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The Big Change

It was a crowd I have never seen before. So many people passed by me that their faces meshed. My ears were ringing, my hands trembled, and anxious thoughts took over my head. I played with the ends of my hijab and looked at the arrows leading me to my first period class. The loud voices surrounding me drowned my thoughts and I was lost again, it had been five minutes since the bell had rung for my first period class and I was late. I started reading the numbers on each arrow more carefully, but I just couldn't seem to focus and that's when I noticed a teacher helping other lost students just like me except, they were Freshman's, and I was a senior. I felt embarrassed but nobody really noticed I was a senior. Being frail, a bit short and having a baby face made me look like a freshman so I blended in quite well.

I finally found my class and indeed what I feared has come to life. Everyone's eyes were on me as my presence interrupted the teacher's speaking. There was exactly one wooden chair left at the very front of the class next to the teacher's desk; of course, no one would take that spot. But it wasn't too bad, there was an outlet on the wall behind me where I can charge my phone and the window near me peered on to the Verrazano Bridge and the beautiful Bay.

It kind of helped with my anxiety and relieved my nerves a bit. But that quickly ended when my teacher asked me to introduce myself, what grade I am in, what career I am interested in and who my teacher was last year. I stood up and answered his question then I went ahead and sat down. I looked around the room and everything was different. The lockers, the desks, the board, the size of the classroom, but especially the students. It was nothing like my old school.

During the beginning of the pandemic my family faced some financial problems just like many families during that time and because of that my single mother could no longer support my brother and I's tuition to our private school. My mother put me in a religious private school since I was in first grade, and I stayed in that exact same school till I was a sophomore in high school.

I changed schools during my junior year but that was during the pandemic, so school was online which helped me not feel the weight of the transition, but this year was different. I was facing the real world. It felt like I was breaking out from my safe bubble and being launched into a new world. You see my school was an exceedingly small private Islamic school.

There would be one classroom for each grade and each classroom would be made up of roughly 25-45 students max and because of that we didn't change classes for each subject but rather our teachers changed and a new one came for each class. The boys and girls were separated into different floors, and of course we had uniforms. We also did not call our teachers by saying Mr. Or Ms. But rather by saying Sister or Brother.

Everyone knew each other and we even knew each other's families and our parents would be friends and it felt like a small community within the school. When my mom Broke the news to me about my transfer, I felt my heart sinking. How was I not going to graduate with my best friends that I practically grew up with it. How will I make new friends, how will I tell my friends that I will be leaving them?

So many questions ran through my mind, but I was mostly scared about the culture difference, you see in my private school I felt comfortable being Muslim since everyone I interacted with was also Muslim, I could pray whenever I want, I didn't mind wearing the hijab I never got made fun of because of my culture or religion, we had our own holidays. I basically lived in a safe bubble my whole life but suddenly it was going to pop. How will I fit in public school?

When I broke the news to my friends, we all cried together. Because of the pandemic many of my other friends were facing the same issue as me and were also transferring to different schools. It felt as if our ten years of friendship was shattering into many pieces. We promised each other to continue talking and visit one another and that this wasn't going to stop us from being friends.

Now here I am in a new school all by myself, I wondered how my friends were doing at their new schools. The teacher kept talking about the syllabus and then the loud ring of the bell interrupted his speech. Everyone started to hurry to their next class. I followed the crowd and saw that my next class was gym. As I went down the stairs I felt a tap on my shoulder, and I saw a girl behind me. She's wearing a mask, but I can tell she's smiling at me by her eyes. I turned around and she greeted me, she had golden blond curly hair and hazel eyes. She asks me what my name was again, and I repeat to her "Chaima Mohamed". She told me that her name was Saphia and that she recognized my name, she had a close friend that went to my private school, and she had heard about me.

I asked her what her friend's name was and once she told me I knew who she was talking about. She talks to me about how, just like me, she also has transferred but all the way from London. I realized by then that I wasn't the only one going through this and that there are possibly many people like me. We shared each other's schedule and found out we have the same gym class, so we continued walking together. She introduces me to some of her friends, who later became some of my best friends. I realized that transferring was not too bad and all though I really missed my friends back in my old school, I have learned so many new things about myself and I had a lot more opportunities than before.

I was able to make so many friends that year from so many diverse backgrounds who all treated me so nicely, I was involved in so many clubs in which I met amazing people, I learned my first instrument; the clarinet, I had the opportunity to take college now classes and try sports so many things that my little private school unfortunately could not provide to me. I finally graduated high school and let me tell you I left as a new person. I had a much broader perspective of the world; I built my self-confidence and became more independent and overall, I feel less anxious when meeting new people and going to unfamiliar places. This event profoundly changed me in a better way but there is always room for more improvement. I believe that everything happens for a reason and me changing schools helped me be the person I am today.