

Student immigrants retain culture in US

Noemi Osieczko, Max Grinfeder, Natalie Tylae, and Hannah Thomas faced difficulties, revelations, and excitement integrating into US culture and society from immigrant families

by JESSIE BATES
executive editor



photo provided by NOEMI OSIECZKO

When she moved to Alaska from Poland at three years old, senior **Noemi Osieczko** was welcomed to the United States by her host family with a cake.

Noemi Osieczko, senior Immigrated from Poland

Senior Noemi Osieczko immigrated with her family to Alaska from Poland in 2005 at age three. Her family originally came to the United States with a religious worker visa. The church arranged for them to stay with a family, who they still visit.

"When we came, they [the host family] had a little cake that said 'Welcome to America!'" Osieczko said. "I still look back at the pictures. We were so happy."



photo provided by MAX GRINFEDER

Freshman **Max Grinfeder** learns to sail in Ilhabela, Sao Paulo with his dad, who has sailed across the Atlantic Ocean twice.

Max Grinfeder, freshman Immigrated from Brazil

Freshman Max Grinfeder's family has a history of immigration. His paternal grandmother moved from Israel to the United States as an immigrant during World War II to escape persecution as a Jewish person. She attained American citizenship, which has been passed through generations to Grinfeder himself, giving him status as a citizen despite the fact that he did not move to the U.S. until he was thirteen. Despite having previously visited the U.S., primarily Miami, Florida and Salt Lake City, Utah, Grinfeder's first year living in the U.S.

family to return to Poland or to find another way to remain in the U.S.

"I've been here since I was three, so I'm basically an American. But I'm not; I'm Polish. I really wish I was American because it is so much simpler if I were. I can't legally get a job. If I got to college, I can't apply for any scholarships. I have to pay international student fees," Osieczko said. "The plan was to become U.S. citizens, but here I am and we're still temporary."

Despite the ease that being a citizen would provide, Osieczko's family still maintains their Polish culture. They eat the meals one would find in Poland and rarely eat out because that isn't a common practice in Poland. Her family still celebrates Polish traditions such as Children's Day -- which is similar to Mother's Day, but for the children -- or eating traditional meals on Easter. One aspect of Poland that they could not bring to the U.S., however, is their family.

"I work at a restaurant and there are always big families eating together and I'm just like, 'I wish that was me.' I know a lot of people hate that, but I want one giant family dinner. I've never met any of my

cousins or my aunt because I never go visit," Osieczko said.

To visit her cousins in Poland or her grandma in Austria as she did as a child, Osieczko would have to return to Poland to get the visa and required paperwork. Even this simple family trip would be complicated and expensive to arrange. Despite these complications, Osieczko recognizes the benefits of living in the U.S.

"Life is hard in Poland. It's poor; it's post-communist, so the country is still trying to recover. We're not rich here, but to our family in Poland we are so rich," Osieczko said. "To describe it in modern day language: they have iPhone 4s over there, and we have the iPhone X."

Although she initially loved living in the U.S., she now has a different opinion. Once the excitement of coming to the U.S. had worn off and the Trump

administration took office, Osieczko found that she no longer liked her new home in the face of growing hostility towards immigrants. For Osieczko, this hostility isn't just found on the news, but rather in her own life. Before transferring to Central, Osieczko had an incident with another student that resulted in her suspension despite her role as the victim. After completing her suspension, her family received a call from the other student's parent, threatening to deport them. When shown proof of the threats, the school claimed there was nothing they could do.

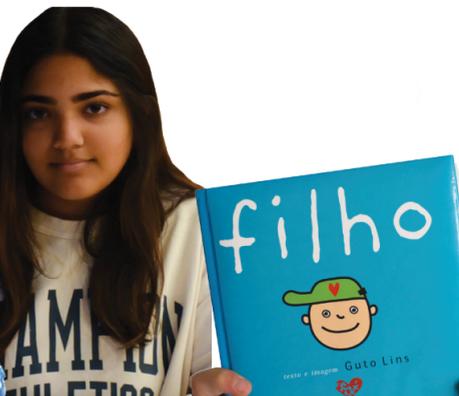
"I'm not saying there's more hatred nowadays than there was in the past," Osieczko said, "but I feel like it is targeted more towards immigrants and people of color."



