

I was born and raised as an animal activist. One of my earliest memories of this was a protest in the parking lot of a KFC Restaurant – this would have been mortifying for most young girls, especially in our prepubescent years, but I protested KFC’s cruelty as loudly as any other activist that day. When I was ten years old, I converted to vegetarianism. My preference for a vegetarian diet has puzzled many people, and the usual response I receive is: “Well, one person won’t make a difference anyway.” This is where I smile, because I have experienced firsthand that one person *can* bring positive change. This is why the quality I am most proud of is my determination – when I set a goal, I will do anything to reach it.

Determination is a powerful quality: it has built cities, overthrown tyrannous governments, and it invented the wheel. Determination is the reason I have picked a UC school to pursue an education – it is the reason I ran competitive cross country for six years – it is the reason I have excelled in college through the completion of the Honors Program and my involvement in Phi Theta Kappa. My passionate determination is also how I helped save a marine mammal habitat in my hometown of La Jolla, California. Last summer, my friends and I formed a student organization to protest the dispersal of local harbor seals from their habitat. Due to a lawsuit brought against the City of San Diego, the City was ordered to disperse the seals within 72 hours of July 20th, 2009. The City planned to use recordings of barking dogs to scare the seals away, forcing them to migrate and leaving them vulnerable to predators or exhaustion. My friends and I organized two protests that week: one at the courthouse where the case was presiding and one at the La Jolla beach where the seals live. After protesting at the courthouse, my friends and I marched to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s San Diego Office. While there, we urged one of his aides to send a message to the Governor asking him to pass Senate Bill 428 – a bill which, come January 1st, 2010, could effectively protect the seals’ habitat and would give the City of San Diego the right to decide how it wanted to use the beach. We found out later that day that due to our urging, the volume of our impression upon the community, and the media attention driven towards the subject because of our protest, the Governor signed SB 428, thus saving the seals from their 72-hour doom.

Next day's rally celebrated the victory, and over two hundred people attended. I was named an official spokeswoman for the seals, and I was later interviewed by local papers and the Los Angeles Times. This experience proved that a determined person does make a difference in the world – and that all you have to do is try. This experience inspired me to follow a career in journalism or law in order to advocate for issues I believe in, and it also taught me an important lesson: That being proud of your convictions is rewarding.