

In Their Name



All LSU College of Science alumni, the Sukkar siblings—Salim ('86), an anesthesiologist in Baton Rouge; Sam ('88), a plastic surgeon in Houston; and Adlah ('98), a pulmonologist and ICU physician in Annandale, Virginia—have created the Julie and Ma'Moun Sukkar Science Scholarship as a tribute to their parents. Sam and Adlah share how their mother and father impacted their education and careers, and what they hope the recipients of the scholarship honoring them will remember about its namesakes.

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My parents sacrificed a lot for us but also for their community in the name of doing what is right.

— Adlah Sukkar

Describe your upbringing. What kind of example did your parents set for you?

Adlah: Our father is from a prominent, successful, but most importantly, an honorable family in Damascus, Syria. In our household, there was never a question that education came a close second to conducting ourselves in a manner befitting of our family name. Our parents showed us every day what it meant to be hospitable, kind, and to walk the walk. Our family home was always open to anyone and everyone, be that Bosnian refugees in need of a home to students at LSU in need of mentoring. We sometimes jokingly referred to our house as Grand Central Station because it was always bustling with new visitors. This was both inspiring to watch and at times frustrating, if I am honest; my parents sacrificed a lot for us but also for their community in the name of doing what is right.

Sam: Being the son of a first-generation immigrant to the U.S. played an integral role in our upbringing. In a way we had the best of both worlds: a very Anglo maternal side, as well as a different, foreign paternal side. We fit in, but we also did not. What seemed to be a liability at times ended up being the greatest asset we could imagine. Anyone who has spent time with my parents realizes they are interacting with people who have a high level of intelligence. While we grew up comfortable, there was not always an abundance of

financial capital, but the educational and social capital in our family and household was overflowing. Early travel allowed us to experience other cultures, countries, and ways of life. For me at least, this stoked a fire deep inside to succeed. Many motivational talks and life discussions occurred at the kitchen table, and while close tabs were kept on us during our developing years, we can see now why this was so important.



Siblings Salim, Sam, and Adlah created the Julie and Ma'Moun Sukkar Science Scholarship in honor of their parents.

How was higher education viewed within your family?

Adlah: As a female, my parents were especially adamant that I achieve at the highest level. My father always said that I needed to empower myself with an education because I did not want to be beholden to anyone. He used to ask me, "Do you want to be the cheerleader or the one they are cheering?" Once I started at LSU, they continued to encourage me to be my best. I was awarded the Chancellor's

Alumni Scholarship, which covered tuition, room, and board, as well as giving me an on-campus job. I joined the Honors College, worked in a research lab, and took on a second major in large part to their encouragement and support. My dad still asks, "When are you going to cure cancer?"—always pushing for more!

My mother is the unsung hero in all of this, so unbelievably smart and so humble. She was always there for me, be it pushing me to improve term papers, driving me to the library for research, or pulling me up when I felt I just couldn't work any harder. In terms of her own education, she showed us what determination and perseverance looked like. She never gave up on her dream after putting it on hold for so long to work a full-time job and raise us. She graduated from LSU at the age of 52, and we walked across the stage together. It was the honor of my life.



Without our parents' guidance, we would have never had the environment that was so crucial to allow us to reach our best potential.

– Sam Sukkar

What does this scholarship mean for your family?

Sam: It is important to celebrate our successes. A realization of who this success stemmed from is also important. Without our parents' guidance, we would have never had the environment that was so crucial to allow us to reach our best potential. Sacrifices and compromises to my parent's lives were made for our benefit. Some of my parents unfulfilled dreams were never allowed to die; they passed them onto us, and it has been my honor to help bring them to completion.

In many ways, my brother, Salim, was the trailblazer. When I got to LSU, I had it easy, because he had already taken the classes, so I knew what to do to be successful in the College of Science at LSU. The torch has already passed to the next generation as my two older children are studying at LSU.

I see the scholarship as a family legacy that will hopefully live on in perpetuity. This commitment sends the same message of education, hard work, and giving back that my parents instilled in us. Since our story began with our parents and how they met at LSU, what could be better than to establish this in their name?

How has your perspective on your career in medicine changed this year?

Adlah: I think this pandemic has shined a light on the value for science, well-designed studies, and the art of medicine. We have had to make very difficult decisions with limited data. It has become abundantly clear that we are in need of talented and dedicated experts in the field of public health; our public health departments around the country have been underfunded and understaffed for too long. So much of what we do in medicine is reactive rather than preventative and proactive. I have realized that I have to play a bigger role in

educating both my patients and the public in general. To the aspiring doctors out there: it is true that medicine is a calling. It is hard every day. It is also rewarding every day. I have never been so grateful to be a physician.

Which lessons that you learned from your parents do you want to pass on to Tigers?

Sam: Well, how much time do we have? We could always count on my dad to keep us in line, so how about a few lines from the Book of Jiddo (“grandfather” in Arabic):

1. When we tried to justify an ill-perceived act that they disapproved of, we would hear: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”
2. When we felt like we weren’t measuring up: “The cream always rises to the top.”
3. When the mountain seemed too high: “Nothing worthwhile in life is easy. If it were, anyone could do it.”

My parents are givers. Find your own way to give back. It doesn’t really matter what the currency is—social, financial, or faith—the important thing is to give back in whatever way that you can.

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