

A long journey home

Leaving behind her home country of Armenia for a new life in America was a dream come true, but not always the easiest to achieve. *Tribal Tribune* staff writer Lia Khachatryan details her journey in a series of columns.

LIA
KHACHATRYAN
Column



“Don’t ever, EVER forget.” Her words echoed through my mind as the plane rose higher into the sky. This was it, the moment, the moment that forever changed my life.

I heard voices. One voice was distinctive. A voice I recognized but just couldn’t put together who it was because of the electric noise created by the computer’s sound system.

Less than a minute later, mom called my name.

“Lia...LIA.”

I abandoned my homework and walked into the other room. My mom was on a call. She was talking to him. It felt like a lifetime ago that I last heard his voice.

We had discussed moving to the United States more times than I can remember, but it always felt like an idea, almost a dream, never a goal.

As I approached the room, I saw him. On a screen, but still here. I heard his voice — the voice of a man who had raised me, a man more dear to me than I believe blood could make someone be. My step-father.

Mom was sitting in the living room, in front of his desk. A desk that had been empty for close to two years now, although I never did find out why he left. My favorite desk. One that stood in front of a wall covered in art I had made for him when I was just a kid, art I could not believe he hung up. Art I never saw the value in, but he considered to be perfect. My drawings. His daughter’s art.

The next moments were a blur.

All I know is, it was time. Time to pack our bags, time to go. To leave behind my home land — Armenia — and head to the land of opportunity.

The conversation was brief, one that we had had before. But, this time it was different. There was no more waiting now. If we didn’t leave soon, my brother would be drafted.

The house was chaotic. There was something in every corner. All I could think about was how I could fit all of my life’s belongings into one and a half bags.

There was a round, pink case mom had bought for us years ago. For my brother and me, though he would never admit to playing with those stuffed animals. The case held all I held dear -- the toys that got me through my parents’ divorce, my brother’s seizures and my father’s absence.

I was sitting at the foot of my bed, planning my toy-smuggling scheme — as well as an 11 year old could — when mom walked in.

“Honey, just pick a couple. You won’t need those soon enough.”

I never took out those toys again, despite my effort to hold on to that little anchor of my childhood. I soon learned, there weren’t enough toys in the world for that.

Goodbyes are hard. But I didn’t really get it then. I didn’t understand how big of a deal it was to abandon all I knew: my culture, my friends, my family, my language.

I didn’t know, but I found out.

I remember standing in a room I was much too familiar with. A room that I spent the better part of my childhood in. I stood there and I watched my grandma weep at the thought of letting us go. I stood and watched, but there wasn’t much I could do.

My mind began to wonder.

It was exciting. I was over the roof. I had been waiting for the iPads and the heating system and the clean streets. I was waiting for the humongous supermarkets. To try the oh-so-famous McDonalds for the first time. I had much to look forward to. But, most of all, I was waiting to see my dad again.

“Lia, sweetie, just promise me not to forget your language,” Ta said.

I snapped into reality.

“I won’t.”

How could I? Even the idea sounded preposterous to me then. But, the years have taught me that no skill is immune to a lack of practice. If not kept up, most skills rust.

This concept came up repeatedly throughout the year, but one memory stands out above all.

There was a play. The same every year, but this one was unlike the rest.

I remember watching all the parents fill the room, one after another, as I waited for my mom.

We were all called to the back of the stage. It was time for

final touches.

I took one last glance. She wasn’t there yet.

Before I could even take a breath, I found myself talking to a woman. My friend’s mom.

There are few things in my life that I remember quite as vividly as her expression. She wanted to know if we were permanently leaving. Once she received her answer came the look, the you’re-a-traitor-to-all-of-your-culture kind of a look. One quite hard to forget, accompanied by a voice I had never heard her use. One so rigid and unforgiving — filled with nothing but jealousy — I could never shake it off.

“This is your home” she said.

“Don’t ever, ever forget!”

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LIA KHACHATRYAN

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Things only middle kids understand

MIA
RANKIN
Column



Growing up as a middle child to two sisters -- Abby, 18 (the micromanager) and Audrey, 12 (nicknamed “the monster”) -- has taught me many things. Some good, some bad -- all insightful.

1. Having to learn how to be both the bossy older sister and annoying little sister at the same time -- while having to deal with one of each -- becomes a tiring task.

2. The whole “middle child gets less attention” is true, but definitely more of a blessing than a curse -- especially when it comes down to figuring out who forgot to empty the dishwasher.

3. Knowing that the little sister is lying to the older sister, but also knowing that the older sister is lying to the little sister about “not knowing.” But laughing while knowing that the mom knows about the whole thing and is scheming the ultimate revenge plan. Never involved, always entertained.

4. Being the “shy” one. If only they knew.

5. Constantly hearing “You should know better, you’re more mature than her” and “You’ll understand when you’re older like your sister.”

6. Learning that if one sister’s heart breaks, they all do. And then having to put them all back together.

7. Always teetering on the edge of “I’ll help you bury the body” and “If you look at me, I’ll scream.”

8. Understanding that “oh you’re a middle child” is only a little bit of an insult.

9. Playing games and knowing you were going to lose because the older sister would know how to cheat and the little sister would cry until she got her way.

10. Always facing the consequences of the siblings’ decisions. The older did something good, so now you have to live up to that and do better, but the younger did something bad, so now you have to “set a better example” for them.

11. Stacking up on hand-me-downs but never the ones you actually wanted (and “borrowed” frequently).

12. Never winning a fight because the older sister is always right and the younger sister is always the victim.

13. Love. Unconditional love and understanding. Because being the middle child means being annoyed with the siblings, but in the end, understanding where they both come from and loving them for it.

