

A Life That Changed

By Jackie Dixon

When I was 12 years old, coming to America was not a dream for me. People helped us to understand that America is better than Liberia. They also said that we should play the lottery game called DV (Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, or DV Program) to come to America, so now my family and I wanted to know what is so special about this place everyone kept boasting about. “Let’s go play the game people are talking about,” my dad declared.

“No, I don’t approve it!” responded my mom.

We went out of town, but my mom played for the whole family and my dad played for himself. My mom won the DV for the whole family, and my dad lost the game. On our way back home, my family and I talked about how our life will change in America: how we’re going to live in a house, have a lot of friends, and travel around the world.

The next day my parents started doing the paperwork, while my brother and I couldn’t wait to go to America, not knowing that my parents had to go through a lot of processes to get us visas. When we got back to school the following week, I was so hyped to tell my friends I’m going to America! My parents told me not to go around announcing to people that we are going to America. But you know, I can’t keep my mouth shut! I told all my friends and asked them not to tell anyone.

“So you’re going to leave us here and don’t think of us?” my friends asked. Here’s the thing, I didn’t think that I was being a wicked person, just shouting to them that I’m going away from them every single day at school. At last I convinced them that I’m going to call them every day and I was going to come back. My parents disliked us telling everything that goes on in our house.

The following month, we took our pictures and also got our visas from the embassy. Then something naughty happened; my dad went out of town that same month. On his way back home, he gave someone a ride. While trying to help the man, not knowing the man was a thief, the man stole our document bag, thinking it was money that my dad had in it. The next day my dad started looking for the thief. Finally, he found the man's house, but the dude wasn't there, so I guess someone else there gave my dad the document bag and he came home.

Meanwhile, it got closer and closer to leaving. My parents told us we were going to leave after our school closed at the end of the year, but things changed. The embassy gave us our final document results. Now we had all our documents and tickets to go, but I didn't know that everything would happen so easy and fast! By the graces of God and after all the hard work, my parents passed through just to get our flight tickets, so nobody would be left behind.

Instead of waiting until school was over, my parents changed their minds. In that same month, we would be leaving. I didn't know what day, but my heart was filled with both sorrow and happiness. I asked my dad if I could use his camera to take pictures with my friends and teachers. He replied, "Okay," so I took the camera to school and took a lot of pictures with as many teachers and friends as possible. Careless me though, the camera was stolen before school was over. I reached home and my parents found out that I lost the camera and got mad, especially my mom. The next weekend, my dad and I went to one of my best friend's house to say goodbye again. My friends gave me a picture, a teddy bear, and their phone numbers to carry with me.

The week that we all had been waiting for came; my parents gave the rest of our household things to people they knew in the community and to family members. February 3,

2013, was the night we left. In the middle of the night, we put our stuff in the car and drove to the airport. It was my first time to see the airport.

“Farewell,” whispered my uncles and aunties. “You should be obedient, and don’t give the old man and the old ma a problem!”

“Okay, I promise!” I declared. It’s crazy how our parents take so long to just to talk to their friends for hours, but that night was different. We left our family members and friends and showed our visas and tickets to get on the plane. As we got on the flight, I felt like I was going to heaven, even though I’m afraid of heights.

On the plane, people came and served us food, drinks and other things that I had never had before. They all were awesome food and drinks too. Plus, the funniest and scariest thing was when I got stuck and couldn’t open the bathroom door on the plane, but I fought harder and got myself out of the bathroom. We changed flights two times before coming to New York City. When we got to New York City, my grandpa and his wife were there to bring us to their home. I swear the house was beautiful both inside and outside! It was second heaven to me. It was freezing, and I was seeing different kinds of people with my own two eyes. I couldn’t believe I was in the country called America! I couldn’t wait to reach my grandpa’s home and to meet my cousins, but when we got there, everyone was sleeping.

To summarize my experience, it was hard at first, but it’s better now. At first, I didn’t like the weather at all. I felt rotten that I wasn’t in school and didn’t have any friends to talk to. As times passed, we got our green cards and paperwork to go to school. At Beverly Hills Middle School, I had a problem, which was that I didn’t understand what the teachers or my peers around me were saying half of the time. When it came to reading, I couldn’t read out loud because I was afraid people were going to make fun of me, which happened a lot.

I started to think back to my country because there I didn't have problems in school. I wondered, "Why is all this happening to me? I mean, I'm a smart student, like everybody else in their own way is, but not having someone to understand me or to help me is really unpleasant, and trying to get exceptional grades is hard too." One day I sat down with my teachers and explained to them that I didn't understand anything in the class. They stated, "We're going to help you get through it!"

After all, from my journey to America, I learned that making friends wasn't easy, especially if you can't understand what they are saying or if your accent is too strong. I also realized that you can't pretend to be someone you're not. Everything happens for a reason and if you wait, things get much better. Afterward, everything started to fall into its own place. I started making friends, getting perfect grades, understanding people, and they understood me too most of the time.

About the Author

Jackie Dixon was born in Africa and raised in Monrovia, Liberia. She came to the U.S. on 2/3/2013 with her father, mother, and brother. Her favorite subjects are P.E., English, and Science because she actually has fun in these classes and enjoys every single bit of them when she is there. Plus, those teachers who teach these classes are the best. Her favorite sports to do are soccer and track and field. Jackie is that kind of person who's quiet and shy at first, but if you get to know her, she's nice, kind of funny, helpful, and annoying in a good way. She loves to dance and put a smile on people's faces.

