



WHY DO STORIES MATTER?

Student Gallery Walk Stories

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ANGELIQUE | NEW YORK CITY

“I want to be a lawyer because I hate when people go to jail for things they never did without a fair trial.”

“Have you seen your uncle in this household in the past three weeks?” was what the police officer asked me on that early Tuesday morning. I was just 14 years old when that police officer from Allentown, Pennsylvania came to my family’s home to question about my uncle. My uncle was accused of killing a guy the day of a shooting in Allentown, Pennsylvania. They accused him right away because he was involved in the situation. He has been in jail for over a year now, still waiting for his trial. That really makes me upset because he didn’t even do it at all.

He had a huge impact on my life because he was always there for me. Every single time I needed help, every time I needed advice, he was there for me. The laughs that we had and the joyful things that we had every time we had a family gathering, he would always be there. Now he can’t be there anymore and it impacted my whole family because we all love him. He is a really important part of my life.

The police officers came to my house, my uncle’s house, and everybody in my family who lives in New York. They asked us a lot of questions. The funny thing is they knew the computer of my sister without even seeing it—the



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color, the company, everything. That is shocking because how is that even possible when they had never seen it before. That made me realize they could be investigating you at any time any day any time of your life. When you least expect it they could be looking in your computer your phone anything.

[My uncle] ran for the past three months after the shootout and the person who was least expected ratted him out which was wife. He was in DR - Dominican Republic, for like a week and she ratted him out and they found him and they took him to jail. They cut his everything. He had long hair and now he has short, short hair. I remember seeing my grandma's face—his mother. Her face that day when they investigated us, she was crying and sobbing. They thought she was lying when she wasn't. She knows if you lie to a police office you will have really bad consequences, so she never lied at all. Every year on her birthday she feels that she can't even breathe because he is not with her.

This is one of the big reasoning why I want to be a lawyer because I hate when people go to jail for things they never did without a fair trial. That really shocks me. Like those assaults the police officers have been doing these days with Eric Gardener, Michael Brown, and Rodney King. I think they all deserve to go to jail.



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AMANDA | METHUEN, MASSACHUSETTS

“I remember lying in bed, not being able to breathe.”

Hi, my name is Amanda and today I wanted to talk about my past events with anxiety and how it affects me pretty much every day. It's really hard to talk about and whatnot because of stuff, and yeah. So I wrote maybe two pages of stuff just so I can be able to say it because otherwise I wouldn't be able to.

So the first time I ever remember getting a panic attack was when I broke up with this one guy and then three days later he got with my best friend. I know it seems really, really silly, but I just remember laying in bed, not being able to breathe, crying, just like shaking, and not being able to fall asleep; it was a really long night.

And that's how it feels. You just can't breathe, your heart starts to race, and all you want to do is lay down and cry. But sometimes my vision gets blurry and whatnot, and spotty. It's really bad because sometimes I'll get it in class. I'll get it in the bus, I'll get it at home, I'll get it in the locker room, I'll get it anywhere and anytime. And how it works is like you can have a five to twenty-five minute period of it. You could also get it all day by just having a really high attack for five minutes, going down really low to no



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anxiety for half an hour, then going back up; it's terrible. It's worse when I get it in class because all I can do is just sit there and let it pass and hope that no one notices because you can't really escape the feeling of that, especially while all your peers are around. It gets really scary because I don't want anybody else to see that part of me, I guess. I don't tell anyone. When I told my mom about it, it was maybe a month or two ago. The only thing that I found that will get rid of it would be ice hockey but that also makes it worse at the same time due to long-term effects. Because in ice hockey, you are taught to be physically and mentally tough. You are always taught to get back up when you fall down. Because of that, I don't really like talking to anybody about it. I feel that it makes me look weak, like crying and just wanting to get away from everybody. It all makes me sick. I just really hate that because I play boys' hockey. You got to be tough; especially for a girl. You got to be wicked tough.

