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The Absence of Distance

Can you imagine going from a bustling city to a quiet, remote, farm village? In the eleventh grade a forced decision due to a complicated situation resulted in a move that I was totally against. Moving from New Jersey to New York was a life altering journey for me. I went from the warmth of having friends and family around me to isolation. Any hope that I had of comfort went by the wayside once I left.

This change was different in many ways for me. I was used to relocating because my parents divorced and I was shuffled around. However, this particular time there was a distinction. In the 10th grade, I had an experience that shook my confidence and security. I was sexually abused and I did not need another situation to complicate my life. This experience rocked my stability and made me anxious about everything. Throughout this phase, I had to learn survival skills and how be independent even though I was lost, depressed and paranoid. On top of my struggles, I was now moving back to New York from New Jersey with virtually no support system or person that I could really depend on.

I was the new girl in a town (Wappingers' Falls) where everyone knew each other and had their own circle of friends. I remember the first day of school there and it was an emotional ride for me because I left abruptly (from Linden NJ) without the chance to say goodbye. I stayed to myself and even asked a guidance counselor to take me out of lunch so I could stay by myself.

As the days passed by, I started to feel the aching emotion of loneliness, so I decided to step out of my comfort zone and make new friends. As a result, I met two independent women (Dena & Gabby). At first it was hard to trust, adjust and believe that these girls wanted to be my friends. Once the social aspect seemed to settle down a little I thought that I should have a job. A few weeks passed by and I ended up getting a job. For many teens, having a job is a step to being independent but for me it was another challenge I would have to deal with on top of everything else. While working at my new job, I was also taking care of an elderly man named Bobby. Bobby took my mom and me in and allowed us to live at his house for free in exchange for taking care of him. I didn't realize that my mom would put so much of his care on my list of responsibilities, but she did. I now had another life who depended upon me. My everyday routine was going to school and coming back just to rush to work and come home late around 11pm. Once I got home at that time I had to take care of Bobby, cook, clean and do any homework that was assigned.

As heavy as all this responsibility was, I started to feel myself coming out of my depression. At first, I didn't really know why I started to feel better, then I figured it out. I was meeting all these challenges and saw progress in everything I was doing. I was doing better in school, I became a shift leader at my job and I was making more friends and actually trusting them. Once there was a little distance between my difficulties and my life, I could see with more clarity. I knew what was important and could prioritize things better.

For example, I felt bold enough to enroll in a pre-med program in high school. It was a tough program and required a lot of studying. It was a half year course that I actually had to pay for on my own. There was a certification ceremony that signaled to me that I was

accomplishing something. I listened to the speakers and their words inspired me to continue to take the second part of the program. I am looking forward to visiting Rutgers University and committing to this program further.

As I mentioned before, I became a shift leader at my job at Dunkin' Donuts. Even though I had not been working there long, my boss said that I had leadership qualities. She decided to invest in me and started training me in every aspect of the business. When she saw how serious I was, she encouraged me. Eventually, she started the evaluation process for a promotion and gave me high grades. She saw the way I handled responsibilities, interacted with customers and other employees and told me how impressed she was. When I came into my regular shift expecting to do my work, she stopped everyone and they started clapping. I still didn't know why, but then she gave me a new name tag with my name and it said shift leader. I knew that I worked hard and I felt proud to finally achieve something that I was striving for.

What advice I would give someone that is relocating? For anyone that will relocate or has done so, don't be afraid to put yourself out there but with the right mind-set. Yes, things will get difficult but stay strong, and keep yourself motivated in the time when it's most needed. Don't let a big move change and predict who you become in the future. Lastly never forget who you are and always seek help if you need it.

The advice I would give an individual is be open. By that I mean, be open to new experiences, meeting new people and having a new perspective. You don't have to change yourself or feel guilty about missing old friends and experiences. There isn't usually very much you can do by transporting yourself back in time and space in terms of dealing with your new location, so you might as well make the best of where you currently are. There is an

opportunity to reinvent yourself by retaining the best of the qualities that you had in the old place and developing fresh qualities in the new place. Relocation should be a progression and not a setback. If someone can adjust to that perspective, they might be able to thrive instead of worry.