

Paris Ross

Charlotte Metro Area Relocation Scholarship

Compared to my relatively easy life, relocating from Virginia to North Carolina felt like the end of the world. My dad suddenly passed away on Thanksgiving break of freshman year due to cardiac arrest. Consequently, my mom made the decision to move to Charlotte the summer of 2018 in order to be closer to family. It felt like the world around me, that was so normal just months prior, was caving in rapidly. Experiencing so much change at once made it hard to feel like I had anything that I could rely on. Looking back, that move the summer before sophomore year changed my life for the better in the most unanticipated ways.

I had gone to school with the same people for my entire life. My teachers witnessed my peers and I grow up. I watched countless kids pass through the same classrooms that I did so many years before. I was comfortable, I had a routine, my life was completely predictable. When I had no choice but to pack up my life and start completely over, you can imagine my apprehension. Meanwhile, trying to grieve and deal with losing such an important part of my life and family didn't make it any easier on me who was still a teenager trying to begin navigating life.

The night before my first day at Providence High School, my stomach was doing somersaults. I can still remember the blatant fear, stress, and anxiety coursing through my body. I could imagine any scenario where something could go wrong, I was also 10 steps ahead and had already come up with a solution to it. Change was hard for me, and being unfamiliar with my surroundings, not in control of the situation was even harder. I had always been outgoing and fairly good at making friends. However, that was when I had lifelong friends to fall back on.

Meeting new people and establishing my own identity were something that went hand in hand. Moving had forced me to separate myself from people and learn who I was alone. I didn't have very many friends at first, which was difficult for such a social person like me. I had become somewhat dependent on having my friends to always go to, my friends that were always there, my friends that I could walk next door and see. Losing that was hard to let go of and played a toll on me. A text or facetime call just isn't the same; people have their own lives that they will still live, even if you aren't there to live it with them. This is the harsh reality of life, it was bound to happen sooner or later. To this day, 3 years later as a senior, I still only keep in touch with a handful of the people I thought were my best friends in Virginia.

It was so hard to lose so many people that were so important to my life. It was very difficult to adjust at first and I got really depressed. Compared to the optimistic and upbeat person I had been for so long, the light inside me had dimmed. I found it hard to wake up everyday, I had no motivation, I just could not stand being here. Every night I would wish to go back to Virginia. However, all the extra time alone left me no choice but to learn how to be independent. Despite how changed my life had become, it was something that needed to happen. I was able to take care of myself and process my feelings without social pressure from other people. I had to find myself and understand who I was before I was prepared to do that with

other people in the mix. About halfway through sophomore year, I knew that I needed to do something and make a change. I hated the way I felt and knew I had to do something before I completely lost myself. Much to my benefit, I started putting more effort into school and meeting people.

I had decided to try out for the cheerleading team, despite telling myself I was going to quit that year after 7 years of participating in the sport. Once I made the team, I gained this newfound feeling that the next two and a half years didn't have to be miserable. I was able to meet some of my best friends to this day because of the cheer team and I can't imagine if I had actually followed through and given up. When I started to wake up excited for school, that's when I knew things were getting better. I started to feel more comfortable, I knew where classes were, and I had a friend group to eat with at lunch everyday. I was determined to feel adjusted and prove to myself that I could make the experience positive. Considering I've always been a big dreamer, I knew that I had to put aside my feelings and make the most out of the hand I had been dealt. There was nothing I could do about my situation except take it and make something great out of it.

I've always been very school oriented, I hated even missing a day of school when I was sick. Since moving caused such a disruption in that mindset, it took diligent work to put myself on the right path again. Although I've been taking honors classes for as long as I can remember, I decided to amp up my course load and begin AP classes junior year. These classes definitely challenged me and there were some excruciatingly painful nights that I spent up studying for an AP United States History test. Luckily, by the end of the year I had managed to maintain good grades in my classes and pass both of my AP tests. This was a little shocking to me because the confidence I had in my success at such a rigorous school was not always there. The performance that I have managed to maintain in school is something that I am extremely proud of to this day.

Currently, I am a second semester senior that has been able to work my way up to cheer captain of my team and get into every college, both safety and reach, I applied to for next fall. I wish I could tell my sophomore year self that the broken and lost feeling doesn't last forever. Life isn't easy and there's always a new problem around the corner, but there are so many more amazing things that you have the privilege of experiencing, making the bad seem so much smaller. I was forced to leap out of my comfort zone and experience life in a way that isn't so terrible, just different. I think my dad would be incredibly proud of me and that makes every single thing that I have accomplished so much better. I was lucky enough to still have an amazing mom and support system throughout this entire process, which definitely made a difference, even if it didn't always feel like it.

I could write a novel of advice for someone facing a move. However, it all comes back and falls under the common theme of doing what feels right for you. Embrace every single change that comes along in a lifetime. Every single person is different; your feelings, your life, your experiences make us unique and make the way we face challenges different. Take your time and heal, don't feel like you have to meet 100 people and know everything from the start. It is a process and one that will only improve if you make an effort to improve it. Without a doubt it

will take patience, determination and hard work. Thankfully, you're already one step ahead everyone else because those are skills essential to your future anyways.

Things that feel like the end of the world usually aren't. The problems that you are burdened with today probably won't even matter in a year, or even months for that matter. I had to take a step back and realize that every disappointment that I have experienced happened for a reason. Despite how awful and gut wrenching it felt at the time, from the perspective of someone on the other side of the hill, there is still good that will come from it. Let go of the pressure to have everything figured out because life is unpredictable, the only thing that you can do is have faith in your ability to make something out of it.