The year I turned nine, my family and I fled war-torn Kosovo to seek refuge in neighbouring Macedonia and were met by heavily armed Serbian forces at the bottom of the hill that marked the border. They told us that the only way we could cross was by walking up train tracks that were riddled with landmines. Despondent, we had no choice other than to go back home to the chaos and violence. The moment when British Prime Minister Tony Blair appeared at the top of the hill to come to our rescue will forever remain frozen in my mind like a photograph.  He escorted our group to safety, personally giving my grandmother a hand as we walked up the hill to freedom.  After we spent six weeks in a refugee camp, we were offered asylum in Canada and we prepared to move to a country I knew nothing about – not even where it was located on a map.  As my family members are ethnic Albanians, I had first-hand experience of oppression and found it hard to imagine living in a country where I would be allowed to speak my native language and choose whatever line of work I wanted to do.  Fifteen years later, I continue to be grateful for being given a second chance and getting to know the normalcy of life in a peaceful, stable country. My lifestyle in Canada is a dream for most people in Kosovo, even today. I have had so many opportunities to succeed and have been able to travel to 20 countries in Europe, South America, North America, and Asia, which has given me insight into different cultures and political systems. The knowledge I gained has complemented my university education and heightened my appreciation of the rights, freedoms and access to justice I have as a Canadian woman. This has combined with my keen interest in th**e** negative and positive impacts that legal governing institutions have on social relations to direct me towards the field of law.

When I began my schooling at Capital Hill Elementary School in Vancouver, I was placed in Grade 5 with my age group even though I had only finished Grade 3 in Kosovo, where school starts at age 10. My teachers were impressed with my quick pace of learning and told my parents that I was a particularly bright and enthusiastic student. Learning English was a venture that I embraced, and within half a year I transferred from the ESL classroom to the regular classroom. I also had a fascination with exploring ideas and chose to join the school’s public speaking club, which gave me an additional means of improving my language and communication abilities. Public speaking was nerve-wracking, but it gave me a tremendous opportunity to express my abhorrence for injustices and inequities. The first speech I wrote and presented was on why peace mattered. I was a natural and compelling young speaker, and in Grade 6, was keen to attend a national public speaking contest that was generally restricted to Grade 7 students. As I thought the grade limit was unfair, I asked my teacher, Mr. Ricker, to request an exception for me. He did so on the basis of my maturity and strength as a speaker, and I was permitted to participate in the contest. Giving speeches and engaging in debates about political events such as 9/11 taught me to build arguments, respond to rebuttals, and appeal to audiences, and the talents I exhibited in these areas contributed to my conviction that law was the ideal profession for me.

 In Grade 8, I transferred to Burnaby North Secondary School, where I continued to push boundaries by becoming the first girl to play on the floor hockey team. There were no rules against girls playing – it had just never been done. I persuaded the coach to let me practice because I was very athletically inclined and had excelled in a number of sports. Eventually, he agreed to let me play actual games. The boys on the team weren’t comfortable with this and expected me to put them at a disadvantage. We were ridiculed the first few times we played, but I kept up with the boys, followed strategies, and scored my fair share of goals. The team came to see me as an asset, and the local paper featured me as the athlete of the month. The following year more girls began to try out for the team, so I had set a precedent. I had also provided an early indication of my passion for women’s rights, which I later clarified when I took ‘Philosophy and Gender Relations’and ‘Introduction to Women's Studies’**.** In recent decades, women have attained greater equality (from playing hockey in the Olympics to winning Nobel prizes to running countries) and accomplished remarkable feats. However, many women throughout the world continue to be subjugated and live without human rights protection. In the west, women still earn less than men on average, do not share all the privileges conferred to men, and are over-represented among poor and marginalized populations. In pursuing a career in law, I am inspired by the hope of supporting women’s advancement and welfare, which I could achieve by practicing Family Law, Labour Law, or Criminal Law.

