

Expanding Horizons Through Global Education: A Leap of Faith

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the transformative experience of studying abroad at Wenzhou-Kean University in China and how immersion in a new cultural and academic environment reshaped the author's understanding of identity, diversity, and human connection. Through moments of curiosity, challenge, and growth, the chapter highlights the development of intercultural awareness and adaptability in unfamiliar settings. It examines how relationships with local students, faculty, and fellow exchange students fostered empathy, communication, and a deeper appreciation for cultural values and differences. By reflecting on experiences of linguistic barriers, friendship, and everyday life in China, this chapter illustrates how global education expands perspective, strengthens resilience, and encourages lifelong learning. Ultimately, it demonstrates how living and learning abroad can inspire personal transformation and a renewed sense of belonging in the global community.

BEING BRAVE: MY ADVENTURE ABROAD

The flyer was small, almost easy to miss, but the decision it sparked led me halfway across the world. It was the kind of decision that feels equal parts exciting

and terrifying. This story is about growth, identity, and the moments that shape a person over time. What I am about to describe is not just a semester abroad; it is about how I came to understand myself more deeply and began connecting the dots between who I was as a child and who I am becoming as a young adult. I grew up in a small, close-knit household where I was raised by a strong and loving mother who taught me the importance of independence, hard work, and staying grounded in my values. Her guidance, along with the deep cultural pride that came from my Salvadoran and Puerto Rican roots, helped shape my worldview in ways I have always appreciated.

In the following section, I will introduce the younger version of myself that used to stay quiet, the one who preferred observing over speaking, and talk about how that version slowly evolved into someone eager to make new connections, explore unfamiliar places, and live with intention. I share how I found joy in the creative process, how I used to build things out of cardboard and scraps around the house, and how those playful moments hinted at something bigger. I had a passion that would one day lead me to pursue my major at university. When I finally discovered my path, something clicked. It gave me a clear sense of direction and enough confidence to imagine a life that reached beyond the borders I had always known.

I will discuss my inciting incident. How a flyer on the wall at my school gave me the opportunity to do something I thought I never could. That one small moment on my way to class sparked a multitude of decisions and emotions, from curiosity to commitment. I share the process of applying to the program, reworking my academic plan, talking with the people around me, and embracing the uncertainty of what was to come. The story includes various conversations, supportive gestures, and the hope that stepping into a completely new environment would help me grow in ways I could not predict.

More than anything, this chapter is about trusting myself enough to take a chance and being open to how that decision might reshape how I see the world and my place in it.

MY CULTURE AND CREATIONS

I come from a big family of Salvadoran origin. My grandma and her many siblings moved from El Salvador to the United States as young adults. I was born in America with a blend of Salvadoran and Puerto Rican heritage. I was raised in apartments as an only child by my mother, who has been my greatest supporter throughout my life. Growing up, it was just the two of us navigating the world together. She is strong-willed, hardworking, and incredibly protective, traits that I now see in myself as well. While our personalities sometimes clashed when I was younger, mainly because

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