

### Home is Where the Heart Is

"Home is where the heart is." As a girl who was constantly changing homes, it took me a while to understand the meaning of this. Relocation is a difficult and life-altering process, and I am no stranger to it, having moved five times and attended eight different schools. It all started in 2001 when I moved from my hometown in Westchester County, New York to the glacial Canadian city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. While this was not the most shocking of changes for a two-year-old, it marked my first step in the migratory journey that is my life. After a comfortable six years in the freezing tundra of Canada, my dad sprung on us that we were moving back to the US. While I was not too happy to be moving to the suburbs outside of Richmond, Virginia, as an eight-year-old girl, I did not really have a choice in the matter. My heart truly broke in sixth grade, when my dad told me we were moving to the gator-infested wetlands of Windermere, Florida. At that point, I had already settled into my life in Virginia; so, unwilling to leave my friends, I kicked and screamed all the way there; but unfortunately, I was packed into a box and shipped off to the down-under of the US. After a depressing two years in the sweltering heat of the orange state, my family decided to take pity on me and moved to Cold Spring Harbor, a trendy town on Long Island. I enjoyed the time I spent there, until, less than a year later, my parents gave me the "great surprise" that we were moving back to Richmond. Resigned to my fate, I packed my things and moved to my current house. At this point, I had already finished ninth grade in New York and had enough past experience and maturity to "gracefully" relocate and change high schools.

Most people, having never moved from their hometown for their whole life, often ask me why I have relocated so much. Many assume that my parents had jobs that made them move us around a lot, but the truth is far from the simple consequences of an occupation and rests more in my dad's childish tendency to get bored easily and continually seek adventure. To fulfill his unending curiosity and restless nomadic spirit, my dad decided to drag our family around the North American continent. While it sounds like an exciting life, and everything truly was a new experience, moving around so much was very arduous on a girl who had not yet found out who she really is. The frequent relocating from place to place put a heavy burden on the shoulders of myself and my family; keeping up with school and a social life became very difficult, and any feeling of stability quickly collapsed. I sometimes feel like I was cheated- never settled enough to pursue my own interests or develop my talents.

By the time I was in high school and was faced with the prospect of moving again, I had adjusted to the constant relocating and was actually looking forward to getting a change of pace. Also, since I was moving back to Richmond, where I had already made friends and was familiar with the environment, I had an easier transition into a new high school. Having a few friends from middle school that I kept in touch with in my new high school eased most of my fears and I quickly accommodated to my new environment and began exploring it further. That is not to say that I did not face some difficulties the sophomore year I moved. Since I still did not know the majority of people, I was quite quiet and some other students perceived me as gloomy or assumed I hated them- which I eventually found out from some of my now-best friends who were initially those people, and the irony honestly gave me a good laugh. It took me about a year to adjust to the social aspects of the new school, and by the start of junior year I felt comfortable with where I was and found friends who I would not trade for the world. On the other hand,

adjusting to the academics was a bit more difficult. I decided to jump into the IB program at my new high school, and since I had not been in it for ninth grade, I started off already behind. I struggled to adjust to the different academic style, but often fell behind with loads of work. I would have drowned in the endless mountains of schoolwork and the constant critical thinking almost gave me an aneurysm, but I was lucky to have understanding friends and classmates to help me adjust. I was also lucky enough to have some of the best teachers throughout my educational career, who understood that I was struggling with being in a new environment and did their best to help.

If there is anything I have learned from my relocating journey, it is that you should always reach out for help when you need it and simply embrace the positives of being in a new place, surrounded by new people. If I could talk to my younger self, or simply another teenager undergoing the same thing, I would tell her to accept and take advantage of all the opportunities that come with being in a new place. Go meet new people and form new relationships, but never forget the good friends you already have. Explore the place you have just moved to; you would never realize how many amazing places you can find if you just go out and look. If you are struggling, do not shut yourself in; instead, ask for help- even though most people will be strangers to you, they usually will not bite and are happy to help. In the end, you will come out a greater person since you have seen more of the world and you might just find that you cannot wait until you get to see the rest of it.

While moving around was incredibly demanding, I am grateful and fortunate that I have had these experiences. I was able to meet new people with different ideas, making unforgettable and irreplaceable friends. I reveled in the different cultures and places I encountered, learning something new with every experience and meeting. I was able to become more adaptable and

open-minded, traits which I feel will be invaluable to me in the future. And now, just like my dad, my restless craving for adventure and new things cannot be quenched. I yearn to meet more people and travel to new places. I want to hear unique ideas and immerse myself in other cultures. Looking at others who have spent their whole life in one place, I now appreciate the diversity I was exposed to. Ironically, I now feel restless, being in the same place for more than a couple years. I realized, that for me, home was never a single place, but an immeasurable assortment of places, cultures, and people. My heart will always rest in the places I have been, the cultures I resound with, and the people who have become a part of me. And now, with the prospect of going to college, most people are excited to leave the small towns or big cities that they have resided in all their life. But for me, it is just another big step in the everlasting journey of my life.