

My mom takes her keys out of the car. “It’s time to go Bella; come on,” she says. As I sit there in the passenger seat, I contemplate how I could get out of this. The nervousness is eating me up, so I simply decide that I cannot physically go in. “Bella, you’re going to be late for the first practice; we have to go now.” The idea of showing up late adds to my anxiety. “Mom, I can’t go—I don’t know where to go, and I don’t know anyone.” She sighs, and we get out of the car. Relief comes over me, as now I am no longer walking alone. As we approach the fence of the soccer field, she stops walking. A little confused and somewhat hesitant, I ask her what she’s doing. In her firm, but loving voice, she says that she is not walking any further. My stomach drops. I knew I couldn’t walk in alone—my face was red from crying, I didn’t know where to go, and I didn’t even know how good I was compared to all these people. I knew though if I wanted to play soccer at all, I was going to have to walk over to ask someone for instructions. Finally, after my mom borderline yells at me to ask someone, I walk over to a group of girls much older than me, and with my quiet, shaky voice I ask, “Where should I go for the 05 blue team practice?” A girl points me in the right direction, but as I am walking over, I start to think about how I will have months, or even years, of team bonding to catch up on. But, I take a deep breath and push forward.

Where I am from is always a difficult question for me to answer. I was born in Virginia, but didn’t live there for long so I don’t really remember it. Since my dad has been in the Coast Guard long before I was born, we have moved six times and lived in some amazing places across the country. Through all of this, I learned from and adapted to many environments and as a result, became a mix of all these different cultures and ideologies. If I hadn’t lived in Hawaii, I wouldn’t have memories of hula dancing, practicing local customs, or surfing alongside people of many different cultures. When I lived in California, I learned to appreciate how important it is

to be welcoming and accepting of all kinds of people and how vital it is to be surrounded with diversity. In Florida, I saw the final Space Shuttle launch and actually lived next to a rocket scientist! All of the places I have lived don't make me who I am, but they have given me great experiences and taught me indispensable lessons and ideals.

Growing up in a military family, I have had to learn to embrace change because it is all I have ever known. I had to learn to accept that moving every two years and starting over was just a way of life for our family. It was a regular thing to try out for new sports teams, start at new schools, and find new friends. Although it was a hard concept to grasp at first, it became my new norm.

I played all kinds of sports growing up, but mainly soccer and tennis. Being new on sports teams wasn't easy; most travel sports teams have played with each other for years, meaning they all have chemistry and understand each other. Trying to fit into that team dynamic with no prior understanding is difficult. It's like trying to join in and play the rhythm of a song without ever hearing the song before. Through this, I learned grit and perseverance. I had to persevere through that initial discomfort and have courage to walk up to a group of girls in order to even try out. I learned to fight through this challenging period and eventually was able to seamlessly blend with the team.

Going into the last quarter of my junior year, I was presented with the option to move to North Carolina for my senior year or remain in California where I had done my first three years of high school. Although I could remain in the comfort of knowing everything, I could also branch out and see new things and new places. Even though I was initially nervous about the change and could have opted to stay with what I knew, making a leap of faith and moving all the

way across the country to Charlotte has benefited me in countless ways and taught me many valuable lessons.

When I arrived here in North Carolina, I was beyond nervous to start at my new school, Charlotte Christian. I spent the few weeks before the first day of school anxiously counting down the days until I would have to start. Of course, this wasn't a new experience for me. Every place we have lived, I had always had this same anxiety to start at a new school. There is a fear of judgment, not fitting in, not making friends, and more. But, what I have learned from these experiences is that most times it is beneficial to step out of your comfort zone. Sit at that lunch table. Talk to that group of people. Ask your teacher questions. Whatever "stepping out of your comfort zone" looks like to you, DO IT!! Because if you don't, you will likely regret it.

In the future I probably won't be moving every two years and having to restart my entire life, but these experiences have influenced me in ways that have helped me grow as a person and gain new skills and values that will be helpful for the rest of my life. They have shaped me into a caring and thoughtful person who is open to anything and wants to create a sense of belonging and community for all.