



ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages

Creating cultural competence, compassion, and connections one flutter at a time.

The Conversation

November 2018



Journey to the New World

By Alhawrra Kareem BHS Class of 2020

I was only 8 then...

It was the day of my cousin's wedding. Excited, in my pink fancy dress, I waited for my uncle as my mother filled her makeup -- I watched her for tips. All of a sudden, I was worried when her phone rang. Her expressions changed. Her face turned red. I could only see fear in her green eyes. I knew something was wrong, but as a kid, I didn't bother to ask.

My uncle parked outside our door, but instead of flower bouquets in his car, my father was lying in the back. My brother and I were told to stay away from the living room. From the second floor, I glimpsed the doctor entering our house. Tears streamed down my face as I asked my brother if we were still attending the wedding.

With the help of my brother, I sneaked downstairs and overheard my uncle's words. A bomb was attached to his car. "Be thankful, it was under the passenger seat, not his," my uncle said. He survived, but with burns. He smiled, but with pain. He knew it was time to leave.

Then I was 10...

Bouncing with enjoyment, I moved over to my father. The word "visa" was the subject of the email. I felt my mother's tears of glee as they vanished into sorrow. My parent's expressions were mixed. They didn't want to take away our joy. All together, we were moving the USA, or so I thought.

"They should be happy not sad," is all that came to my mind. It was a day or two after the email when I was given the choice. Mom or Dad? Iraq or USA? I was in shock because we had to split up and choose. The kids' visa cases were managed with the father's case, and the mother in a different case. In particular, my mother's case was still processing. She couldn't leave, but we had to...

Then I was 11...

It was so hard for me to leave my mom. As I was entering the teenage world, I needed her advice. But we had no choice. We had to go. Our bags were packed. But there were only three bags, one for each of us -- my father, my brother, and me. We weren't a whole family. My brother and I went with my dad. My little sister, who was only 4, stayed with my mom.

On our flight to the USA, the sights were unbelievable. Stepping outside the airport, I was excited, but the full impact had not set in yet. I misunderstood life during my first week in Maine. Traveling 12 hours in the air altered our sleeping schedules, and our time management. Spending our first month in our new home in Portland brought us homesickness. But it was time to explore our new world. Our apartment was located in a lucky spot. It was on Park Avenue where there were the Portland Exposition, Hadlock Field, the ice arena, Portland Stadium, King Middle School, Deering Oaks Park and the best for last, the Holy Donut shop. We were never bored after we found out about all of these places. It was fun for us to get lost. I could never forget attending my first Sea Dogs game or feeding the ducks in Deering Oaks Park. It was Christmas vacation of 2012.

Finally I was 12...

By now I had the language to connect with people. Ten months had passed already. My brother and I were

used to my dad's "perfectly" cooked dishes, and they were also familiar with the burnt eggs I made for breakfast. Once, my egg was not burnt, but unboiled.

