

Christina's interview

Which is the story behind your decision to immigrate and what were your parent's hopes for a new life?

When I was unborn my parents decided to migrate because they wanted a better future for their family because of the Albanian war.

Why did you choose to come to this country instead of going somewhere else?

My father chose to come to Greece because it was near Albania. He had been working here already for five years.

Who did you come with and who did you leave behind?

I came here with my brother, my mother and my father. We left behind the rest of family.

Did anyone come ahead of you?

My parents' siblings started coming ahead of us.

What was the most difficult part about leaving?

It was difficult for my parents to abandon their whole life, especially their family.

What was the most difficult part about coming here?

It was the permit of abidance. My mother came illegally to Greece therefore the police imprisoned her many times.

What was it like when you first arrived?

It was a hard situation. My parents didn't know the language and they were alone in a foreign country with two young children.

What most surprised you?

Greek people are more open minded. I remember when I was younger I couldn't wear shorts in Albania as I did in Greece. Additionally it was inappropriate for a woman to work as a waitress.

What did you and your parents miss most about your country?

Obvious our relatives.

Was there anybody who helped you move?

Yes, my father had come here a few years before we moved and he had met a man who became my brother's godfather and a woman who became my godmother. These people really helped our parents .When our parents went to work they were taking care of us. In general they helped us socialize.

Migration can be hard. Where did you and your parents find the power and the strength to keep on trying even when the times were hard?

I think that comes from the family. I mean my parents came here in Greece with two young children, two babies. So they took courage from us, from their children. Because the situation in Albania was awful.

How do you think migration has changed you?

It has definitely changed me. If I was in Albania I wouldn't be the same because the way little girls grow up there, is really different from the way they grow up here. I think that the fact that my parents worked really hard and I with my brother had to grow up alone basically has helped me a lot. I, at a really young age, had to do the housework and I was really independent. I also looked up to my parents who were trying really-really hard for our survival and I think all of these things together have helped me a lot.

Which was the biggest and hardest challenge for you so far?

I don't really think that I had a hard time in my childhood. I was actually lucky enough to never face any sort of racism. Maybe a few situations but not that

important. I remember one of them better. I was in the third or fourth grade. I remember there was that boy that had just moved to the village and his parents were kind of racists. He pointed at me and said "Albanian you're not gonna play with us". Luckily I had all the rest of the children on my side and their parents as well. So I don't think I really had a hard time with that.

What about the language?

As I said before I was really young when we came here so I actually managed to learn the language really fast. Unfortunately it was not that easy for my brother who was older. He faced difficulties in the school where he was alone because he couldn't speak the language. But as the time passed, he learned the language as well.

Do you speak Albanian in your house?

Yes, we speak Albanian in the house and to be honest it's not that easy for me; sometimes my parents ask me something in Albanian and I answer in Greek. In general we do speak Albanian in our house and me and my parents try hard so that I don't forget the language.

What kind of sources of happiness did you have?

I think that friendships that I have made with people throughout the years have really and actually helped me. So when I face any sort of difficulties they really help me. Of course my parents are the first ones to be there for me always.

How do you think your family is doing after they moved to Greece?

Obviously much better even though we are foreigners in this country, now we are much-much better. We are now a part of this community, of the Greek community. Now no one can tell us apart.

Can you think of the times were you felt unwelcome.

I think it's only that little situation with that kid in the school. Maybe some racist comments from people who are older and who are not as open minded. Although I don't care because I had a really good childhood and if I hear some comments about me that are not that polite and I don't want to fight with people.

Is there anybody who had thought you were Greek and when he or she learned your name or your last name were surprised?

Actually most of the people that I socialize with, think I am Greek. Neither my appearance nor my last name is Albanian. Moreover my name is Christian, unless I choose to introduce myself with my other name which is Regina. Maybe it's kind of shock for them sometimes but I don't care.

What things are you most proud of?

I'm really proud of my parents because with hard work they managed to build a house and they also brought us up .They basically started from nothing.

What would you like to achieve in the future?

I want to make my own family, here in Greece. I do not want to leave my place again.

