

By Inela Omerovic

Xenophobia: intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries

As you're looking at me right now, what do you see? Do you see a normal teenage girl? Do you see a normal human breathing the same air as you are? But I have a secret, my parents weren't born in America. A picture came into your head, right? Although, it isn't what you think.

1991, war broke out in my parents' home country. They were little kids seeing things we would all fear to see right in front of them. The sparkle in every babies' eyes were dull, more like dust filled and even sometimes they were with a lady who wasn't even their mother. They survived the ultimate test, while others in our family and others' families didn't make it. Now, imagine not being able to hear from your mother or father for a day. Hard, right? Now imagine not being able to see or hear them again for the rest of your life. Even harder. That's what a lot of people have to go through.

My parents ran away from that though. America invited them during that hard time period to come here. Although, they had to sacrifice a lot to be able to go through with the opportunity. My father moved to Seattle, Washington at 13 years old with his parents and brother. My mom moved to St. Louis, Missouri at 18 years old with her mother, uncle, aunt and 2 younger cousins. Shocked? Oh, you thought I was going to say they hid in a van or truck and snuck into the country. You see, not everyone who wasn't born in America came here illegally.

Me and my two younger siblings were born here, but we grew up with a Bosnian culture. My parents have always wanted the best for us, as every parent should, and they did everything they needed to do to make it happen. Notice how I said "needed" instead of could. My parents worked hard to go through the process of being able to live here, but they've always cared more about our needs before theirs. Isn't that what everyone says America is about? Caring about everyone else while or before yourself?

My parents are my identity. I would not even be close to the person I am right now if they didn't raise me as a mature, respectful young adult who will have fun when it's appropriate to as long as you remember the rights and wrongs. I was born in America, which makes me American, but my blood is Bosnian and there's no shame in me when I say it. Foreign cultures don't make anyone less than a person. Everyone deserves respect no matter where they come from or how they grew up.

Honestly, learning about different cultures might be one of the coolest things to me. Next time you find someone from a different country, ask them about what it's like. You might even surprise yourself with how much you'll learn.