These attacks affect my school and social life. I will get one in class and do badly that day because, like I said, once you get one, it could stop that day or it could go up and down all day, so I may have a twenty minute resting period but then go back to really high anxiety levels or I just stop and that's the only one for that day. I can't go out with my friends anymore because I'm afraid that I might get one. We might be at the mall and I might get one. I might not be able to control it as I could in class.



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I really have no clue what sets me off, so it's really hard to stay away from things that might set me off. I remember in Spanish class last year, people would not shut up and my teacher didn't do anything. She was a terrible teacher and she would just not do her job. So I became really nervous and I just had to leave the room. That's the first time I ever left class like that. Otherwise, I'll just sit there. I'll just let it pass, not tell anybody about it. I'll sit there shaking my leg, I don't know what to do. My mom suggested going to the doctors and getting medicine for it, but I know that's not going to help me. It's going to get rid of the pain but not actually fix it, especially during presentations at my school. It's the worst.

Getting up in front of everybody and talking. All my classmates that are recording today, they can tell you when I did a presentation a week or two ago, my face got so red. I started shaking. I couldn't speak. It's honestly terrible, and you can't even do the things you love anymore. The only thing that I really do nowadays is hockey because that's the only thing that helps, but also makes it worse. I stopped doing other things that make me happy like going out. I stopped reading, I think, yeah, because I was afraid that people would judge me and say, "Ugh, she's reading a book. No one likes her," stuff like that. I think that is it. So thank you for listening.



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CHEVARIE | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

“When I think back to how I have overcome a lot of negative things and people, it makes me have a sense of warmth and accomplishment.”

Hi my name is Chevarie and one of the assets I would say I possess is resilience. I possess resilience because I have been through a lot of stressful events in my life. When I think back to how I have overcome a lot of negative things and people, it makes me have a sense of warmth and accomplishment. But there is a lot of darkness and skeletons in my closet.

I started getting bullied in the sixth grade, but I believe I was bullied way before the sixth grade. I don't really remember because I was younger and I didn't really pay attention to what was said about me and what other people thought about me. I was mainly bullied because I looked different than the other kids and because I used to always wear my hair in ponytails.

I didn't know how to cope with my emotions on top of all that; I had so much stuff going on at home. I wanted to die and kill myself. No one understood my pain or tried to. I had got into it with a lot of the kids in my class and my family. Before I knew, it I ended up at a mental hospital by the name of Hargrove to learn how to maintain my pain and control my stress and anger problems.



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The years 2012 through 2013 would have to be the worst years of my life because of all of the pain I had to endure. My favorite place to go [at Hargrove] was in the day room because I had a chance to talk to everyone and get to know them and see the type of person that they were. Girls and counselors would help us with our issues or problems from the past and things we have problems with now.

I stayed there for two weeks learning how to cope with my anger problems and stress. By the time I left Hargrove I had an inner-peace with myself and I knew I was okay. I knew that no matter what I went through that I would be okay. Nowadays I go through things but I know that I'll be fine so I don't stress. Life is too short to let one thing that you go through predict your whole future. Resilience is something I believe we all possess but you have to find the strength within yourself to have it, own it, and get it.

If I could change one thing after Hargrove it would be to take away all the pain, exhaustion, and stress. Nobody deserves to be put through pain and stress. In life we have to go through things that will shape us into who we are so that we can be who we are destined to be. I feel as if some of the girls' struggles and triumphs—their destiny is waiting for the day that the tears and pain will be taken away from them.



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I was only at Hargrove for two weeks, but there isn't a day that goes by that I don't wish I could go there again, especially when I feel like no one understands me. I don't know how everyone feels about Hargrove, but I would hope the feeling is mutual. I believe that the place is still the same. I'm going to visit one day. My favorite object is the food because we had a choice of what we wanted to eat and drink and there was dessert. Hargrove Mental Hospital is located on the west side of Chicago.



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JANIA | CHICAGO, IL

“You could see how scared I was on my face.”