Noemi Osieczko



Natalie Tylae



Hannah Thomas



Max Grinfeder

where Grinfeder was able to walk down to the grocery store, something that he had never done in Brazil. Coming from São Paulo -- the largest city in the Americas, with 12 million people -- the small city of Little Rock, Arkansas was quite a change of pace.

"When I got here, I saw nothing on the drive from the airport to our house. I just got to see a bunch of grass fields when I got here and I thought, 'Is this it?'" Grinfeder said. "But I was kind of excited, because it was like, 'Wow, this is America!'"

Although Grinfeder has physically left Brazil, he still keeps in touch with his native

Hannah Thomas, sophomore Parents immigrated from India

Sophomore Hannah Thomas had a very different childhood than her parents. Unlike her parents, who grew up in India, Thomas has lived in the United States her entire life. As a result, the American culture that she is exposed to among her friends and at school differs from the culture in which her parents have raised her.

"India was very different than living in America," Thomas said. "[My parents] were much more disciplined than how I--and Americans--grow up. The

school system was more harsh, and they made really good grades. They had to live up to a different standard."

Thomas' parents hold her and her siblings to a high standard. Thomas claims that, in order to go out with friends over the weekend, she has to maintain good grades, and try to get along with her parents throughout the week. Her parents didn't spend much time with friends in their childhood, so they expect their children to grow up as they did, with limited time spent with friends. Although some aspects of Thomas' child-



Natalie Tylae, senior Immigrated from Tanzania

Natalie Tylae has lived in four different countries throughout her life. Born in Tanzania, she lived in Botswana for four years, Dubai for eight -- where her family applied for and won the green card lottery -- Houston for two, and finally moved to Arkansas last year. Despite the many different



countries that she has lived in, she still considers Tanzania to be her home because that is where her family is.

"I'm very prideful about my country and where I come from," Tylae said. "I speak a lot of Swahili at home. When some of my immigrant friends go home, their parents will speak to them in their language and they reply back in

English. I can't do that because I don't want to forget Swahili; it's a very important language for me."

Tylae recently visited her extended family in Tanzania for the first time in the four years she has lived in the U.S. During her visit, she attended a Tanzanian wedding. According to Tylae, getting married is even bigger in Tanzania than in the U.S. Three events are dedicated to the concept of marriage: the Kitchen Party -- where the bride receives all of the necessities for her future kitchen -- the send-off -- in which the bride's family sends her off to be married -- and then the wedding ceremony.



photos provided by NATALIE TYLAE

There are many other differences between Tanzania and the U.S., Tylae claimed, that are not specific to a single tradition.

"In Tanzania, if you drive on the street, you will see people jaywalking across the street with no shame. People are brave there, I'll give them that," Tylae said. "Aside from that, food is honestly a lot better because everything is fresher there."

Having spent most of her life outside of the U.S., Tylae had several ideas about what the U.S. would be like before she arrived. Many of her friends warned her that she would be shot by the police because of her skin color, or that she would be met with a lot of racism. In her experience, however, she faces more microaggressions such as people touching her hair or telling her to "speak African."

"I thought America was going to be racist, but there would also be a lot of opportunity. That is the biggest thing. The reason my parents moved

here was for the opportunity in America," Tylae said. "America has so much influence over the rest of the world. If you go out and try to look for a job, the fact that you are American gives you an advantage."

Her initial impression of the U.S. was underwhelming. As they were driving home from the Houston airport, all she saw was flat land and strip malls. Tylae said once they arrived at their "typical American house," she felt like she had finally made it to the U.S. everybody had told her about. Despite her pessimistic preconceptions and underwhelming first impression of the U.S., Tylae is still determined to take advantage of the opportunities the U.S. has to offer.

"You see this work ethic from immigrants that is like no other because we know how America is viewed from the rest of the world and we want to be a part of that," Tylae said. "We want to be a part of the American dream."

of racism; they [other students] would be like, 'Why do you have a mustache?'" Thomas said. "I also get the stereotype where people are like, 'Aren't you Indian? Aren't you supposed to be really smart?'"

Despite the difficulty of finding a place for her culture at school, Thomas' family keeps in touch with their roots through annual trips to India, nightly traditional Indian meals, and gathering with the other Indians in their community to celebrate their shared culture.



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