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ENGL 1000 Writing Studies 1 Autobiography Contest

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3rd Place Essay - ENGL 1000 Literacy Autobiography Contest 2018

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Literacy Narrative Cover Page

1. **Name:** Marina Ibrahim
2. **English 1000 teacher's name:** Laura White
3. **Writing and revision process:**

My writing process of my literacy narrative began when I was first handed the information sheet. Numerous ideas flashed through my mind, so I began brainstorming and writing down my thoughts. After conversing with my peers and professor multiple times, I finally decided I wanted to write about my transition from Egypt to the United States of America. I began contemplating and analyzing my ideas and created a simplified outline. When I started typing my first draft, transitioning my thoughts and ideas into writing was the hardest and most time-consuming part; I had to fully elaborate about every idea. After finishing my first draft, I was looking forward to revising it and to perfect in the best of my abilities. To revise my literacy narrative, I incorporated symbol breaks throughout my paper, and added a quote to beginning in order to evoke the minds and emotions of the audience. Likewise, I elaborated throughout my paper about the differences between the English and the Arabic language, the safety drill procedures in the Unites States, the new opportunities that I now have, and the hard work that my parents have done for the family. I also made some minor grammatical errors and split up some of the paragraphs and sentences into shorter ones.

The rhetorical situation of my literacy narrative is crucial in fully understanding my paper. I was writing this paper because about ten years ago when I first moved to America, I did not encounter as many immigrants in school as I did about five years ago. Throughout time, more families moved to the United States to provide their family with better opportunities. I wanted to connect with a bigger audience. I wanted to connect with other immigrant students who encountered difficulties throughout their transition.

4. **If selected, I will NOT be available to present my essay at GSU Research Day due to a very important religious service on Friday, April 6, 2018.**

Marina Ibrahim

Professor White

Honors English 1000-15

March 2018

It was my father who taught us that an immigrant must work twice as hard as anybody else, that he must never give up.

Zinedine Zidane

A New Beginning

RING! RING! I switched the handle of the faucet to the red side as warm water came seeping through. RING! RING! I placed my palm on the soap dispenser and began rubbing my hands together for thirty seconds. RING! RING! I opened the bathroom door to a view of red exit doors opened and children lined up in single file lines on the green grass. Teachers holding clip boards in one hand, a pen in the other hand, and going through the lists checking students off alphabetically. RING! RING! *What in the world is going on? What is this infuriating alarm?* I was socially disoriented.



As the summer ends, children begin preparing for the new school year, but I was preparing my luggage. As the summer ends, children say goodbye to beaches and water parks, but tears flow down my cheeks as I say goodbye to my family. As the summer ends, children wait impatiently in check-out lines at Target, but I wait fearfully in the security lines at the airport.



Early Monday morning on July 7th, 2008, my entire life was about to be altered. An eighteen-hour plane flight from Cairo, Egypt to Chicago, IL, USA would transform my daily routines, school, and close friends. An unfamiliar culture was waiting for me at the end of the flight. New language, new traditions, and new friends. As August arrived, I was entering the fourth grade; I began my first year of school during late August in an alien building. On the first day of school, I walked anxiously in a room full of American children staring at me with their immense wide eyes and asking, “What’s your name and where are you from?” I replied with a thick accent saying, “My name is Marina and I am from Cairo, Egypt.” Little did I know that after this response, I will be exposed to a world full of American children that barely encounter immigrants in their everyday routine.

Being illiterate in English at the age of nine in the United States of America was a life revolutionizing experience. Growing up in Egypt, I was used to writing from right to left, but now I have to change the angle of my hands and fingers in order to write from left to right. The official language of Egypt is Arabic; the Arabic language has its own unique Arabic alphabet and numbers. For example, a simple word like “hello” would be “مرحبا”, reading it from right to left. Likewise, the number “4” would be “٤”. Even though I was taught how to write the English alphabet in Egypt, I feel as though I was taught incorrectly. After starting school in the United States, I realized that the way I write the English letters is different than the way my classmates write them. Throughout the years, I adjusted the form of my English handwriting, but until today I believe that my handwriting would have been better if I was not an immigrant.

