

Hariprasad Thangavel

Born: India

Currently: University of Houston, Houston, Texas



I'm from an average middle-class family in India. My parents are not rich, so they were only able to afford a high school education for me. I needed to study hard and do well.

I was the top of my class in high school and my childhood ambition was to study medicine and help my community. Unfortunately, I fell ill during my final exams - I was diagnosed with liver disease and was in the hospital for more than a month. As a consequence, I didn't have the grades for medical school. My family was pushing me to study engineering, but soon after I graduated, I lost my grandfather to lung cancer, which only made my goal to study science clearer. I decided to push for a bachelor's in microbiology instead.

I remember a quote I heard from one of my mentors in the early days. He said, "the doctors prescribe medicine, but those medicines were actually discovered by a scientist." This pushed me to continue my studies in science. I got my PhD in Italy and

came to America to work at UT Houston, where I collaborate with MD Anderson Cancer Center and Baylor University.

In India and other developing countries today, there is a whole class of people who can't afford good medicine. This bothers me. I remember when I was 12 years old, my father had a heart attack and we couldn't afford the bypass surgery he needed, so we had to ask neighbors and charities for help. Private hospitals are run more like businesses than I would like to see. I want to do something about it - it triggered me to jump into science and then do something for society.

My longterm plan is to return to India and open my own research lab; I wanted to do something, like service, maybe something I can get just enough for myself and my family to live and give me peace of mind that I am helping the poor and those in need.