

NJRC Scholarship Essay

“Everything happens for a reason.” Those are the words my dad told me when I moved to New Jersey in the summer of 2019. For my whole life, I’ve always lived in the city where the sun never sets: Miami. Most kids when choosing a high school, envision a place they’ll be in for the next four years of their lives— or at least I did. I enrolled into Florida Christian High School, as a bright-eyed freshman, ready to make countless memories, just like the TV sitcoms. However, my time there was cut short, as I moved over 1,000 miles to unknown territory: New Jersey. Although it was difficult at first, I’ve ultimately grown as an individual and created lasting friendships and significant life experiences.

I knew 3 months into sophomore year that moving was inevitable, and as exciting as a fresh start seemed, it was extremely terrifying. My parents were divorced for all of my life, and I had lived in Florida with my mother while my dad lived up north. However, when the environment I was residing in was no longer safe, I had to make a choice to move in with my father to New Jersey. I felt lost, leaving my friends and family behind to a place that I knew but never called home. As the end of my sophomore year came about, I had to break the news to close teachers and friends that I was moving across the country. Within only those short two years, I created a close group of friends and grew to love my school. It wasn’t only the friends I made that were affecting me greatly, but those who have been with me since 1st grade. The only thing that was pushing me forward was knowing that I could use this relocation to reinvent myself, and to finally be someone who “fit in.”

Moving into a new city is a challenge. The summer leading up to my junior year was one of the hardest. I followed my friends on social media as they went to the beach and hung out, while I was in my room all alone. I was struggling with the isolation, and it manifested itself into my journey towards self-improvement. Over time, the constant over-obsessing about school and the new found desire to better myself hid the underlying signs of depression. As the year went by, my depression worsened and was noticeable in my grades, lack of attention, and mannerisms. I poured my focus into trying to make friends and fit in, to suppress the overwhelming feelings of depression I was experiencing. I had my whole life planned out in Florida and moving turned everything on its head. I questioned myself and what I wanted to be, feeling like I could only concentrate on the present. The result of losing myself was attracting the attention of people that didn't have the best intentions. The need to belong made me look past the warnings everyone gave me about the girls that became my friends; I felt indebted to them for taking me in. The combination of pent up anxiety and depression led me into a complete spiral. I was unfocused in school, lacked any motivation, and fell into a group of people that weren't good influences. The year was cut short due to Covid, however that break allowed me to gain a new perspective of my school and make true friends.

My new surroundings allowed me to obtain a fresh outlook on life. I lived a very sheltered life in Florida, and I wanted to break out of that shell once I came to New Jersey. Within the first month in Jersey, I got my first job working as a cashier in Shoprite. This opportunity allowed me to feel somewhat acclimated to the area before school started. A lot of my classmates and alumni worked with me over the summer and gave me many insights about the school and the area. Mount Olive is well known for getting many transfers, and they held tours specifically for people moving, which helped me meet some new people in my grade and

get to learn about the school. In addition, moving to Mount Olive opened my eyes to the diverse cultures in the community, which I wasn't used to. In Florida, the main culture is predominantly Hispanic, and it was all I ever truly knew. Within my first day of school, I came across various cultures ranging from Anglo to Native, and through different clubs like International Club, I was able to learn about different cultures and customs. The school also held many events such as Friday Night Lights and Snowland which I had never taken part in before. These events were the highlight of my junior year, and really allowed me to get out of my comfort zone. In trying new things, I joined a sport for the first time in my highschool career. I signed up for the track team in late February of 2020, as I saw it as an opportunity to further make friends and have fun. Although track was cut short due to Covid, the three weeks were honestly extraordinary and I made a handful of friends that truly like me for me. Throughout quarantine, I did Zoom workouts with these friends and felt like I was slowly belonging to a place that used to be foreign to me.

I've gained a lot of experience and wisdom these last two years in New Jersey. It wasn't easy to say the least. I moved during junior year, when everyone already had their friend groups and was strictly focused on preparing for college. I felt out of place for a while and it wasn't until senior year that I could reflect on all the lessons I've learned and be proud of the strength and determination I've gained. As teenagers, we always have this overwhelming need to belong, and sometimes we don't make the right choices to achieve that. I became an individual that I wasn't because I felt that I needed to change to fit in and make friends. After a year, I realized that the best thing that anyone can do is to always be your authentic self. You might feel like you have to do these trends or change your appearance to properly fit in, but at the end of the day if people don't like you for all your quirks, then they're not worthy of being in your life. I also definitely advocate for prioritizing your mental health. Moving takes a huge toll, not only on adults but

children as well. It's okay to feel lost at times, and watching people move on with their lives is a difficult feat. Just remember that moving doesn't mean you'll lose those special people. Thanks to modern technology, they're a click away and I'm still close to many of my friends from Florida as we talk everyday. If you're struggling with the move and it's affecting your mental health, then reach out to your parents and maybe ask them about visiting a therapist. Many transfers I know, including myself, struggled with the move and through counseling sessions were able to feel more at ease with the transition. My dad and step-mom also greatly helped me by pushing me to get out of my comfort zone, like when I applied for a job. That would be one of the most beneficial things I think anyone can do with a move. The job allowed me to meet new people and feel secure when everything else was out of place. Joining clubs and going to school events also helped me feel like I belonged. I may not have been "cool," but I had fun. Always remember that everything happens for a reason.