

## Letting Go

It had been 10 long years since my first step to the land of opportunity. I remembered that feeling I had, that feeling of curiosity and joy that I was on a completely different planet. The night we landed, my family and I got to witness New York City in its finest for the first time with lights dazzling and flashing in our eyes.

We were driving from John F. Kennedy Airport, being escorted back to New Jersey. Along the way, I got overwhelmed with euphoria, seeing all kinds of lives being presented freely upon the streets. Everyone was so alive and so spontaneous with life; even the noise of traffic got tuned out by the liveliness of urbanism. New York City was exactly what I imagined it would be from all those glamorous shows and movies. Pizzas and food trucks were the essence of living for a regular New Yorker—I noticed as we drove past blocks of streets. Eventually, the car led us out of the city through the Lincoln Tunnel.

By the time we got to my uncle's house in the suburbs, I was in another strange place. It was a complete departure from the city with streets remaining so quiet that the sound of footsteps would destroy its peacefulness. I thought to myself, *Not the way I thought it would be, but you'll get used to it*, as I entered my new life in America.

Ever since then, I spent my teenage life being cooped in a room, not knowing where to go, not knowing where to be—I began to lose my sense of belonging. New undesired feelings started to arise in myself that numb me out as if it consumed me and kept me in its shadow. My parents weren't much help as they had their own demons to fight against, so our house never stepped foot outside to our own bubble.

Then, I landed my first gig as a cashier in this big supermarket. At first, I didn't know anyone—I was a lone wolf for a while considering how reversed I was. Whenever I entered the store, it was just another day of business instead of finding ways to make connections.

Soon enough, I stumbled across this guy working as a bakery clerk. At first, we didn't see eye to eye as much—simple hello was the most of our conversation. Out of nowhere, we quickly became friends through our mutual sense of humor.

I didn't fully grasp the idea of making a friend in such a place, a place with no personal opportunity to grow. I was happy nonetheless—another person I could talk to! It was weird how everything else fell into place because soon after, I was introduced into a group of people who shared the same values as I did. We went on adventures together, celebrated together; we became a small family.

For the longest time, I felt belonging—I felt like I had a place in this universe to belong to. The child in me slowly stepped out of the shadow, seeing the world again for the first time. I never thought I could find something this priceless, and somehow, it jumpstarted my heart again. I was a teenager again, living out the childhood that I had lost over the years of growing up and stagnancy—I felt like I could grow.

One day, I was at the park by the Hudson River in the Financial District—the calm view of Jersey City was across in dazzling lights; the sound of the subtle waves quietly smoothed me as I sat on a nearby park bench. Almost 10 years ago, I was in this city, dreaming of living here with a loving group of people that most sitcoms showcased. When I realized that I had reached the dream, something inside me resurrected—a new sense of hope and ambition. At that moment, I burst into tears, knowing the grief I had for my childhood slowly dissipated. I

suddenly found myself letting go of the pain that I held so dearly as the night stars gathered brightly above the navy sky.