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*The sound of the chair crumbling to the ground pierced the air. Rushing to the dining room, I found my sister sitting amidst the remains.*

*The collapse of the chair plagued my mind. The chair was a part of a table set older than I, having followed my family through ten moves. Within the spiraling scratches littered throughout the table, I saw home.*

*The first address the table and I shared was New Jersey, where its wax still glistened.*

*Two years later, in Taiwan, the wax began to fade. We continued to put it to good use: because of the large size of the house, we decided to add the leaves of the table in.*

*Resourceful. We took what we had and made the most out of it.*

When I lived in Taiwan, most people spoke only Chinese. I immersed myself in the culture: at the cherrywood table, I read regional newspapers and watched local television. Although neither of my parents was proficient in Chinese, I was able to speak, read, and write Chinese by ten-years-old. In Shanghai, I visited hole-in-the-wall shops, back streets with authentic food stands instead of Yuyuan, and sought out cheap trinkets and warm locals. I seized the opportunity of living abroad to break out of the international school “bubble.”

Be resourceful: take the unique classes at the new school. Perhaps you have never heard of anything like the class “The Science of Happiness” before, but if the syllabus interests you, take that leap of faith. Take that opportunity to volunteer at an interesting organization and enrich your experiences. Not only can you learn new skills at the new organizations, but you could also meet another person to hang out with or even people that could help you secure your next internship.

*In Houston, three moves later, the table reverted to its smaller form.*

*Open-minded. We embraced change.*

Returning to the States was difficult. Although I attended an international school, America was unfamiliar with its strange expressions and greasy foods. To overcome the toughest part, making friends, I joined the Math and Science Club. I’d never been in competitions; during tryouts, I didn’t even recognize half of the categories! I spent hours at the cherrywood table preparing for the tests, not to win competitions, but to learn novel concepts to gain content for conversing with people.

Be open-minded. Don’t restrict yourself to social groups you have “always been in.” Each person you meet at a new place has different experiences that can expand your horizon. Moving can be difficult when you have to leave all of your friends, but don’t forget how fortunate you are to have the opportunity to see more of this world!

*In Dallas, the table suffered its first substantial damage; nonetheless, it remained in commission.*

*Perseverant. We conquered challenges and continued to strive towards our goals.*

During junior year, I made varsity fencing--a blessing and a curse. While I was able to practice more and compete, I consistently felt I was the weakest link, a feeling I was unaccustomed to.

At States, I lost almost all of my matches. My nose felt sour and my throat closed up, but I resisted the urge to let my tears fall. I was worried that our squad's ranking would suffer, but after my teammates explained this competition had nationally-ranked fencers, I internalized the information and turned the tide to improve my fencing and attitude. Their words motivated me: at the cherrywood table, I watched video after video, embracing these skills during drills. I refused to remain the chink in our team's armor.

Persevere. There will be challenges that accompany your move: maybe the new climate really messes up your hair, or maybe your new teacher's teaching style does not fit with how you learn. Failures do not represent you as a person, it represents a chance for you to grow. Persevere through the challenge and build your character.

*The return to New Jersey marked the table's tenth move, where one of the chairs succumbed to age. Instead of replacing the entire set, we replaced just the chairs.*

*Optimistic. We made the best out of every situation.*

"Do you eat dogs?" a friend inquired.

I stood in shock, unsure of how to respond. I had never experienced such blatant racism. I know there was no malicious intent behind her words, but the ignorance was glaring. Rather than taking offense, I made the best out of the situation. I invited my friends over, and at the cherrywood table, we made dumplings and egg rolls. I took them to Asian supermarkets and restaurants to show them that, no, not all Asians eat dogs. I stood up to people who made racist comments under the guise of "joking."

Be optimistic. Do not let the negative energy take over your mindset and restrict your ambition. Being optimistic doesn't mean finding rainbows every step you take, but it does mean finding the silver linings in challenging situations. Moving is a difficult time: it means many changes and adapting to a brand new environment. Being optimistic allows you to see those new opportunities that may have been blocked by clouds created by negativity before.

In just ten months, the cherrywood table will no longer be a part of my ordinary day. In my future dorm room, perhaps, I'll have a desk with veneer, scratched from past stories yet eager to hold more memories. Though the cherrywood table cannot follow me to college, it will always be a part of my identity.

If I were to give a final piece of advice to pass on to all of those going through relocation, whether it's their first or their tenth, it would be to appreciate. Appreciate the move and invite the new environment to leave a mark on your identity. Allow your "table" to be marred by the time you spent at your new home, whether from making food at the table or studying for a class. Be grateful for each opportunity you are given: instead of staying home and trying to text old friends, go out and find new activities to try. At the same time, appreciate your old friends, but also look to new ones to share new adventures with. Do not get stuck in a stagnant mindset or

allow yourself to wallow in old memories instead of creating new ones. Find your niche in the new community, and your table will continue to carry your memories.