

Padmanee Sharma

Born: Guyana

Currently: MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, Texas



I come from a family of rebels. That's how I look at it.

My mom is Muslim, and my dad is Hindu, and I was born in Guyana, a very small third-world country in 1970. A Hindu marrying a Muslim broke religious norm; political circumstances in Guyana would not tolerate this, so our family was targeted and threatened. For our own safety, we came to America as immigrants when I was 10 years old.

We couldn't take any money with us when we left because the Guyanese government would know we were fleeing the country and that wasn't allowed, so we had nothing when we arrived. We moved to Queens and lived in a very small basement apartment where we all slept together in one room. Both of my parents had to work four or five jobs just to afford the very modest rent. A lot of times, I would take care of my brother because my parents

were not home; they were working all hours of the day.

In school, I discovered science and it was just the most incredible thing to me! It was a passion, something I couldn't get enough of. I spent all my time researching every class that I could take for free because we couldn't afford much. My teachers and my schools always helped me find the next opportunity, and I took advantage of every one I could find. Finally, I applied to and was accepted at Boston University, which paid most of my tuition, and my dad helped as much as he could. I loved Boston University and flourished

there - so much so, that I went to medical school and did my M.D./Ph.D. -- all at Boston University!

I never could have imagined that I could go from growing up in Guyana in those circumstances, to where I am today. I look back and can honestly say that no one back then could have told me I would be here today.

All I wanted was to do well and to repay my parents for the sacrifices that they made to give my brother and me a life outside the dangerous turmoil in Guyana.