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GRRC Scholarship Application Essay

Two Thousand Miles Across the Lunch Table

*Ding. Ding. Ding.* The lunch bell sounds. In simultaneous movement, seventeen hard plastic

chairs scrape against worn linoleum and the class files out. Kids are relieved and ready for a break with

friends and food. One kid hangs back though, feeling stress and worry. He files out of the class last,

afraid that someone will notice how he shies away from people and eats lunch alone- lonely and afraid

to reach out to anyone. That kid is me, four years ago, two thousand four hundred and nineteen miles from where I am now.

If anyone had told me how far I would come, both in terms of location and my own maturity, I would have probably stared at them in disbelief, and maybe said the proverbial, “Yeah, right.” My social inhibitions started in middle school. My budding teen self- sore from bullying and the social stigma as an intelligent, liberal and awkward kid in a rural conservative community- had developed a social handicap: that was the assumption that I was unlikeable. At the time, I felt like two different people- the smart, funny individualist who starred in *OLIVER!,* won Show Jumping Events , helped run the family horse farm and riding school and hiked in the Rocky Mountains; the other a timid, rejected and angry kid desperate for someone to just reach out to me.

But it turned out that moving to Virginia has been pretty successful for me. I wasn’t the most outgoing kid when I started high school, and I was sure that moving was going to be really awful because of this. However, moving actually gave me a chance to improve my social skills and to get involved in my community. In fact, relocation was probably the best thing that could happen to me in high school.

When I started high school, I believed my stage was set- a bit of a nerd with very few friends unfit to face the injuries of high school. Fate had other, wackier plans. Freshmen year, I made some acquaintances but mostly kept to myself, and ate lunch alone if I could, fearing that if I got too friendly with anyone they would see my various eccentricities and reject me. Next year Mom and I moved fifty miles north to Missoula. I enrolled in another school- and rolled back to square one. This time, I reflected upon my previous year, faced my fears and forced myself to approach more kids. When fellow students asked me to eat lunch with them I did. I interacted with people, signed up for clubs, and made some noise around the school. By the end of my time at Hellgate High School, I made some great friends, became a good friend, and was pretty happy about the way I handled myself.

Next challenge: Senior Year. Mom and I moved across country to Richmond, Virginia last July. Thrown into yet another new high school I was determined to make this year my personal best. I chatted with people, introduced myself to everybody, made the effort to learn names, and actively sought to associate myself with those I liked and admired. I got involved in service clubs. In this way, I’ve quickly been accepted into the community of students and staff. I had no idea how to accomplish this back in that rural middle school. I only learned though repeated trial and error and effort.

Moving gave me a second chance at defining who I am, and how I fit into my community. To other students moving into the Richmond area: this is your time- be exactly the person you want to be! I can also say that what you lose in friends and familiarity with your former school, you will gain in perspective. Relocation gives a wide-view picture of people and society that can only come from travel, and has a curious way of making you realize what does and does not matter in the spectrum of high school (a hint: respect, in all its forms, is huge), so embrace this.

Although I consider moving to have been a successful, positive experience, it has also been difficult. When I got into the school system, my classes were far more simplistic than I was taking back in Montana, and I had to work with/beg my councilors to change some of my classes.

Moving is really expensive. My family didn’t relocate because we were moved by an employer; we relocated because of a dream- my Mom’s dream to become a teacher. Mom sold all her horses and her riding school then applied and was accepted to an alternative route to teaching licensure program called EducateVA, in Virginia. We targeted Richmond as the city of best fit, and in the summer of 2011, packed all our stuff into a U-Haul and moved across. We have been living off Mom’s savings ever since. I can proudly say that my mother now has her Language Arts and Theatre Arts endorsements and is mid-way through her ESOL endorsement. My Mom will get to do what she came here to do- teach Virginia’s children, and I’ll be able to attend a good Virginia university. Unfortunately, my financial situation means that I now have an acute need of financial support.

A special note about Richmond: This city is definitely worth moving to. I was so surprised to find the hip, happening town that Richmond is! Be sure to get to the Byrd theatre, check out Science Museum and the VA Museum of Fine Arts, and then go swimming in the James.

Through this relocation, I’ve slowly been able to accept and understand myself; a critical

step towards accepting, understanding and working with others. I notice now how valued my distinctive

contributions and global viewpoint are in class and among my friends; attributes I intend to keep cultivating as I work my way through college.