What do you think can stop these dreams?

Perhaps the financial crisis is the only thing I can think of now. I don't think there is anything else that can stop me from doing it.

What do you think can help make your dreams come true?

The opposite. Improvement of the economy. Maybe, I don't know.

How do you think immigration has made you a better person and a stronger one?

Okay. I think what I said before that, because we actually grew up with my brother, we are committed to each other a little bit, it actually made it harder for

our parents. I think that made me stronger and made me independent, that is, to count on my own strength, to be able to do what I want on my own, to have the power to do it all; made me stronger in this way.

If anyone was planning to come to this country, what would you advise them to expect?

The fact that they would experience some kind of racism.

What would you tell them about whether or not they should come?

I would advise them that anything is possible and that once they made the decision to come, not to get disappointed, to have in their mind the reason they were thinking of coming and what they experience here, not to hurt them.

If they decide to come, what advice would you give them to make them have the best experience, a good time?

I think the advice I would give them is not to listen to what the people are saying and focus on their purpose, the purpose they had and the reason they came here for.

What would you like most people to know about immigrants?

That they obviously left their country for a better future and not "We've come here to get your jobs" which is what most believe.

What are the two most important things people can do to improve the process of coming to a country?

I think it has more to do with bureaucracy, because Greece has a very strange and complicated bureaucracy system. It might help a lot.

Is there anything you would like to add? Maybe something that hasn't been said, something we haven't said?

Basically I want to add something, because it's something I'm still being asked. They ask me "How do you feel? Are you Albanian or Greek?" This is a very common question. I clearly think I am Greek because, I grew up here in Greece. No matter what, Greece has helped me to become what I am.

Would you ever go back to Albania?

No, I would never go back for any reason. No way. Except for holidays, like the way I would go to any other country. But permanently, NO, I can't live there. Because Albania is many years behind Greece. Basically in relation to the whole world. (Laughs). Because it is!

(one of the teachers, Vasso P. interrupted): I want to say the following. Do you allow me Christina to say how I met your parents?

Yes, Yes. I think, at the police station? Right?

Vasso P. (teacher): Yes. I happened to go to the police station here in New Moudania for some... to tell you the reason, to get our family correspondence. Because we do not have a postman where we live... in this beautiful part of New Moudania, our family correspondence is sent to the Police Department and the Traffic Department. Outside, I saw a couple coming in and asking the police officer what to do to authorize you (their daughter) to make a change at a phone company. The policeman clearly understood that they were not Greek citizens and the way he treated them was the worst ever. I didn't know they were Christina's parents at that time. I didn't know her, Christina was a schoolgirl, she was also my daughter's friend, but I hadn't met her parents yet. And I'm starting to help them, because it doesn't make sense, even for locals, it is confusing filling in applications, imagine for foreigners. And I started helping. As soon as the name of Christina came out, I was astonished to find out that they were the parents of Christina who was a student at my school. They asked who I was

and I answered that I was the teacher who went on a trip with... And I started to explain the whole story from the beginning. The policeman didn't expect me to stand up and help two unknown people. Yes, he does not have to fill in these applications, but the way he treated them was the worst.

Yes, in general the services here in Greece are inhumane, but also the behaviors towards immigrants.

Vasso P. (teacher): I am very sensitive, because I was also a migrant in Germany, all alone. At the age of eighteen I found myself there and had to fight alone with all this bureaucracy. It had everything to do with my survival. Maybe that's why I'm helping. Because the memory of this trauma often comes back to me. I think this is the right thing to do, help and that's what we all need to do. We are all human beings and we should stand by each other because we can find ourselves in the same place. Let's not forget this. If we respect other people we can expect to be respected.

One last thing I forgot; I took up athletics at high school. I liked it very much, I had the talent as my coach said and we had reached a very good level. Me and some other girls from the team had been proposed by Albania to represent them in European matches but to continue being trained in Greece with our Greek coach, that is, to represent Albania in Europe and all over the world, but with the coach we had in Greece. I refused because I was born in Greece. Greece has supported me and would be a betrayal for my beliefs to represent Albania. I have nothing else to complete