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There is a place nestled in the center of New Jersey called Millstone Township. Few people have heard of it, and for good reason. Millstone is a rural town dominated by large houses juxtaposed against small horse farms, but contains little else. The few businesses that call it home are small and spread out, making Millstone more of a dot on the map than an actual destination. But despite the mundane appearance of this quiet town, it will always hold a special place for me because it is where I spent seven years of my life.

My family moved to Millstone Township just before my seventh birthday. I was delighted to have my small, one-story house replaced by a beautiful two-story home, much of which was designed and built by my own father. For the next seven years I had a wonderful childhood. I lived in a great house in a great neighborhood. I made amazing friends who shared my interests, made me laugh, and always had my back. I excelled in school and was greeted by friendly faces every day. But like all good things, it eventually came to an end.

In the spring of my seventh grade year, there was a day that changed the rest of my life. I remember everything about that day: where I was, what the weather was like, and even what I was wearing. I was sitting in the car with my parents when my father turned around with a solemn look on his face and informed me that he had been laid off. After hearing this news, I did the last thing anyone would expect: I laughed. I did this because I thought my father, a chronic jokester, was simply messing with me. But he wasn't, and as the truth set in the laughter disappeared. At that point, I didn't know the ramifications of that one moment, but now I realize it was where it all began.

Months later the job search was not going well for my dad. In the state of the economy, there was little demand for a man in the homebuilding industry, which had been hit particularly

hard by the recession. After searching tirelessly, he finally acquired a job in Richmond and it quickly became clear that this was the place I would soon call home. After my eighth grade graduation, I said goodbyes to my classmates, many of whom I knew I would never see again. Only a few months after, I drove away from my beautiful house in Millstone for the last time and began my new life in Richmond.

Only two days later, I began attending Godwin High School in Henrico County. My first day at Godwin was a huge shock for me. Not only did I have the standard freshman problems of adjusting to a new environment with new expectations, but I had to do so without the support of my friends. While I slowly adjusted to life at Godwin, I had trouble making friends in the new school. Looking back, I realize that my problem wasn't an inability to make friends, but rather a lack of the desire to do so. As I viewed it then, my home was still in Millstone and any time I spent in Richmond was time spent in a foreign place. Rather than embrace the change, I shied away from it, only wishing to return to New Jersey live my old life again. My apathy towards life in Richmond not only manifested itself socially, but also did so academically. After making near perfect grades in elementary and middle school, I began receiving B's regularly on my report cards. To put it simply, my first few months in Richmond were miserable.

My fortunes started to change in October of my freshman year when I joined the indoor track and field team at Godwin. Initially my intentions were to use track for conditioning and try out for soccer in the spring. Running was not something that I enjoyed initially, and for good reason. But as I got in shape and began running faster times, I realized that I enjoyed track more than I had ever enjoyed soccer. When the spring came around, I didn't even think about soccer anymore; I was now a full-time runner.

I see my first season of track as the turning point of my life in Richmond. The change was not instantaneous, but after this season my social, academic, and emotional states began to slowly improve. I met friends on the track team with whom I could finally connect. With my new friends, my insecurity and sadness were gradually replaced by confidence and a state of well-being as I figured out my place in the school. With this shift in my emotions came a shift in my grades as I realized that my earlier performances were not good enough for me. In essence, I started to become the person I had been in New Jersey.

Fast forward three years and I am hardly the same person that walked into the front doors at Godwin as a freshman. Once shy, introverted, and without friends, I am now greeted by smiles, waves, and friendly faces wherever I turn. Once struggling academically, I have now risen to become the valedictorian of my class after making straight A's for my sophomore and junior years, as well as the first semester of senior year. Once a reluctant participant on the track team, I am now a team captain with three years of varsity letters and multiple All District and All Region medals. These changes did not happen instantly, but over the course of three years I became the person I am today; a person I am exceedingly proud of. I attribute my successes to that fateful first season on the track team, which gave me the desire to further myself and my accomplishments. From this experience I have learned that the best way to adjust to a new situation is to be as involved as possible, because it was this involvement that helped me find myself again.

My parents have asked me countless times if I would, given the chance, go back to living in New Jersey. For the longest time, my truthful answer was "yes." But just as I have grown in other ways, I have come to realize that my home is now in Richmond. While I will always cherish the friends and memories that I gained during my years in New Jersey, I know that I

would not be the same person had I not moved to Richmond. At one point I viewed this move as the worst thing to ever happen to me, but I now understand that I could not have been farther from the truth.