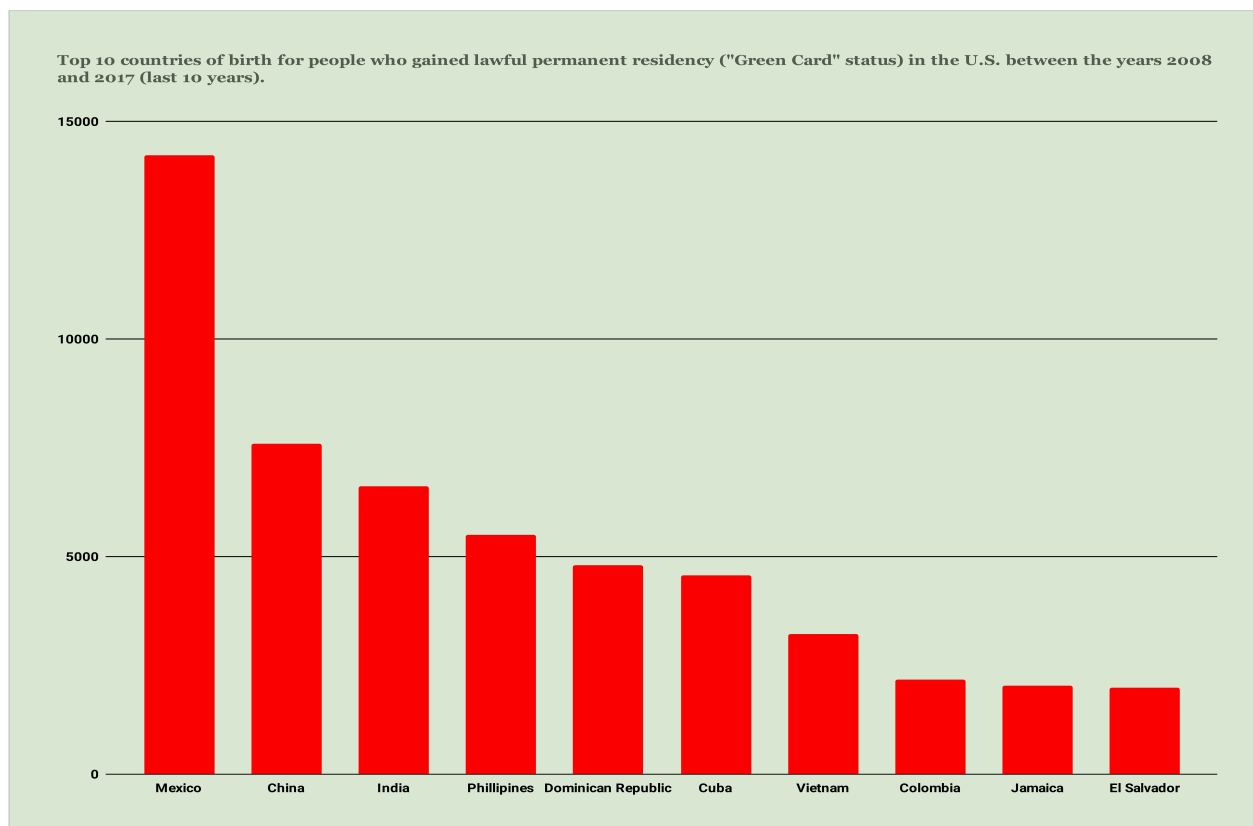
I graduated from Reiche Elementary school and went to King Middle School. I was thankful there weren't any more bus rides to miss. In sixth grade I received my first award for "Excellent Reading." It was my first step to the future. In that moment I realized how much work there was still to be achieved.

On October 10th, I finally saw my mom's tear filled green eyes and my sister's smiley dimples going down the escalator at the Portland airport. Her hug fully woke me up to my life in Maine. It was the resolution of my journey, but the start of Chapter 2.

*Please share **YOUR** stories of culture and language, and let's begin "The Conversation." You can email them to: edarby@brunswick.k12.me.us*

The plight of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants may seem so removed from our quiet corner in Maine. But in the last 10 years, about 15,000 people from all over the world have become lawful permanent residents in Maine. As of last year, 45,653 people living in Maine were born in a different country. For some, the news headlines may not be so removed. In fact, the stories may be personal, surprising, and enlightening.

10.7 million people from other countries gained lawful permanent resident status in the U.S. over the past decade.



Current Brunswick school students were born in:

Poland Sweden Italy The Philippines France
 Bulgaria Guatemala Brazil The United States Iraq
 Puerto Rico China Cameroon Germany
 (and probably other countries that we wouldn't know about without having conversations)

What's the difference?

Immigrant – Anyone who chooses to live in another country and becomes a permanent lawful resident

Refugee – The Refugee Act of 1980 allowed special status for people who were in fear of persecution in their own country because of race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion. They register and receive permission to enter before arriving in the new country. In the U.S., refugees can then go through the process of applying to become permanent residents.

Asylum-seeker – Anyone who is already in another country of destination or at the port of entry and seeks protection from that country for any reason. The asylum application process in the U.S. determines whether the person qualifies as a refugee.

How do refugees arrive in the U.S.?

The U.S. government works with the following agencies in resettling refugees:

- Church World Services
- Episcopal Migration Ministries
- Ethiopian Community Development Council
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
- International Rescue Committee
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration & Refugee Services
- World Relief

Where do refugees come from?

List of the top five countries in 2017 where refugees are fleeing and settling in other countries worldwide:

1. Syria - 6.3 million
2. Afghanistan – 2.6 million
3. South Sudan – 2.4 million
4. Myanmar – 1.2 million
5. Somalia – 986,400