would live in a world that is not obstructed by violence and filled with injustice. I seek for opportunities that will allow me to make this goal possible in honor of my ancestors who died from violence and discrimination.

My ancestral history, as briefly explained, sparked a passion in me to remedy the human condition. Being raised by refugees who were deprived of basic human rights and education, I felt that this internship experience is truly a testament that there is a silver lining in the cloud that forced my family to leave their home.

Never would I have imagined that working at WHO would be a reality for me, let alone ever visiting Europe, living in Geneva, and seeing the world's most urgent health issues being resolved first-hand. According to the American Community Survey data, only 14% of Cambodian Americans complete a four-year degree. And even among the U.S. born, only 1 in 4 finish college. That's half of the college graduation rate of Asian Americans in general. Given that, it is an enormous feat to have come this far in my academic career and be the first in my immediate family to soon graduate from a four-year institution. Nonetheless it all would not be nearly as possible without the privileged background that my supportive parents who value an education worked hard to attain: growing up in an English-speaking high income country, having the means to work multiple part-time jobs during the academic-year etc.



I feel extremely blessed to have been afforded all of the opportunities that are now around me. I know my ancestors could never have dreamed of working in such a place as I am now because of the limitations imposed on them from the contingency of the Vietnam War. The fact that I am working somewhere that can assist people who can relate to my story or the stories of my ancestors makes this experience so much more worthwhile.

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Pictures from my mother's refugee camp.