My first day of high school, I was so nervous that I almost cried. I remember it like it was yesterday. I had woken up at 4:30 for some reason and I just couldn't go back to sleep. All I could think about was all the kids and which classes I'll be stuck in. I didn't think that I was really ready to be on my own like that because I was so used to be around the same kids in the same class with the same teacher. Me and my mom left the house around 7:00 and as we were in the car she kept telling me about all the good things that was going to happen while I was in high school. I couldn't really pay attention because I was so nervous. You could see how scared I was on my face.

When we first walked in the security guard made me take my belt off and told me to put all my electronic devices in my book bag. And that scared me because I felt like I was going to jail or something. But then they told my mom and I to get my schedule and told me to get to class after. So after I got my schedule I was nervous and about to cry because my mom was going to leave me. My first class was upstairs and I didn't know where to go, but thankfully one of the sophomores told me where it was and I finally found it.



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When I went into the classroom everyone stared at me and then I became nervous again because I had to introduce myself. I didn't know what to say but when I saw my friend from 8th grade in my class I was so shocked and happy and all my nerves went away.



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JUAN | NEW YORK CITY

“When she smiles, I don’t know how to explain it, but it’s really truthful to me.”

Today I’m going to talk about my mom and why she is so important to me. She’s important to me, not just because she is my mom, but because of what she’s done for my life. She’s made me the man I am today. She’s taught me what’s good and what’s bad, what to do and what not to do. She puts it in a way that’s so different from other people. She’s so driven. She taught me to never give up, do what you always want to do, take what you want. She dropped out of school in 3rd grade in the Dominican Republic to help her family. You should see the smile on her face when I say I passed a test, or passed a year. I just can’t wait to get into college and graduate just to make her so happy, just to see that big smile. It’s really bright, her smile. When she smiles, I don’t know how to explain it, but it’s really truthful to me. I don’t like to talk about this a lot because I think it’s kind of private so I keep it to myself.



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JURULE | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

“When I looked to check if I was hit, I saw blood pouring out of my arm.”

This event happened in the past, but it will always follow me. People who know about it will always treat me differently. The event occurred when I was outside the park with my little cousin. We started off playing basketball with some of my friends. Then we played a neighborhood game. That’s when it happened.

First, two people came up to my friend and me and showed the gun and pulled it out. But it was fake, so they didn’t shoot and we ran them off. So after that, I told my cousin to go home. When he left, me and some other people started to walk to McDonalds. Then we saw them again, but when they came back it was with more people. So we stopped, and they kept walking towards us. When I saw the people that came up to me the first time, I started to take my shirt off. When my shirt was off, one boy kept walking towards me. He pulled out a gun and he shot it. I was hit one time in my left arm. When I heard the gunshots, I ran, not knowing I was shot. But when I looked to check if I was hit, I saw blood pouring out of my arm. When he tried to shoot me again, one of my friends hit him, so he shot at him. He saw another person he didn’t like and shot at him—hit him in his leg once. When he shot



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again, he hit someone in the head, but he didn't die. As I was running, I finally stopped. And another friend called me to his house where I sat down on the grass and blacked out.

When I woke up, I was at the hospital. I couldn't feel anything, but I was awake. I saw doctors. They kept asking me questions, and later that day I was told I was almost paralyzed. When the doctor left, I got to see my family. My mom was the first to come see me along with my auntie. I couldn't talk. I saw a lot of my friends and family that day. A couple of people took pictures of and with me. A couple of days later, I was moved to a room where I had a nurse and a bathroom. My mom stayed with me everyday I was there, and one of my aunties stayed most of the time. A lot of people came to see me. My mom helped me up and helped me walk. I was in the hospital for two weeks. When I got home, I could barely walk and I had no balance. But as months pass, I'm feeling better, but I still don't have that much balance. But I'm feeling better and I'm doing good. But sometimes, I'm still hurting.



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JUSTIN | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

"I wasn't hindered because I didn't have both of my parent figures."