In Grade 11, I completed my work experience credit at Greiner, Bethell and Company**,** a full service law firm in Burnaby. The office manager was so pleased with my work ethic, maturity and commitment to becoming a lawyer that he offered me a volunteer position as a general assistant with the firm after just four days. The following year, my teachers made it possible for me to attend classes in the morning and work at the law firm in the afternoon to satisfy one of my elective credits. I was able to successfully balance my studies, my extracurricular activities, and my job. After graduating from high school, I worked part-time at the firm as an administrative and accounting assistant for six years and then part-time at MacKinnon & Co. (Family Law)for two years. During that eight-year period I also worked part-time as a receptionist at two medical clinics. Since December of 2013, I have worked full-time at BTM Lawyers LLP as a legal assistant. I have thrived under pressure in all of these capacities and demonstrated an acute attention to detail as well as excellent organizational and administrative abilities. The positions I have held in law have enabled me to observe what lawyers do on a day-to-day basis, how they carry out their responsibilities to their clients,and how they handle the issues and complications that cases often present. This has given me a solid grounding for my pursuit of an LBO.

In 2008, I began my post-graduate general arts studies at Capilano University. My intention was to transfer to Simon Fraser University in order to earn a BA in Political Science, which would expand my understanding of the real-world implications of laws and policies and support my candidacy for law school. I was aware that a long haul was ahead of me, as I was working full-time and paying my own tuition. Nonetheless, I was excited and dedicated to my plan of study. Unfortunately, this plan was derailed when I fell victim to a car accident several months later. The physical trauma of the accident caused various soft tissue injuries and I was diagnosed with Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, a neurovascular condition that affects the upper limbs. I was forced to withdraw from school and focus on my recovery, which involved medication and extensive physical therapy. Doctors assured me that my condition was manageable and I would fully recover, but the process would be slow. As I prefer to meet challenges head-on rather than admit defeat, I made the decision to return to school in the fall, knowing that I would not be at my best academically. For the next few years, I attended classes, worked full-time, saw physical therapists three days a week, and participated in litigation processes to get a settlement for the accident. In addition, I continued to assist my parents with the care of my younger brother, as they both worked full-time. Those years were difficult and exhausting, and at times I found it hard to cope. This was especially true in 2012, when I again had the misfortune of being in a car accident that was not my fault, which aggravated my injuries. I persisted, as studying kept me focused on the future and I was looking forward to attending SFU in the spring of 2013. It is also important to note that going through litigation for my accident settlements will be invaluable in terms of my career, because knowing how stressful, frustrating and time-consuming the process is to clients will lead me to have more compassion for them.

In retrospect, I question whether I should have continued to study while I was recovering from my injuries, as my GPA is slightly below the standard requirement. However, the ability to overcome adversity that I have shown ultimately enhances my qualifications as a candidate for UBC Law School. My commitment to academic excellence is evident in the grade improvement I have achieved at SFU: my overall GPA is B+, but my third and fourth year grades are higher than my first and second year grades, and I anticipate earning A- in two of three courses I am taking this semester. I am currently at about 70% in terms of my recovery, and should reach 100% within a year.Consequently, I am confident that I will be able to meet the rigorous demands of law school while fulfilling my academic potential.

AlthoughI wish my circumstances did not requireme to applyunder the discretionary category, Iam certainthat they will make me a better law student and a better lawyer. My education and work have enabled me to develop the research skills, critical thinking skills, and analytical skills I need to practice law, but it is my tenacity and determination that truly distinguish me as a candidate. I have shown that I am a fighter who lets no obstacle get in her way and I take great pride in all that I have done and all that I am, including my independence and the fact that I have paid for my education entirely on my own without incurring a penny of student loan debt. Being accepted to the program and taking the next step towards making my dream a reality would be an honour. My long-term vision is that I will specialize in international law and prosecute perpetrators of crimes against humanity. This may be a lofty and far-reaching aspiration, but I have always believed that anything is possible providing that one has drive, imagination and a willingness to work incredibly hard. As the saying goes – “shoot for the moon and if you miss, you’ll land among the stars”.