

In hindsight, there are lots of things that influenced me to study marine biology. Growing up in a navy family meant that we moved multiple times even before I began elementary school, and easy access to the beach has always been a constant with my family. Eventually, when I was around 5 we moved to Honolulu, where my dad was stationed at the Pearl Harbor Naval Diving School. It was when we lived in Hawai'i where I was exposed to the ocean and biology, from healthy childhood obsessions with all things Spongebob and Finding Nemo to frequent take-your-kid-to-work days with my dad surrounded by diving equipment. Instead of dinosaurs or trains, I had toy sharks, shark-tooth necklaces, and diver guides on local species.

I have also, from a young age, understood the impact of human activity on the ocean. During the last year we lived in Honolulu, a sewage leak contaminated beaches and algal blooms made the water unsafe to swim in for months. Later, in the 4th grade my class made a presentation at a Virginia Beach City town hall meeting against proposed plans to begin oil drilling off the Virginia coast. After that, whenever adults asked what I wanted to be when I grew up I told them I wanted to be a marine biologist.

As of now, I have completed an Associates degree in Biology and am now a senior studying Marine Biology full time. I am currently looking for internship opportunities to get a better idea of how I want to specialize, as well as pursuing a position at the Virginia Aquarium to become a Water Quality Technician, which would be an amazing opportunity to get my foot in the door and gain experience working in an aquarium and educating the public. My end goal is to do conservational and educational field work with organizations like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and play a part in preserving natural ecosystems for future generations.