Writing was the easy part. Conversation with my classmates was much harder. Trying to understand other classmates talking in slang and speaking, “How you doin’?” or “I dunno know,” was perplexing for the mind of a nine-year-old immigrant girl. Similarly, I had to endure

going through the discomfort of leaving the classroom a few times a week during certain times of the day in order to attend English as a Second Language (ESL) sessions. Likewise, I combatted bullies making fun of the way I pronounced words and spoke. In the Arabic language, the sound “th” was rarely even used or spoken, but in the English language, the “th” sound is very common. I would say “tree” instead of “three” and “taught” instead of “thought”. I became terrified of reading out loud because I was a slow, stuttering reader who had less than a year of exposure to the English language.



At my elementary school in Egypt, I was always one of the top ten students of my class, but moving to the United States, I became one of the bottom ten students of my class.



I had a flame within that fired me to transform my illiteracy in English. As a young immigrant girl, I had to learn the language of my new home. I began exploiting every opportunity I had to enhance my language skills and expand my exposure to the English language. I watched children’s television shows every day on PBS Kids, Channel 11. I recall watching *Super Why!*, *Word Girl*, and my favorite, *Curious George*. I started having an optimistic perspective of my illiteracy and began perceiving ESL classes as a tool instead of a punishment. Likewise, I would check out multiple books from my school library and read every single day. I started reading after I finished my homework, while waiting for dinner, during long car rides, and my favorite, reading myself to sleep every night.

During the next few years, I learned the various American customs, as well as the fire drill procedures that had bewildered me during my first fire drill experience in the bathroom while washing my hands. Growing up in Egypt, I was never exposed to safety drills like fire drills or tornado drills. I now understand that in an occurrence of a fire drill, all students and staff are required to exit the building as soon as possible in an orderly manner, line up in single file lines, and wait patiently until your homeroom teacher checks off your name. I now understand that in a tornado drill, students should report to the middle of the building and protect the back of their necks with both of their hands. I now understand the American school system.

Going into the seventh grade, I was astounded that I was placed in accelerated English and Math. I was also placed in Spanish due to my high scores in the ISAT (Illinois Standards Achievement Test). Not only was I able to improve my English language throughout my education, but I also fell in love with a third language. Spanish is a language that I began to learn in seventh grade, and it evoked in me the love and appreciation of constantly learning new things as well as always improving my skills.

Entering high school, I began to see a glimpse of light, a shadow of hope for a successful future. I started to understand and respect the opportunities that are freely offered in the United States that I would have never been able to attain in Egypt.



Now I have the opportunity to equally learn and not be criticized based on my gender or religion. Now I have the opportunity to attend a university without restrictions simply because I am a woman. Now I have the opportunity to drive a car safely without the eyes of street men criticizing my actions.



Since I was born and raised in a different environment full of diverse expectations, traditions, and cultures, immigrating to the United States of America was a life changing occurrence. The primary factor that allowed as well as planned this altering event were my loving and supportive parents. My mother as well as my father sacrificed everything they attained just to provide my brothers and I with better opportunities. My parents gave up their excellent jobs, family, childhood friends, and their unforgotten rituals for their children. Presently, their elder son is in college studying to be a Physical Therapist Assistant, their only daughter has received the Governor's State University's Presidential Scholarship and is currently a freshman in college, and their youngest son is in Accelerated Math and Reading in his second year of middle school. Their risks paid off.

Throughout my nine years living in the United States of America, I learned that every difficult situation shapes an individual into a stronger person full of wisdom. Sometimes challenging situations empower an individual to alter their perception. They begin to view their lives through positive lenses and appreciate all the little things in their life. I now appreciate people who love me despite my flaws, long, tight hugs when saying goodbye to family overseas, and being able to publicize my notions and sentiments through the universal English language.

Most individuals have different identities for different situations. For instance, a person can be a student, a child, a spouse and/or a friend, but it is different when an individual's identity is based on their language. To the age of nine, I communicated through the Arabic language, but after moving to the United States of America, I transitioned to communicating in multiple languages. When speaking to my parents, I would replay the Arabic script in my head before I talk to them; when I am presenting a project in school, I would replay the English script in my head before presenting. I believe identity should not be based on language, but the world

identifies an individual based on their signature, and only one signature is valid per person. I have two signatures, but I only have one identity.

Marina Ibrahim

مارينا ابراهيم