

My International Experience Has Created a New Version of Me

Going from the Middle East to the west was not a simple decision. The decision was required a firm belief to move myself forward. Actually, the story of my international experience has started since I got an educational scholarship from Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. I felt overwhelmed with immigration procedures and detach from the real world. My mind and heart were occupied with various thoughts and concerns about what I should do in the matter of the new transitional phase of my life , how I'm going to adapt in completely different culture and society, how Muslims are treated in such society, and Are their people going to generalize the concept of terrorists on each Muslim. Therefore, I have decided to focus on my missions to improve my English language and gain a master degree in respiratory care program and going back home instead of being influenced by general stereotypes of how various races, religions and customs might make such a conflict or misunderstanding between people in two completely different continents. However, my brain has not stopped to express its curiosity to tackle new ideas about the imminent future that have made my unconscious mind to act inadvertently.

My train of thoughts was interrupted when my baby was screaming upon reaching to Dulles International Airport. We were standing and waiting on a long line on immigration checkpoint and almost 100 people ahead of us. Customs and Boarders officials were doing an intensive and precise checking for safety and security purposes, but one of line-service assistants allowed us to move to the checkpoint of US citizens and permanent residents so we did not wait on the line and finished in about five minutes. I really was surprised and appreciated. I said to my husband that our daughter's crying helped us to enter the US quickly. Moreover, when we were struggling to deal with our heavy luggage--as there were no special workers designed to help passengers to carry the luggage like in Saudi Arabia, An American passenger helped us to move our luggage and put them on a cart. I thought we were lucky to get a help. Then, something has been lighted up on my brain; my conscious mode was activated and started to wonder and analyze the two previous situations. "Were we lucky to be treated kindly or is there something we do not know about people of the American society?" Hence, I have intended to erase all of

the preconceived ideas from my brain about this new society and try to see it with fresh eyes and have my own view without being affected by others' perspectives.

The first step upon arrival to the US was to settle in a new apartment before the beginning of the fall 2019 semester. That was one of my major concerns to find the most suitable and high quality accommodation. I was amazed by the number of numerous apartment communities available around UNC Charlotte area which have lots of facilities in terms of quality and safety standards which made our settlement so convenient.

Moreover, finding the best child daycare for my toddler was so challenging because I did not accustomed to leave my child with somebody else unless with my parents. I was so worried to charge this responsibility to someone else but I am assigned to a full-time educational course so does my husband and no one available to take care of her. The first day to my child in daycare was so hard to both of us. However, I have founded my baby enjoying, learning, exploring and blending so easily with other children. Also, I have become less stressful so that other qualified and trusted daycare teachers have helped me to take care of my child and build up an organized system of my child care.

It is appeared that I have lots of concerns and worries. I always tell to myself that being worry is sort of having sense of responsibility and part of weighing merits and demerits of any new thing we never had an experience of. However, I believe the intrinsic power inside me--to confront my concerns--has been popped to the existence upon reaching and interacting with the new environment especially after being an ELTI student.

Starting a new journey as a student again has been exciting. The purpose of enrolling in ELTI program is to improve my English language but actually I see myself being exposed more to the cultural knowledge through the language. I have not imagined myself--for instance--to participate in a discussion or writing about politics in a second language. ELTI community has broadened my knowledge to the life

beyond the textbooks. I have learned lots of the US culture on classroom seats which have helped me to interact properly with people inside and outside of campus.

The life outside the campus also has multiple aspects that accommodate all people from different religions, beliefs and ethnicities. I have been so glad to know that Charlotte has Islamic Center where Muslims could gather and convene their Islamic rituals without restrictions. We as Muslims can perform our belief and no one will hinder or disrespect us.

It seems that my mission to improve my English language and get a master degree get expanded and tipped subtly toward larger one. I see myself blending in a new society, setting up new goals: getting PhD degree and professional career in the US.

As days go on, I have realized that I do not need to change my identity to fit to this society but I have needed big mind and heart to absorb diversity, which makes us unrivaled and united us somehow.

I have changed, yes, to the best version of my life. I see myself glowing with positivity and happiness. I do see myself climbing to stairs, guiding me toward a bright future.

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