

Molly Lao graduated in 2009. She attended Brown University as a First-Generation College student and Sidney Frank Scholar, which funds the most financially needy students at the university. She says, “Of course, I had my doubts moving from a public high school in Fresno to a private university so far away in Providence. In fact, I was filled with tears on my first plane ride back east. But as I did in high school, I tried to keep busy and calm my fears with all the things that interested me, including volunteer work, sports, and leadership. I feel so fortunate I ended up majoring in sociology and political science, graduating with high honors, and meeting some lifelong friends and mentors.”

Her journey after graduating from Brown was not a straight path to law school. She knew she was interested in public interest work as a career, but was not sure in what area, so she took internships in various arenas. They included: philanthropy work in NYC advising donors on how to effectively give their money, government work at the White House as an intern for First Lady Michelle Obama, policy work in Sacramento as a Senate Fellow with the Senate Public Safety Committee and as a Policy Analyst at the Workforce Development Board.

Currently she is a civil rights lawyer with the nonprofit Legal Aid at Work serving clients throughout California who have been discriminated against in the workplace based on their race, prior records, and/or disability. She feels extremely blessed to get paid to work in my dream job. She is married to her loving husband, Kevin. They spend a lot of time with their two dogs, Aki and Sky, and a few community cats they have taken in. They have also helped care for Sky’s 7 puppies in the past year, since they found her when she was almost due (hungry and houseless). When they are not busy with their pets, they are hiking, playing sports, trying a new restaurant, and going on a new adventure in hopefully a new part of the world.

Molly reflects, “When I think back about my time at Sunnyside, I reflect on some of my most fun yet challenging experiences, my best friends, and empowering teachers and coaches I’ve met. At Sunnyside, I learned how to take advantage of all the opportunities I could, where I met teachers who encouraged me to keep trying, even when I felt like I could not. The teamwork and friendships I built as a 4-sport athlete (tennis, basketball, track, and lacrosse) have been so important to me, and I’m lucky to still be in touch with these teammates. I also definitely drew from my experience as student body president, where I worked long hours to set-up and fundraise for school dances and events, when I worked at the White House and the Sacramento Capitol. I had some of the best teachers (too many amazing teachers to name, but you know who you are), best coaches (Coaches Anderson, Carte, Farmer), and best friends: I was honored to be Maid of Honor, bridesmaid, and wedding officiant for some of my best friends from high school (Stephanie, Crystal, Jasmin), and helped another close friend, Chong, with her homebuying process. Coach Farmer, who was my basketball, lacrosse coach, and homeroom teacher, often repeated the quote “Adversity doesn’t build character, it reveals it” which I’ve remembered through hard times: getting bed bugs in New York City, living off a very little and stretching my money as far as I could in London, NYC, DC, and Sacramento, and not being with family back west during difficult times. It’s normal to doubt yourself, wonder if you belong, experience major imposter syndrome, and wonder if you’re good enough or ever will be. Just remember you are always good enough and you do not have to prove yourself to anyone but you, so do things you love. Life is hard and sometimes when it rains, it pours, especially when can feel like you might be straddling two different worlds of Fresno vs. privilege. Just remember that other people

around the country and world are lucky to get to know that piece of you and Fresno – the perspective, language, difference you bring – should always be cherished, and not hidden. The more you embrace what makes you “you” the more you will recognize your own power and light. Just remember to take some time to figure out who “you” are. I took 5 years between college and law school to get to know myself better and figure out what I wanted to do. I don’t regret any of those years I took, even if sometimes people asked me what I was doing. Take your time and arrive on your own time. You’ll be more beautiful for it. If you ever want to talk more about any of this, please reach out to me!”