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My Experience with Change

Immigration is a hard thing to discuss, especially for me as it's been a problem for my family for a while. Even though the good it has done for me cannot go unmentioned. The opportunity to escape and live a life in America is a privilege for many Africans, a dream so many boys and girls have. Unfortunately for most Africans that's all it can be. A dream many in Africa wake up from starting another day. I was fortunate enough to live it, hard but not impossible.

Growing up, my life was a mix of babysitters, daycares, and long hours away from home. School was the light of my day: the laughter of my friends echoing down the stairwells, the slap of UNO cards on our table, the sound of joy that cut through my loneliness. But even in those moments, there was an empty space, someone was missing. My father, I didn't have my father for most of my life. Immigration prevented him from coming with us to America. We had to leave him back home, no funds to travel back at least not at that time, and no visa for him to come here. But he was always there providing even if he wasn't physically there, I have him to

thank for all I've received during those special days. My Mom was a single mother so times were not easy she'd wake up before the birds and their chirps, dragging me to daycare, Days I'd see her come home like she's seen a ghost, panting, drowning in her own sweat, wanting nothing more than to end the day. Her body could only handle so much. She'd throw up her feelings and all the stress that accumulated literally. Being a nurse and a single mother isn't an easy thing to get through but I'm glad she made it work. I mean I can still remember the days she'd pick me up from daycare in the darkest hours. I could see the stress on her face like she was wearing it. The stubborn baggage under her eyes and the half smile she could muster through all the pain but "at least she could still smile" is what I'd mutter to myself on our way home. So, when we got our citizenship and finally had the chance to not only go back and see him but bring him back with us. I was overjoyed, I could barely keep myself still on the airplane jittering in the seat from my excitement, I really couldn't wait to see him. I'd sleep early to make the hours go by faster and so when I woke up and we landed in Ghana entering its humid land, we were met with many people waiting at the airport gate, but I only remember one. He stood out, inches from the rest. And the smile it set him apart from the crowd whose expressions I couldn't begin to comprehend, didn't want to comprehend. They were bleak but the hope of seeing their loved ones or whoever else they waited all those hours for was still there, anxious and jumping at any person that came out hoping it'd be them. But all I saw and could see was him, towering over the rest, and with a glowing smile like a bright star whose light exceeded its kin he got closer. I couldn't understand it, but I felt drawn to him like some sort of instinct, I just knew that he was my father and when he approached you could only imagine what happened, what I felt I couldn't begin to describe. A moment I wish so desperately to forget just so I could live it all over again.

Those two weeks in Ghana were short but unforgettable. We spent hours on the porch talking while the heat shimmered around us. Chickens wandered freely, and the sound of DJ

Arafat played from the bar nearby. My father sang along, laughing and even though he knew I couldn't understand the French lyrics. "Enjoy it anyway," he told me, and so I did. Those nights with him and his half-empty beer, me with my Fanta, my mom's TV murmuring on the inside felt like home in a way I'd never known filled me with warmth I've never felt. I slept with a smile on my face for every night spent within Ghana, two weeks, enough to make great memories, us going to the mall, lost in the supermarket wandering around, going of my parents yelling my name to find them, testing out their VR systems and that was only day two. We went out the fifth day nothing to crazy a small rural restaurant, simple, and with very good food, but what made it truly good was my family. We talked a lot joked around and ate together. Life here was fun, not any better but it was fun, family and the memories we had made it worthwhile. But most of all it was different and when the trip came to an end, knowing that those almost hellish times by ourselves in America were over and past us, I can only imagine the relief momma felt when she realized she was no longer going through this alone, and when it was up and we went back as a family this time, we were all excited not only that he'd be coming but that we'd be together as a family and when we got home it was late so we went to bed the excitement of it had worn off, swept away by the fatigue of our flight. The next morning the change was almost instant waking up to see him sleeping in our home in America was different, knowing I could rely on him more personally now was different that I could talk to him now was different I had to adjust to how different it all felt. Home felt different, familiar but not the same as putting on somebody else's shoes. It was the little things he did I had to adjust to. We were similar down to our core's but not alike, he was quiet until there was something to talk about then he'd go on and on. unlike me he was structured, like buildings have foundations he had his own foundation, architecture and it showed through all that he did. Everything was where he wanted it where he could see it, touch it where it should have been is what it felt like and when he started working it

seemed like it didn't affect him at all, my father worked two jobs ever since he came to America and could work he went right to it working two jobs to support our family. My Mom needed the break by this point. he'd come home maybe twice a day and leave within the next two hours; I used to think he didn't sleep. He'd come home and he would make it seem easy like he could do this every single day for the rest of his life if he had to and that's what he would tell me he didn't care how much or whatever he had to do but as long as it was to support me he didn't mind he told me he was sorry he couldn't bring back all those missed times together but that he can at least support me so I'm able to go far and make new memories and guide me on my way to becoming not only an adult but a man. His presence at home was soothing when I was struggling in class, he was the one to help me get through it. When he saw me going to the school gym or doing pull ups with my door frame, he went right to get me a membership. He saw the little things I did and gave me the support I needed to do it better and so as time went on and I got used to this difference I started looking up to him quickly. he was everything I expected of a father, everything I thought a father was he was it.

If I needed help, he was the one I asked, when it came to advice he gave the best, he was like my guide, a teacher especially so because he was licensed back in Africa, I remember while I was applying for college he was there, helping me practice for the math placement exams the way he was able to teach was impressive, made impossible things feel completely understandable. Those late nights at the dinner table around all the practice tests, books and notes. Our whiteboard full of solved equations and explanations written in red and blue, it covered both back and front. It wasn't like with regular teachers he didn't want me to just memorize not like a trick. It was about knowing why that method worked which is what made so separate from all my past teachers having to adjust to that change in thinking in working, He didn't just want me to pass he wanted me to understand and learn he said "whether you do good

or not doesn't matter just try". I didn't realize it then but he was prepping for more than this exam he was changing me so that I realize effort matters more than anything he would tell me to "think about it like this" and tell me "as long as I got the answer right" a lot and that slowly changed me, helped me to realize my own efforts I had to adjust to this change of mindset that no matter how I got there it's the fact I'm even there that I got past it is what really matters. And by the time the exam was here I was ready with a fresh new mindset, the time I spent with him led me to change the way I thought and the nervousness that came with the way I used to think went away. Now that I had learned how to approach those questions I stopped treating the clock at the corner of my eyes as this grave enemy of mine. No rushing like the old me, I took my time I started thinking more instead of just working on auto pilot the change was evident. I took my time, question by question and the sound of continuous clicking, and pencils moving filled the room. I answered with clarity it's not like I didn't before, but I never thought to really think and look over my choices that difference helped me stop many mistakes during that test. Doing things, I've never done before, I asked myself questions like "what do I already know?" and "where can I start?". I left the testing ground feeling proud, I thought I did good I knew I handled it better than I ever would, if it wasn't for my dad I would have been stressing, overthinking every question I did, all my answers. But my mind was clear a free conscience unlike before I was less concerned with how fast I could go and more focused on how well I could think through each problem. In the end, the exam felt less like an obstacle and more like a chance to prove myself and how much I changed. The change in mindset wasn't just about process it was about the ending itself since this change led by my father helped me to realize that the journey isn't what matters it's the destination, As long as I'm reaching the right answer the right ending how I got there doesn't matter I would have never reached such peace and understanding if it weren't for the change instilled and reinforced by my father. His arrival sparked differences in the way I

act the way I spoke the way I did anything. He taught me who I really had exposed me in a sense to my true self forcing change simply within the couple of years he has been here, and I have him to thank for all of it.