

The Journeys of Immigration

By Louie Meinolf

“...the USA doesn’t care about the people, the USA only cares about power and money.”

I asked Anne DeSouza, my mom’s coworker, about her immigration experience on a cloudy afternoon via email. She shared with me the story of her journey, one which took quite a bit of knowledge, time, and money. I was comfortable on my couch, although a bit stressed because I only had a few days to complete the interview and I was having some tech issues. She discussed her move here from France with her American husband and the changes she experienced, including having a child in the United States. It takes a lot to move anywhere as an immigrant, especially into the US. I respect immigrants from all nations. I think our culture should value and respect them, -legal or undocumented- more.

Anne immigrated at twenty nine, and according to her, “I think it was a good age. I had time to experience an adult life in France and it gave me a good perspective of what I wanted here.” She didn’t plan to move here, but instead, “...fell in love with an American man. He was supposed to move to France with me but he didn’t speak a word of French so we agreed it would be easier if I moved here instead.” She also said that, “Culturally, France and the USA are pretty similar. The meal portions and the quality of food is a big difference. The hardest part for me was the healthcare system. In France, like in most developed countries, we have Universal Healthcare.” In another quote she says, “Everybody has easy access to healthcare whether they live on the streets or are CEOs. We also have free education paid by our taxes. And you get 5 weeks vacation paid whatever job you have.”

These quotes show how different the US culture and government is when it comes to the people. In France, the government oversees and runs a Universal Healthcare system. Anne said that, “Everybody pays for everybody. The more money you make, the more you give.” Here in the US it’s hard for us to imagine, but there is also free education and a functioning public transportation system.

Many countries in Europe have similar systems. The food in France is also different, with more high-quality food but smaller servings, as mentioned by Anne in the interview. I think this shows an aspect of our consumer culture.

Anne's immigration was one of convenience and family. She discussed how her husband didn't know any French, but she knew English. Apparently she had learned English in school. According to her, "In France, we have to learn a foreign language when we start sixth grade and take a second foreign language when we go to sixth grade. Luckily, I chose English as my 1st foreign language. I studied it for about nine years and then began speaking it regularly when I started working as a camera operator." This really helped her out when they moved to the US. Her English knowledge also was a deciding factor of their move here instead of going back to France.

When she immigrated, Anne needed some way to become a legal permanent resident. She applied for a green card. The process is a difficult one, and costs a lot of money. She said that she paid three thousand dollars for a probation Green Card that lasted for two years, then paid more to stay here. She had to go through a very difficult process to get citizenship, saying that, "I ended up asking for citizenship this year and paid almost nine hundred dollars for it. I had to study American history and had to pass a test. There are one hundred questions that you have to know by heart. You get asked ten questions and you have to answer six questions correctly." In the end, Anne and her husband, Dan, did all the paperwork themselves as well. Many people hire an accountant or someone like that to do the paperwork for them. She describes it as being a very stressful situation. Apparently, twelve percent of Green Cards get denied. This may not seem like a large percentage, but it really is.

This whole process has taught me a lot, and I hope our culture can shift into respecting immigrants more. While Anne may not have gone through the extreme difficulty of some immigrants, I'm glad she made it here and hope everyone can live in the place of their needs and dreams.