

Prior to my sophomore year, my family uprooted from our home in Chicago to move to Richmond, Virginia. Although I had moved a few times prior to this, it had been 6 years since my family had last moved. In the past, I was able to quickly adapt to my new environment, but I wasn't a teenager during those times. Having lived in Richmond during my elementary school years, the move should not have been so traumatic. Unfortunately however, it was. I was fifteen after all. I had just successfully navigated my freshman year, and without much notice I was tossed from my newly established comfort zone.

Being at my new school didn't make things any better. My parents advocated for me to be placed into the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Henrico High School, and since I had come from an accelerated program at Homewood-Flossmoor High School in Illinois, I was easily accepted into the IB program, but not into the community. In Illinois, I had become accustomed to a friend group full of culturally diverse, social justice-minded, intelligent individuals that were supportive of each other's dreams and cared about poor communities. In Richmond, having peers that were so drastically opposite, I felt as if I had suddenly found myself in a zombie apocalypse.

After a whole year of struggling, I finally adapted to my new surroundings by making two key decisions. The first decision I made was not to limit myself to the small IB circle and to make friends among those who were serious about their schoolwork and free enough to appreciate the social and cultural activities offered at my high school and in the larger community. The second decision I made was to control my own academic path by becoming an IB Certificate Candidate instead of a diploma candidate so that I could pursue my interests in math and science.

Through this experience I developed skills that helped me embrace my analytical side as well as my intuitive one. Not only did I excel in my academics by taking courses I thought would help me in my future STEM major, I also found solace in taking classes that integrated my love for the arts (culinary and fine) and sciences. Even greater, I participated in a summer program in North Carolina that gave me opportunities to do research in the areas of food science and nutrition.

From this course of events, what I learned about myself is that I need to be in an environment where there are enough resources for me to create balance- socially, intellectually and artistically. I also discovered an emerging love for food science that represents for me the perfect intersection of my interests in food, research, the sciences, and advocating for sustainable food systems.

These experiences and self-understandings have given me new perspectives on what it means to be a traveler, by first helping me know that it is important to develop skills that assist in navigating foreign or different environments. Additionally, I think my opportunities to participate in research and to focus on advanced science and math courses have been a good introduction to what college level courses may be. Finally, in having to navigate a new place, I have also developed new career interests and passions that made it easier for me to make future decisions about where I want to attend college and what I would like to focus on related to a major and areas of research.

For students suddenly dropped into Richmond like I was, I would have to say that moving is hard and harder still when you have no friends or family already in the area. Yet there is advice that I would offer about being relocated, based on my own experiences. I would suggest three things. First of all, mourn, celebrate and keep the

past. It's okay to miss what you have lost by moving, and sometimes a good cry session is just what the doctor ordered. At the same time in this day of social media and texting, it's much easier to stay in touch with those people you left behind so you will always have someone to talk to about your move and friends that know you in ways that new friends may not. It's like the words to a song I learned as a Girl Scout, "Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver and the other is gold."

Secondly, as weird as it may sound, embrace your family. Try to be on good terms with the other members of your family. They may be annoying, but they moved suddenly, also and may be experiencing some of the same loss just as much as you. So work on having good relationships with them. Remember, for a while they probably will be the only people you hang out with in or out of school. For me family outings and movie night was and still are some of my favorite activities.

Thirdly, be open to exploring new interests, new passions and a new you. Just because you moved and people claim it's not the end of the world, it truly is the end of your world as you knew it. However, just because you moved doesn't mean you have to stop growing as a person nor stop learning new and exciting things. What may be very helpful is to get a hobby. By hobby I mean something that you push all your frustrations and anger into. Maybe I should say that a little better. Hobbies often times help you to center, imagine, create and relieve yourself of stress. Strangely enough, I found that when I do things with my hands, it brings peace to my heart. If you do not already have a hobby, learn to cook and bake. As teenagers, we always love to eat. Write something, be it a poem or a novel. Often times writing our feelings, emotions and insights down

gives us a different sense of power over them. In essence, do whatever makes you a happier person to be around.

Honestly, though I have given suggestions, the reality is that moving is difficult. In fact, I am not trying to mislead you. New schools are virtually impossible at first. There are new people, new teachers, new policies; these are going to be very heavy weights to carry. There is a book entitled, *The Road Less Traveled*. The first sentence on the first page states, "Life is difficult." But once you know that is the reality it benefits us to appreciate the words of Ms. Frizzle from the Magic School Bus, when referring to doing science, "you are going to need to take chances, make mistakes and get messy." Change and moving is the stuff of life. If there is no change and no movement according to biology, you are dead. So be gentle with yourself and take it one step at the time. Be your boldest self, possible. Take these moments to amass the skills you need to adjust to your move, knowing that this is practice for living; ultimately, if we embrace the challenge, face the difficulties and trust the process we grow into a person that we love to be with... a resilient, content person who moves exquisitely through life to college and beyond.