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*A Different Life*

November 7th, 2007, was the first time I ever felt freezing cold weather, it was also the first time I landed on American soil. Everything was a lot different than I expected; the cities, the people, the way people were but most importantly how the weather changed very rapidly. Before the plane landed, it flew right over the top of Philadelphia. It was a cold snowy night, where I spotted a couple big buildings and couple small ones but what stood out to me was how the city lit up with an amazing row of lights, building after building. It kind of blew me away how nice it looked. A couple minutes went by and were finally landing, we get off the plane and of course it’s the usual routine which was waiting for your bags and your ride to get there that for some reason takes more than two hours to get there to begin with.

I never thought I would ever leave Puerto Rico, from what I experience and lived through it isn’t as nice and paradise like as people always made it seem like. The coast might be nice other than that it is the equivalent of living in Brooklyn, The Bronx, Camden and parts of Newark. Another way of me saying that it had and still has a high rate in violence involving drugs and guns. So obviously, the main reason I came to the United States was for a better life even though I ended up in a town that was pretty much the same as Puerto Rico, it just happened to be an American city called Camden. Nothing really changed at first except the fact that people knew English and of course I did not.

I spent about three years in Camden, New Jersey before moving to Pennsylvania. When I moved to Pennsylvania, it was the closest thing I thought about when people brought up moving to America. Not a lot of people spoke Spanish so I was force to learn English in a way that was not just in school. All my friends spoke to me in English while I understood nothing unless it involved a sport or hanging out outside of school. I learned English really fast thanks to my friends, hanging out with them made me step out of my comfort zone unlike at school it was nearly impossible.

I started playing sports from the moment I arrived to PA. In sixth grade, I started playing basketball for the Lebanon school district and played all throughout middle school and high school. I also played football until the eleventh grade but then I stopped due to the fact that the school I transferred to Lebanon Catholic my senior year which did not have a football team. Before I get too far into my middle school and high school days, let me back track to elementary school. I went to an elementary school called Henry Houck. I was one of only a few Hispanic kids in the school which made it even more interesting due to the fact that the teachers looked at us and treated us like we were idiots, well from what I remember that’s what it felt like. Even though I was only there for a couple months, and it still bothers me to this day.

Middle School just started, and I lived in the United States for almost three years. At this point, I knew English fairly well which surprised my friends, and even my own family how quickly I learned it. Middle school was a unique experience for me personally, a lot of long days and nights studying for classes due to the fact that I was a little behind everybody else because I barely knew English. If I wanted to pass all my classes, I had to work harder than the average student. That’s exactly what I did. I made it through middle school and found myself a couple new friends that helped me through it all and later then became some of my best friends throughout high school as well.

Throughout middle school I played basketball and football but basketball interested me the most. Part of the reason why I started playing sports was because I had nothing to do outside of school besides homework. I use to play basketball for fun so I already knew how good I was at it. Little by little I got better and ended up getting praise in so many ways. On the other hand, I was naturally good at football. I only played the sport because it was going to help me get in shape and make my footwork better and quicker for basketball. Another reason I played two sports starting middle school was to get to know people that went to the school, since I was new that was a good way to start it off. As the year went by I started to learn more about the game but even better about myself. Team sports has a way of teaching us at a young age about life in general, how to handle adversity and ways to work together as a team. By doing so, it taught me a lot especially about the work place after school in general. Playing sports in middle and high school is similar to playing a team role for your future job.

One thing I learned about myself in middle school was how immature people were. Especially in my grade, I never understood why people did the things they did and at a young age I felt as if my mindset grew from just playing sports two years out of the three in middle school. It set me apart from the other kids, it gave me hope knowing how I grew as a young kid that barely knew English and was always made fun of for not knowing the language. Eventually the hazing faded away and people started acting like normal human beings. After a while I felt more comfortable speaking to my teammates and classmates.

When I got to high school I was still involve with sports. I just happen to be older and more mature in many ways. Life for me was very different at this point. Leaving poverty and violence to a city that dealt with similar things, then to a small town like Lebanon completely change my point of view in life and how you should try to live it. Coming from a small island full of negativity to a city with a positive environment made me realize how great life can be. Puerto Rico didn’t have as many opportunities as people would think. A lot of people didn’t care about school when I lived there from what I remember. Coming to the United States gave me the opportunity to better myself as a person and with school as well.

I named this essay “A different life” because coming to the United States changed my life for the better. I was more than sure my life would have been a lot different if I never came here, different in such a negative way. I came from a family that struggle throughout their lives and they made sure my life was different for the better not for just me but also for my siblings.