

Hiba EL Rassi

Immigration

Good afternoon ladies and gentleman. How are you tonight? My name is Hiba El Rassi. I think you've heard that last name before because my oldest brother Joseph EL Rassi, my sister Carla EL-Rassi, and I have stood in this same place speaking in the previous years. I think it's a family tradition for us.

I'm proud to be a senior at Copley High School. I am 17 years old and I have 3 siblings, two brothers and one sister. I am Lebanese and I speak 2 languages: Arabic and English, and I'm working on my third, Spanish. I want to study hard, and become a civil engineer and make my country, my school, and my parents proud of me.

When I was younger, I always wondered why is the United States defined as the mother of Immigrants? Then I noticed that America is built from people from all around the world. Technically, Native Americans are the only ones who are not considered immigrants. Just like Herman Melville said, "In America you cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world; we are not a nation so much as a world." America is a country where freedom, liberty, justice, responsible government, and human equality are everywhere. It is a place where people can start a new life no matter where they came from, what they believe in, or what their race is. That is exactly why July 13, 2011, is a very memorable day for my family and me.

Every day when I wake up, I remember that feeling that I had experienced when my mother told me, "We are moving to America". I did not know what to say, or what to do. I was

confused wondering, if I should laugh and be excited, or should I cry and be sad. I could not decide whether my life changing was something I should look forward to or something that would cause me to face more problems than rewards. I could not bear the fact that I would no longer be able to see my family, and friends that I would have to leave back in my country, Lebanon.

After spending about twelve years in Lebanon, I knew that the biggest difficulty, I would have to overcome to moving to an environment that was totally different from the one I came from.. The first day I came home from school and cried for hours. My mother asked me what happened and I replied, “ I didn’t understand anything and I don’t even know if I have homework. She smiled and said “don’t worry, you don’t speak English, and your teachers wouldn’t give you any, even if they did they will not yell at you like your old teachers.” During 7th and 8th grade, the transition did not happen overnight just like Rome was not built in one day. I often felt unseen, misunderstood, and alone at school. However, I started to focus on the freedoms and benefits of living in the United States and knowing that one day I will at least learn to say, “hello, how are you?” As I spent more time trying, my communication skills slowly started to improve. Due to my progress, I started to enjoy the ability to chat with my classmates. Soon, I made more friends and noticed that I actually enjoyed going to school. Loneliness was no longer my only friend. Hanging out with my new friends and shopping became my new hobbies.

The doors finally opened for me, but it took effort and time. Life was complicated when I was learning a new language, culture, and customs. There were times in which I did not want to go to school, times I did not want to face shame, and times I wanted to return to Lebanon. Even

so, as time passed, I think back and say, there is not a better place I could have moved to. This country gave me and is giving me the rights and freedom that everybody asks for. One time my american friend told me that he loves his country but I think he meant that he loves an inner air, an inner light in which freedom lives in and which a man can draw the breath of self-respect. This quote is about the country and it's individuals who have taught me self-respect. Lastly, I really want to thank my ESL teachers that helped me through middle school and high school. You guided me when I was lost; you supported me when I was weak, and you have pushed me in a positive way. I want to thank you all and let you know that it's the little things you do that means so much to me and to all of your students. Especially, Mrs. Kopacz with helping me in high school and being one of the greatest ESL teachers that you can ask for and for staying overtime just to make sure that her students are acing their classes. Finally, I want to thank Copley High School's principal Mr. Cory and Copley High School's Vice principal Mr. Oden for giving me the opportunity to speak at this wonderful dinner. I want to thank you all and let you know that it's the little things you do that means so much to me and to all of your students. God bless America and the people I have got in contact with who have made me a proud American with a positive future.