

Between Two Worlds

When my parents first told me about moving to the United States, everyone said it would be wonderful — a land filled with opportunity, freedom, and success. People often speak of the “American Dream,” but deep down, it was never mine. I did not come here chasing a dream; I came because I had to. I told myself that leaving everything behind was the price of a “better life”, yet I never imagined how heavy that price would feel.

Before arriving, I imagined a country full of progress and possibilities — a place where effort and determination alone could open every door. However, reality felt far more complicated. The opportunities were real, but they came with invisible barriers that tested not only my knowledge but my courage and emotional strength.

Unlike many of my classmates who chose to study abroad, I did not make that decision myself. I did not come for a semester or an exchange program; I moved here permanently. This was not a short adventure — it was a transformation of my entire life. I had to learn a new language, adapt to a different culture, and redefine my sense of belonging. Even now, there are moments when it feels as though a part of my heart never fully crossed the border with me.

I grew up in a small town in Mexico, where family and community shape every day. I miss the laughter echoing from my neighbors’ houses, the smell of tortillas cooking, and the way people care for one another without needing to speak. Back home, even silence felt alive. I once believed that coming here meant “making it,” but I have learned that real success sometimes means holding on to your identity when the world around you asks you to change.

Before leaving, my grandmother passed away. She was the person who believed in me the most — my source of strength and encouragement. Her voice still echoes in my mind: “*Mija, tú puedes.*” When she died, it felt as if a part of my soul faded with her. I did not even have time to grieve; I had to pack my life and board a plane. That day, I was not only leaving my country — I was leaving a piece of my heart. Even now, when I walk through the quiet streets of Delaware, I talk to her in my thoughts. I tell her about my classes, about how I am improving my English, and how I am trying to make her proud.

Life in the United States has been both fascinating and overwhelming. It is a beautiful country — diverse, organized, and full of opportunities. I have met people who are kind, respectful, and supportive. Yet, I have also learned that a place can be admirable and still not feel like home. Back in Mexico, food connected people; here, it often feels like routine. I miss the taste of *pan de muerto* with hot chocolate in October, the warmth of handmade meals, and the comfort of my family gathered around the table.

The language barrier has been one of my greatest challenges. I studied English before coming, but living in another language is entirely different. I often understand everything around me but cannot express my feelings with the same depth or humor. Sometimes I stay quiet, not because I have nothing to say, but because I cannot say it the way I want. It feels as though my true self remains suspended between two worlds — the language of my heart and the language of survival.

Adapting to a new culture has been like learning to breathe again. People here are kind but distant. Back home, we hug, we stay, we care. Here, everything moves fast, and sometimes I feel

like I am running just to keep up. But I remind myself that I am here for a reason — to grow, to learn, and to honor the sacrifices that brought me here.

I wish people understood how difficult it is for many of us. Not every international student comes by choice. Some of us come because our families believe this is the path to a better future, even if it means losing the familiarity of home. When people see us, I hope they recognize the courage it takes to rebuild a life from the beginning — in a new country, in a new language, while carrying both fear and hope in the same heart. Behind every quiet smile, there is a story of resilience and love.

If I could offer advice to future international students, I would tell them the truth: it will not be easy. You will feel lost, you will cry, and you will miss your home more than you ever imagined. But you will also discover a strength within yourself that you never knew existed. Carry pieces of your culture with you — your traditions, your music, your photographs, your faith — because they will remind you of who you are when everything else feels foreign. Missing home does not mean you are weak; it means you come from somewhere worth missing.

Coming to the United States has transformed me in ways I am still learning to understand. It has taught me that success is not always defined by happiness; sometimes it is about enduring, learning, and growing even when everything feels impossible. Every day at the University of Delaware, I find small moments of connection — sharing stories with classmates, meeting people from other countries, and realizing that, in many ways, we are all fighting the same battles of identity and hope.

I still do not know what the future holds, but I know that every step I take honors my grandmother, my family, and the culture I carry within me. Even far from home, I will never stop

being who I am — a Mexican woman pursuing her dreams, missing her roots, and fighting to make every sacrifice worthwhile. And perhaps, that is my own version of the “American Dream”.