

Life of an immigrant

Being an immigrant can feel like building a solid house on unsolid ground, but I have prepared myself for this. Here's the story of my immigration and my American dreams. Hope this can inspire you and help you believe that you can make a change in this world.



Sayena Majleseini
7 min read · Jul 17, 2020

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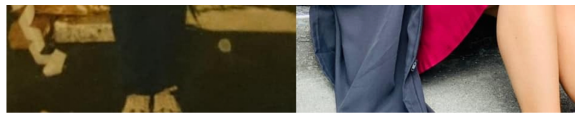
It's August 2009. I'm doing my homework in my room in Tehran, Iran, when suddenly I hear my dad's excited voice saying "we're going to America". After almost two decades of waiting, we're finally moving to the US. At that time, I was 13. As long as I could recall, we were always about to move to the US. In each gathering or family ceremony, everyone would talk about our case. At first, it was exciting, but when 10 years passed and nothing happened, it just become a meaningless mission in the corner of my mind.

So when I heard my dad, the excitement was real. I slept that night dreaming of East High School -from the High School Musical- and McDonald's Big Mac. You might laugh, but that was my American dream.

It's August 2010. I'm living in a small unit with my family and my uncle in Baton Rouge, LA. Going to the school is the hardest thing. Last night, I stayed up all night finishing my math homework. I ask a question about one of the equations and the teacher says she'll respond even though it wasn't part of our assignment. I realize we were only supposed to finish one section of the 8 pages that I completed last night. I cover my notebook with my hands. I don't have a lot of friends and everyone makes fun of my accent. I still get lost in the hallways and I'm not confident enough to ask for help. I often cry at nights thinking of my friends and our beautiful house back home. This was not part of my American dream.

It's August 2019. I have finished my master's at UW and I have gotten a job as a product designer. For the first time since I've moved, I'm feeling the power of stability. I can finally take care of my family. This was my American dream.





I rent a 2-bedroom apartment and ask my parents to live with me. ★
My dad, a retired math teacher, often gets bored at home. I encourage him to sign up for ESL classes at a college, but he says it's too cold in Seattle to go to these classes. My mom, with a master's in women studies, starts working as a part-time employee at a retail store. She loves her daily communications, her colleagues, and the opportunity to learn and practice English. The first thing she needs is a new bank account to set up her direct deposit. I take them to one of the major banks to open a joint account and I explain to the bank teller that we have recently moved to a new place and I'm very busy with my new job. So I want to make sure that when we walk outside this branch, we won't have an unresolved issue. He smiles and tells me that I have no reason to worry about.

One day later, the same guy calls me from the bank. I'm in a meeting. He calls and calls and calls till I answer my phone. He says that he's sorry, but they need more documents with the new address on it. I start thinking.. my dad's driver's license is from Oregon so they won't accept that. I ask if I can give them the lease agreement, they say no. Insurance policy? No. An official piece of mail? No. I'm frustrated. My mom has already given the account numbers to her employee. He gives me 48 hours to find a document or else they'll close their account. I feel disrespected and angry.

48 hours later. They close their account and send us a check.

As you can imagine, this was definitely not a part of my American dream. However, over the years I have learned that **sometimes being an immigrant can feel like building a solid house on unsolid ground**. And by house, I mean your dreams, thoughts, achievements, and contributions to this country and the world. So one must always be ready for an unpredictable change.

This time I had an opportunity to be part of another type of change...

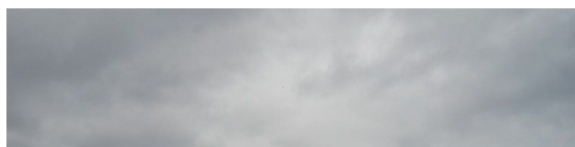
It's February 2020. I'm raising my glass with our amazing team at Remitly to Passbook, the bank account for multi-nationals. We were all part of a better change. We built a banking service that won't close anybody's account just because they don't have an SSN or just because they don't have a driver's license with their current residential address on it. We created a bank that understands the journey of immigrants like my parents and values their effort. So I was blessed to be part of a team that has turned this understanding into features like identity verification using various types of documents.

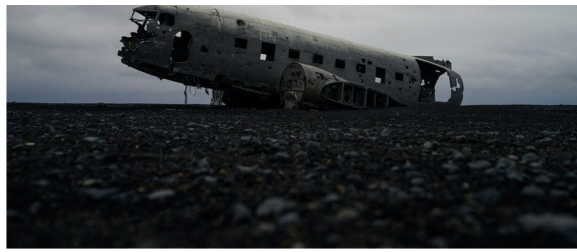
These features were not built because my parents needed them. **They were built because millions of immigrants like my parents needed them.**

Turning a challenge to a great work isn't easy, but who says that we're here to do anything easy? We're here (here = anywhere in this world), to put the bricks of our dreams one by one next to each other and be part of a better change.

Spoiler alert: This story never ends. There are infinite number of things to improve and fix in this world. Even today, when I close my eyes, I can still hear the voices of young students mocking my confusion, accent, or the way that my family looked. I open my eyes and I see the news about domestic and international wars, financial instability, or potential deportation of international students. But, I have learned my way to make small, but valuable changes. I have learned to turn my grief and anger to an impactful work.

Elena PTE Studio





In January 2020, when the Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 was shot down and 172 innocent, well-educated, young, and kind hearted immigrants passed away, many of us sat down in our homes and watched the news feeling useless, angry, and sad. Although no amount of work could fill the forever empty spaces that were left by these irreplaceable individuals, we came together and built a network of strong professionals who were eager to help ambitious students pursue their education abroad. Since that day, we have helped hundreds of students in Iran prepare their documents and pay for their admission fees.

Believe me when I tell you that everyday achieving these types of goal becomes harder. The pandemic, new regulations, and political events start raining on our heads when we don't expect them. But, we move forward. Well, I for sure try my best to move forward because I know that being an immigrant can sometimes feel like building a solid house on unsolid ground and I'm prepared for it.

Believing in making an improvement and being part of a better change is not limited to the lives of immigrants. It's a passion that one might feel anywhere in the world and in any situation.

I lost a close friend of mine at the age of 11 to cancer. For 6 years I struggled with a sadness and grief that was a permanent piece of my life. I assumed that life is this sad and hopeless for everyone till one day, I decided to be part of the change or dream that I was having for years. So I joined an NGO to support children with cancer and it changed my life. I started believing that I can be part of a change I want to see in the world.



I'm not sharing these true and personal stories to brag about my achievements over the past years because:

A. I wasn't the only person driving these goals. I was just lucky enough to work with people, teams, and organization who had similar visions, goals, and missions. So if you want to make a change, look for people and organizations who can help and support you. I'm sure there are thousands of them out there.

B. I still have a long journey to learn and achieve my goals and I'm not even halfway there. So buckle up, this journey may never end.

Lastly, looking back and having personal retro sessions have helped me stay motivated and committed in hard times. So I hope that by sharing these stories I can inspire you and help you stay motivated. And this my friend, the belief in being able to make a change is the true American dream.



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