

Crossing the Pond

Jasmeet Kataria

I still remember when my parents made the announcement to me and my siblings that we were leaving England and moving to the US. The same thoughts crossed our minds at the same time: will it be exactly like the American movies? While our parents continued to ramble on about our reasons for leaving, my siblings and I began to picture ourselves living in a beautiful, sunny place, with a big, luxurious house. We each saw ourselves with our own bedroom, each bedroom with its own bathroom. We could see ourselves never having to travel to the community pool ever again because we would have our own pool in our huge back garden. Although our parents fulfilled all of those dreams for us, we did not realize what we were about to leave behind. When I think back to the excitement I felt about moving to the US, it never crossed my mind that there was no turning back. You see, in my mind, I always thought I could go back to England if, for some reason, the US was not my cup of tea. It was not until we were finally here that I realized how hastily I was able to leave my childhood behind for the luxurious American life I had seen in movies and TV shows. All of a sudden, I started to remember everything I had left behind. Gone was the house in which I had grown up, all my family that lived so close we were practically neighbors, my closest childhood friends, and most importantly, all of my childhood memories. I was not ready to do it all over again, to recreate my home in a new locale. When the time came to start my first day of high school, I was terrified. As if high school isn't hard as it is, what could be worse than starting the first day of the ninth grade without knowing a single soul in the entire school? It felt as though I had a huge stamp on my forehead that read, "I'm an outsider." Although I am sure my hair and clothes had already given that secret away. I didn't even know how to dress outside of the safety of my British school uniform, let alone what to take with me, which building to go to first, where to sit, or who to talk to. I was accustomed to wearing a white shirt with a tie, a skirt, blazer, and the same black shoes every day, with my hair tied back. Now, all the choices were paralyzing. I was used to being with the same classmates all day long, moving from one classroom to another for our different subjects. I was used to one small building, where everybody knew where they were going and it was harder to get lost than it was to find your classroom.

Along with the worries of fitting in, my accent had only made things worse. I could feel myself becoming red in the face when my accent drew too much attention to me. I

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would sit through all my classes without uttering a word in hopes of going unnoticed. However, it only took a word for me to give it away. Once the secret about my accent was out, my fears of having a label had inevitably become true. I was known as the "British girl," or the "Brindian" because of my Indian ethnicity. I remember being automatically given the part of Juliet in ninth grade English class while acting out Shakespeare's play. Having an accent like mine has a magical effect on people, even complete strangers are not immune. It triggers something innate deep in their minds that says, "Hey, tell her any random connection you may have to England, she'll like that." Usually, I don't really mind this, but it sure makes it hard to fit in.

Next came my chance to perform in physical education. Given my excellent skills in a famous British sport, netball, which I assumed was also a sport here, I was very excited to participate. I soon came to learn that there was no such thing, that "Rounders" had been replaced by softball or baseball and that netball was really a modification of basketball. I had expected that my Kappa tracksuit bottoms would impress my sporty classmates, but even that failed miserably as that British brand-name hadn't crossed the Atlantic yet.

Although I had heard the famous "potato chips" and "soda" being ordered in the TV shows, I never thought to utter those words myself. When I chose "crisps" and "a fizzy drink" at lunch instead, I was met with a blank expression in the cafeteria. Although I tried to make multiple mental notes to remember this new vocabulary, it proved quite difficult, especially when paired with learning trigonometry and having to catch up

on summer reading assignments of which I had not been aware.

Needless to say, when I returned home from my day at school, I wanted to crawl under the covers and wish myself back to the comfort of my school uniform and a plate of

Date Night
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familiar fish and chips. I did not make myself any promises to try to fit in more, I did not resolve to participate in American sports activities and certainly did not start uttering words such as "soda" or "pop." I kept in contact with my family and friends back home and eventually, with much effort, positive attitude and little heartache, I slowly felt myself starting to fit in to the American culture.

After ten years, I have learned to enjoy the small quirks of the American culture, such as the friendly greeting by the clerks when I walk into a grocery store, a pleasantry not afforded in Britain. I also appreciate the ability to make a u-turn at almost any intersection, opposed to navigating a roundabout, and not having to squeeze two cars onto a one-lane road. It almost feels unnatural for me to call a parking lot a "car park," an elevator a "lift," a line a "queue," the movies the "cinema," and to greet my family and friends with the words, "You alright?"

Surprisingly enough, I have become used to being asked the famous question, "Where are you from?" I enjoy

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talking to others about my origins and nationality, even if they respond with a short story about the trip that Uncle Bob's ex-plumber took to see Big Ben. I no longer shrink in my seat when asked a question. I am proud of who I am, my cultural diversity, and my ability to relate to others of various non-American cultures. My accent and way of speaking do still attract attention, and I find myself having to repeat myself often, but I have learned to make adjustments accordingly. I enjoy living that American dream when swimming in my own pool, basking in the warm sun during winter, or getting dressed in a closet that was the size of the bedroom I shared with my sisters back in England. The funny part is, now even when I go back to England, I have an American accent. I better just embrace being a little different!

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