

GRRC Scholarship Essay

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I am a 17 year old girl, anxiety stricken and stressed out at the moment, but alright for the most part. I don't like talking about myself very much, but it's a necessary evil, so here it goes. In all honesty I do not know exactly what I want to do when I grow up, so I applied "undecided" to most of my universities. The topics that engage me currently are: engineering, theater, and foreign affairs. Growing up, I always wanted to create things. I used to take apart household item (old watches, radios, and whatever I could get my hands on) and use the components to physically express my imagination. And although my "inventions" never worked the way I intended them to, I always had a desire to engineer the world around me to fit my larger than life visions. That also ties into my interest in theater; I am by no means an actor, but I love set, costume, sound, and light design. These aspects of show production give me the means to bring to life imaginary worlds and influence the viewer's perception; I see theater as a form of engineering. In the future I want to design and build magnificent sets and help engineer the way people see the world. On the other hand, foreign affairs fascinate me as I am the love child of many cultures. I come from a very diverse background and lived in various parts of the world growing up. My experiences have given me first hand insight in regards to the conflicts prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa and how those conflicts affect the lives of people in the region. I've seen extreme poverty, death, religious intolerance, racism and blatant government corruption in a very direct way over the course of my life. All of which are things that devastate me and therefore fuel my interest in foreign affairs. Someday, I hope to be part of a positive change and political advancement in that part of the world.

Speaking of not knowing what I want to do with my life, I find myself questioning my identity frequently. Simply put, I am Zainab Babikir, but the world is not that simple. I am an American who was born to Sudanese parents in Al-Gwei'iyah, a windy desert city in Saudi Arabia. I had only lived in my birth city for a year when I moved to Sudan to live with my grandparents while my parents were in the United States working; that only lasted for a year. Then, my family moved to Richmond, Virginia where we lived for about five years. Later, we moved to Alexandria, Virginia where we lived for three short years until finally we moved back to Saudi Arabia. This time around we lived in the loud booming metropolis, Riyadh, but only for five years. Most recently, in the summer of my sophomore year of high school, I moved back to Richmond, Virginia. This last move was particularly devastating, as I had to leave my closest friends in the country where I spent the longest portion of my life.

Despite the unfortunate circumstance, having moved so frequently in my youth, I was ready to take on whatever life threw my way. Armed with the exceptional conversation skills that I developed over the years, I prepared myself mentally to make new friends for the fifth time, but who's counting. Upon my arrival at my new school, Mills e. Godwin, I was surprised to witness the lack of diversity; having come from an international school, I was not used to such an environment. Nonetheless, I was optimistic and determined to make the best of my situation. During my first few months at Godwin, I tried my best to reach out to people and form relationships. Most of the people I met either made it clear that they did not want to make any new friends, or gave me the impression that I was not the type of person they want to be friends with. I tried not to take it too personally, I mean after all, by this point in high school, everyone already has his or her friend group determined. These kids have known each other for years, and I was the

new kid intruding on their lives. Although I understood their perspective to a degree, I was still hurt by the way I was treated. I felt like a fish out of water; I did not belong, yet I wanted so badly to fit in.

Because I moved so often in my life, I've never felt like I truly belonged anywhere. Over the years I've gathered an understanding of how people in different communities view me. In my predominantly white high school in the Virginia I am this brown kid who wears a headdress. Probably oppressed. Probably has an accent English. Probably a Terrorist. Not given the time of day, by anyone. At my school in Saudi Arabia I am this American from the West. Probably sympathizes with governments that bomb civilians. Probably agrees with problematic US foreign policy. Probably poor. To my extended family in Sudan who I used to visit every summer for as long as I can remember I am a spoiled brat from Saudi Arabia. Probably Rich. Probably has never worked a day in her life. Probably cannot speak Arabic. Probably thinks she is better than us.

Not that anyone who has ever made assumptions about me will ever read this, but I still want to set the record straight. First off all of those assumptions are completely false. I choose to wear my hijab and am not oppressed. I do not in fact have an accent. I am not a terrorist nor do I sympathize governments that act like terrorists. I do not agree with every aspect of US foreign policy. I do not condone civilian killings. Financial status is relative, and has no correlation with who one is as a person. I can speak Arabic fluently; it is my native tongue. As a matter of fact, I am far from rich; many times in my life I have had to opt out of school related activities because my parents could not afford the fees associated with said clubs and programs. Last year I had to get a job to help provide for my family while simultaneously juggling school work and volunteer

work. Finally, I do not think I am above anyone; I see everyone I meet as a person I can learn from.

Now that I have gotten that out of the way, I can tell you who I really am. I am a kid who never belonged, so I make it my duty to give others a sense of belonging. I make it a point to reach out to anyone who seems lonely and take that person in as a part of my circle of friends. I want to be the voice for those who don't have a voice. I want to tell stories of people who come into and leave this world unnoticed. I want everyone to be happy. I want the world to come together for a greater good. I am the kid that will talk to strangers on the subway. I will tell you stories if you are need of good conversation, and I will listen intently to your problems if you need advice. I will be your shoulder to cry on, no matter who you are; and, I will be more than happy to help lift the weight of the world off your shoulders. I am a morning person, and I love life. I want everyone to love life.

On another note, if I could do my move back to Richmond all over again, I would tell myself not to take life too seriously. I would stop chasing friendships with people who do not care about me. I would spend more time doing things I love instead of crying about the past. I would mold the environment around me and create my own path instead of waiting for opportunity to come my way. I would tell me to be myself, and I would advise anyone who is moving or has moved recently to do the same.