Hello, this is Justin. First, I would like to say thank you, StoryCorps, for allowing the students at Corliss to record on your website. Second, I will be telling you some things about me and about my life, some things people may not know about me. The first thing I want to start with is what makes me happiest in this world. What makes me the most happy in this world is when I see my little sister smile. Both of my sisters' smiles are like nothing you've ever seen in this world. It's wonderful. It's a wonderful feeling to get their smile when you see it. They are both pretty, beautiful young ladies and I love them.

Second, I will be talking about people in my life that support me. The people that support me are my mom and my grandmother. My grandmother has supported me in many ways; she has supplied me with all that I could ever need. She's supplied me with clothes, money, and food, all of it. Whatever I needed. Some may say I was a spoiled baby, but I don't really care because I am glad for having my grandmother in my life. There's nothing much I can really say to that. If I'm spoiled, I'm spoiled because she gave me whatever I wanted. My mother was there for me educationally and that's why I thank her and I love her.



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She's always wanted better for her children than what she had. My mother will tell you that she never really had that good of an education. She had a good education, but she was never really smart as a kid. She'll tell you herself. I just thank her for all that's she done for me and I really do love her and I'm glad to have her support. She is always pushing me to make me want to do better. I just try my hardest because I never want to see her cry or say that her kid had to go through the same things that she had to go through. I love my mother. I love my mother dearly. My mother has a saying that goes, "How are you supposed to fly with the eagles if you're still clucking with the chickens?" I don't know if I fully understand it, but in ways I do. I thank her for telling me that because I really do appreciate it and I really do know what it means now. Going on into the future I really have got a better understanding of what it means.

What I will be talking about is what I've had to overcome to get to this moment in time. I've had to overcome a lot of things that people don't really know about. I didn't really have a father. At times I would fall off with grades. My grandmother had entered into Dementia, which was a really hard time on me in my life because I really do love her and I love to spend time with her. To see her not remember some things can really hurt me. Let me explain Dementia. Dementia is when you have short-term memory problems. It's certain things that she can remember, and certain little things that she can't remember. So, say this



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morning so-and-so brushed her teeth and she'll say earlier that day that she did, and later on today she'll say, "No I didn't say they did that." That's the little thing that she can't remember, but that's okay because I still love her dearly.

Another thing I've had to overcome is not having a father figure in my life. My father just now came into my life, and I really do love him now. I've gotten to know him over the past two, three years. I really do thank him for coming into my life because now I have a better understanding. What people don't understand is that people think you're hindered because you don't have both parent figures. I wasn't hindered because I didn't have both of my parent figures. I still had uncles that taught me certain things that I needed. I had uncles that taught me how to tie my shoes, how to fix oil on cars, how to pump air into tires in bikes, how to throw a football, how to play basketball. I have a cousin who taught me how to play the drums a tiny bit, but I still learned on my own. I wouldn't say I was hindered. I've had people in my life who've helped me and I thank them for that.

Now I'm going to be talking about things I do outside of school. Something I do outside of school, like you heard earlier, is play drums. I play drums at school and at church. I used to play in a band. Playing drums used to make me feel so free. It's my passion. It's what makes me move. It's what keeps me going through the day, I just love it. People ask me why do I tap. Sometimes, I know it's a bad habit,



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but sometimes I just can't help it. At times I don't notice that I'm doing it. I really am sorry because some people get irritated by it. I really can't help it at times.

It's my passion. It's something I care about. It's something I love. It's always been a main concern in my life, a main thing in my life. That's something my father and I have in common. We're both drummers. Isn't that a coincidence that me and my father are both drummers? And just like me my father plays football. Well, played football. He played football in high school. He loved it just like how I love it. Well, those are some things I do outside of school. I play sports to get active and drop a couple of pounds. Lord knows I need it, and it wouldn't hurt to lose a couple of pounds. The reason why I drum is, like I said, because it's my passion. It makes me happy, it makes me feel free.

Last but not least, the one person that I will always love and never forget is my grandmother. I can't stop talking about her because she truly is wonderful. She truly is a great woman because she's never stopped loving me and I'll never stop loving her. She has always helped me and I will always help her. I just want to thank God for my grandmother and blessing her to be a part of my life. And pretty much, that's all I have to talk about. Thank you for listening. Thank you for your time. God bless you. Goodbye.



