Jennifer Sotz:  
Fearless in the Face of Uncertainty  
Alumni of the Month * Lighthouse Class of 2013

Throughout high school and college, Jennifer (Jennie) Sotz was determined to become an immigration lawyer. Her ambitions were inspired by her own experience migrating to the United States from Honduras at 10 years old. Like many new arrivals to this country, Jennie and her family struggled socially, emotionally, and economically during their first few years in the U.S.

Without legal status, it was difficult for Jennie’s mom, a single mother raising a family on her own, to find stable work or housing. As a result, Jennie attended six different schools in her first six years in the United States. It wasn’t until she came to Lighthouse in 10th grade that school became a source of stability and hope for her.

“When I changed schools in 10th grade,” Jennie remembers, “the welcoming atmosphere and school community at Lighthouse helped me gain trust and
self-confidence. I became more open with my teachers because I observed their willingness to support me.”

By her junior year, Jennie was earning A’s in all of her classes at Lighthouse even though she was still officially classified as an English Language Learner. Her academic achievement was the product of incredible determination and courage. She consistently sought out help from her teachers and was unafraid to speak up in class despite her noticeable accent and limited vocabulary.

“I managed to overcome my fear of talking in front of people because I saw that even though English wasn’t my first language, I could often communicate better than those who spoke the language from birth. When I realized that I had this potential, I began to ignore any negative comments… Now I am able to advise others to trust in themselves and not allow hurtful people to bring them down,” Jennie says.

Jennie graduated from Lighthouse in 2013 and decided to attend San Francisco State University. While her immigration status prevented her from receiving any financial aid from the federal government, Jennie managed to pay for college through Cal Grant, several scholarships and work.

Her employment in college included a fellowship at Catholic Charities representing clients before the Department of Homeland Security. Based on her success helping people apply for immigration relief, Catholic Charities soon hired Jennie as a legal assistant, and her journey to becoming an immigration lawyer seemed like it was well on its way to becoming a reality.

But just as Jennie was getting ready to graduate from SF State in the 2016-17 school year, Donald Trump got elected and Jennie found out that she was pregnant. Both of these events ended up steering her away immigration law and towards other career options.

Here’s what Jennie had to say about this: “One of the reasons I changed careers was because the tech field pays better than the immigration work I was doing. If I’m not able to provide for my...
daughter, I know she will suffer. Also, with all the changes in the law (in the Trump administration) it got too stressful for me. I worried that making a mistake could cost someone their visa or chance to be in this country.”

Once she decided to change careers, Jennie signed up for a technology training program called dev/Mission. Here she learned about hardware, coding and other skills needed to enter the tech sector. For the past few months Jennie has worked as a tech support specialist at La Clinica De La Raza in Oakland. Her favorite part about her new job? “Helping the La Clinica staff with their technological issues gives them more time to be with their patients,” she reports.

In January, Jennie will be starting a new job at Cisco Meraki in San Francisco where she will be tasked with providing client support around product licensing. In time, she is hoping to become a network engineer there.

Jennie’s advice for other Lighthouse students: “be your own resource. Look for things that interest you, and don’t be afraid to take on any opportunity that you can. Eventually, it will be worth it!.”