

## 2013 Ripley Hunter Essay Contest Winner: Sibina Mehdi

### Iran: Finding Life within the Country and Myself

I could flip the pages of a book with my hands. I could cut a piece of paper with my hands. But I never thought human hands like mine own could reshape a mountain the same way they had the Alborz Mountains in my family's hometown, Tehran, Iran.

I was young- only seven -when I traveled with my mother to Iran to visit my family. One of our first spots was the Alborz Mountains. At the peak was a restaurant, but before we could reach that we'd have to ascend a couple hundred steps.

"Piece of cake," I scoffed the first few steps up the towering mountain. Not long after, maybe even a dozen steps along the way, my legs were starting to feel heavy. But what more could I do than can-y on.

What I learned along the way was that these mountains were shaped into steps through terrace farming. I wasn't surprised- honestly, I thought I'd seen better. But what did throw me off guard was learning that mountains even larger than these were reshaped through terrace fanning hundreds and hundreds of years ago. "With what technology?" Certainly not today's, but varying civilizations, from the Incas to the Chinese, developed ways to reshape mountains, mostly to help them grow rice and prevent flooding by carrying storm water and nutrients down each step.

Soon enough, the heat was intensifying and my legs felt more and more swollen. If it took this much to climb, how could anyone transform these mountains?

The last couple minutes, as with any obstacle, were the hardest. By that time, I was willing to crawl the few remaining steps. But three more steps, two more steps, one more step, and I'd finally reached the entrance of the restaurant.

It struck me that they placed this restaurant so far up as a tactic. If I hadn't been motivated, even if it was for food, to climb this far up, I would've never experienced the awe- inspiring view of the country.

The streets were miniscule, the people were even smaller, but everything was greener and sharper and livelier. I used my fingers to play with the wind I breathed in. I was open to the most beautiful parts of the country, and it amazed me that despite being very populated, it was able to maintain a lively, fresh green.

Defeating this obstacle not only gave me a new understanding of the world, but allowed me to discover the power within me, not only physically but also emotionally. I'd pushed myself every step of the way, and even in my weakest moments I endured. In learning the history of the mountain, I discovered ambition's potency- the strength within will power and enthusiasm. And in standing on top of that mountain, where everything seemed much smaller, I found something bigger within my own self- an interminable vitality- and within my hands I found power. I understood the capability, within all humans, to persist despite losing motivation or encountering any of life's hindrances.

With all I'd seen and all I'd done, I, for once, felt alive.