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KAYLYNN | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

“Having an IEP was kind of sad for me only because people looked at me different and most judged before they got to even know me.”

In grammar school, I received my first IEP. The type of IEP I was placed under was a learning disability. I couldn't read and write and sometimes couldn't understand what others could. Having an IEP was kind of sad for me only because people looked at me different and most judged before they got to even know me. That gave me a very upsetting feeling—I felt that nothing and nobody in this world could change.

Having an IEP in grammar school was very hurtful for me because I had friends up until I got placed in classroom number 208, the special education class. Many didn't know but when they found out things changed. I was so embarrassed to the point where I would wait until everyone was in their class, then I'd go into class and get started on my work. Even though I couldn't do what others could, I still gave school and my schoolwork all of me.

I've had an IEP through grammar school. I attended my 8th grade graduation. I was very proud of myself because sometimes, in my mind, I felt like I wanted to give up on



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school. But I didn't—I kept pushing.

My IEP still remained during high school. My first two years of high school were much better for me than grammar school because there were more kids so people didn't notice I was in Special Ed and I got to meet kids that had disabilities like I did. Morgan Park was one of the best high schools I've attended before I moved and started to attend Corliss High School. Corliss was ok, not that I was used to it, but Corliss changed my life. Finally all my work paid off. They released me out of Special Ed—they released me. From that point on, I was on Honor Roll. I was an Honor Roll student and that was one of the happiest moments in my life. Not only was I released, I felt like weight had been lifted off my shoulders. Still to this day I'm proud of myself for becoming a full senior in high school.



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PALOMA | METHUEN, MASSACHUSETTS

“It reminds me that I’m my own person and I can be independent.”

Hi, my name is Paloma. I’m going to share a background story about how I got my name. So I am named after this merengue song, “Paloma.” My dad used to sing it to my mother when she was pregnant with me. And every time he’d sing it to her, I’d be moving in the stomach. It was like I was dancing in the stomach. But it was also meant to be. So when I was born, they named me Paloma.

My name, Paloma, means dove. A dove is a bird. So people think that I’m named after a bird, but honestly, I’m named after a song. But that’s not the only reason why my parents named me that. They also named me it so I could be free. Like you know how birds are free and have their own life? My parents wanted me to do that. They wanted me to be free and be my own person and not care what anybody else thought of me. Like be free and that’s pretty much it. Honestly, I think that’s like a big part of me because I consider myself as my own person who is free. I make my own choices. I don’t follow what anybody else says or wants me to do. That’s what I pretty much consider myself as.

Every time I listen to my name, I used to hate it. I used to get bullied because of my name because it was a bird. But



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now that I listen to it, it reminds me that I'm my own person. And I can be independent. Also because I have merengue style, because I love to dance too. So that's why I'm a dancer now. That's pretty much it.



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ROBERTO | NEW YORK CITY

“I’m asking myself, ‘Wow, am I really going to be a big brother? Wait, so that means I’m going to become a role model.’”

My name is Robert, and this is a story of me when I became a role model. It began in the summer of 2010. I remember it was the last day of school and I was anxious. I was happy and I was sad just because some of my friends were leaving and moving on, as our new beginning was going to begin in a few months: High School.

At the same time, I was way happier just because I knew that before I left the house my mom was getting cramps. I also know that in that tummy there was a baby that was going to come out. I remember it was the last few minutes of class, last period, and I get a call from my dad and he’s telling me, “Robert, be ready because I’m going to go pick you up and your mother’s in labor.” I just looked so shocked that my friends are like, “Are you okay?” And I’m like, “My mama’s in labor,” and they just start teasing and teasing.

My dad picks me up, and I’m in the car seat looking out the window and just [thinking about] the future, and I’m asking myself, “Wow, am I really going to be a big brother? Wait, so that means I’m going to become a role



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model." And all those things start going through my mind.

