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A Life's Changing Journey

It was another beautiful summer day and the sun was high in the sky over the Tyrrhenian Sea. A carefree 12-year-old girl pondered if she should take her bike out for a ride around town or find friends to play hopscotch. Little did she know that her life was about to drastically change and take her to places that she only knew on maps.

Her older brother had traveled to the USA, found love and announced he was staying. Her parents made the decision that the immediate family needed to remain a core unit, therefore, their destiny was to be found in the United States of America.

Passage was booked on a big ship, the size of a small village, as her dad was afraid of flying. By late summer, after many hugs, well wishes and tears, her family embarked on a journey that changed their lives forever. No one realized the magnitude of life changes that were about to take place, some great, some good and some challenging.

The voyage was an amazing experience. The ship was lavish, filled with bright lights, pools, dining rooms and happy people. The evenings were filled with music and dancing. The food presentation belonged in gourmet magazines. It took 10 days from departure from Naples, Italy to New York Harbor and she looked forward to her new life.

The morning of their arrival was met with such a noise of excitement! It was something that would remain in her mind and heart forever. Once informed they had arrived, everyone dressed quickly. She made her way to the ship's main deck where passengers already lined the railings to take it all in. Several tug boats had greeted the ship and guided the ship to its destination. As the ship approached the Statue of Liberty, multiple horns loudly sounded and music broke out.

The atmosphere was electrically charged. People were cheering and crying, champagne corks were popping! She looked with amazement as the skyscrapers were a sight that she had never could have imagined. Welcome to America!

The family traveled to Massachusetts and began to settle in. She could not speak English but that didn't stop school from beginning 10 days after her arrival. Her only option was to begin a new life.

Her first day of school was amazing and traumatic at the same time. Coming from a small fishing town, the new school was enormous, with so many classrooms and even more kids. Her teacher had a kind face, but everything that came out of her mouth was completely foreign, it was confusing and overwhelming. By the end of the day, it was obvious that the language barrier was going to be a challenge. Day after day, she went to school, and didn't understand what anyone was saying or the culture. Her world became smaller and smaller. She missed her town, friends, familiar surroundings but most of all, the way of life. Many nights she cried silently before falling asleep and kept much to herself since she knew, even as a child, that her family members were going through their own challenges.

She soon found that kids will be kids all over the world. That included the bullies. There's always that one kid that tried to make life miserable for his victim. Unfortunately, she became his target. He would make fun of her relentlessly. Little did he realize that he would change her life for the better. She was forced to decide, she could either sulk and keep to herself, or see the humor and not care how anyone perceived her. The latter was quite helpful.

Each day she tried harder to communicate with other kids, if her pronunciation was wrong, she asked for help and slowly things began to change. She rapidly adapted and learned. She made friends. The four years of high school followed by four years of college flew by.

The rest of the story, as they say, is history. After she was grown and educated, she got a job, found love, married and had two children. One of her great achievements was when she became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America.

However, the 12-year-old girl never forgot that life changing day as the ship arrived in port. Her mind often drifts back...the emotions are vivid, the challenges now accepted. She grew to love this country, her home, it's where she belongs and where her loyalty lies.