Four years later, he's grown, he's strong, and he's my little brother. His name is Ronnie, and Ronnie does whatever I do. If I do homework, he does homework. If I watch TV, he watches TV. If I wanna go outside and play a sport, there he goes, telling Mom, "Mom, can I go with Robert?" I always look up, I say, "Thank you. Now I have a reason to say that I have to finish high school." Just because of Ronnie—I'm his role model. Now my goals are to finish high school and go to college so the trend keeps going and Ronnie does the same. I really like being a role model, mostly as Ronnie's growing up and he's getting older. So, this is my story of becoming a role model.



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TREY | NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

“My whole drive of living in this world has been geared towards being a better role model for other males in my society.”

When I was little, I grew up in a house with my single mother. My biological father skipped town because he had responsibilities somewhere else. He cheated on his wife and had three other kids. So he left my mom alone with a kid and told her that he had nothing to do with me, he wasn't going to accept responsibility. I was a just a living mistake to him. And I had communication with him before, and he told me that I was a mistake, and no matter what I do in life, it was always going to be like that. And so it hurt me that he would just label me like that in the beginning of my life. And I watched my mom struggle with this.

When I grew up, I thought about him as a man, not just as a father. But I thought about his manhood and I was like, "That's no way a man should be." So I learned from his mistakes and I developed dreams from that. So my whole drive of living in this world has been geared towards being a better role model for other males in my society. Not just younger ones, but older ones too, on how you should carry yourself as a male.



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Being a gentleman was something that came very much to mind. I never really allowed people to mistreat woman in any kind of way, shape, or form. I always carried myself in a higher light than that.

My dream, my ultimate dream since I was little, since I was like 9, has been to become an architect. I love to build. I love to make things better around me. To become an architect has been my ultimate dream—to build a house when I get older, raise a family, and accept responsibility for everything I do, not just the good things, but also the bad things.

So, that little patch of history from my past about my biological father, and how he treated me—it may have been a bad beginning for me, but I made the best of it. I used what he told me of what I was going to be as a reminder and as my initial drive to do better. Because no matter what they tell me, I'm always going to do better than what they tell me.



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WENDY | NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

“I’m very thankful for the sacrifice that my parents made by leaving me behind and working hard to bring me.”

When I was 10 years old, I moved from my home country, El Salvador, to the United States. It was very difficult for me to get used to a new environment, new people, and a new family. The biggest thing that affected me when I moved here was that I left behind a very important person in my life that was with me throughout my whole childhood and that raised me, which was my grandmother. Throughout my whole childhood in El Salvador, she was the person that I knew as a parent and who had raised me. My parents had moved to the United States when I was about two years old and left me with my grandma. While they were working hard in the United States to raise money to bring me with them, I stayed with my grandmother that entire time. So when the moment came for me to move with my two parents who I didn’t remember much about and a new little brother that I had never met before, it was a pretty big change for me, emotionally most of all. And as much as I loved them and I had missed my parents the entire time that we were separated, it was difficult for me to get accustomed to a new home.

However, what I truly feel impacted me the most when I



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came to this new country was that I couldn't speak or understand English. It was a big struggle for me at school because I didn't understand the lessons and sometimes it was just hard for me to figure out simple things like my way around the school. I remember the first year was the most difficult for me because everything just felt so different. The schools were much bigger and there were so many more people, and it was just so diverse. There were a lot of times where I felt really lost in the middle of crowds and felt like I was in a place where I didn't belong.

But as time went by, little by little, I felt like things were starting to get better. I started to learn to speak English a little more fluently, so I felt a little more control over things. I started getting along better with other kids, I started making friends, and I started getting along better with my teachers too because I could actually communicate with them. Eventually, I started to overcome that challenge, and I realized that I really appreciated the new life that I had.

Now that I'm older, I see that there are many more opportunities for me and for my future. I realized that it was all worth it. I was given a chance to have a better life and a better career than many other people out there, so I'm very thankful for the sacrifice that my parents made by leaving me behind and working hard to bring me. All of that is motivation for me to work hard and be as



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determined as my parents were. I want to be able to look at them in the eyes and make them proud.