

American Dream or Nightmare?

Alejandra González

Being an immigrant in the United States isn't as easy as it sounds. Who says you can come to this country and live the "American Dream"? Probably, the only people who say that are people who never lived the experience of being an immigrant.

My First Days in the U.S. Were Great

When I started dreaming about coming to the U.S., I knew about this country only from the movies. Even though I knew that movies are not the same as reality, I still thought that life in the States would be similar. I thought there would be only big houses, cars, jobs, the possibility of a better future, and a safe place to raise my kids.

My first days here were great. My husband's family took us to Washington, D.C. We ate at restaurants and went shopping. They surprised us with the good news that they had found a job for my husband and an apartment where we could live! I couldn't ask for more.

Then the Dream Became a Nightmare

But then reality got me. As soon as everybody went back to work and their routines, I found myself with a three-year old son, no car, and no ability to communicate in English. My dream apartment became my jail. I lost my independence, and I became totally dependent of my husband. On weekends, going to Shoppers and eating at McDonald's was the best that could happen to us.

I was living in survival mode. I wasn't happy, and the "American Dream" became a nightmare. Don't get me wrong. I had a place to live and food on my table, but the price that I paid for that was not having family and friends.

Getting Help

By the time my second son was born, depression took the best of me. That was a breaking point for me. Fortunately, doctors and my therapist helped

me to feel strong again. What really helped me was taking English classes. I was able to meet other people who had similar problems. Getting my driver's license gave me back my independence.

Today, 13 years later, I sit in my car and enjoy the liberty to go wherever I want. My English has improved so much that now I volunteer as an interpreter at the Fredericksburg Christian Health Center. Can you believe it? I'm part of the society now. I'm proudly a soccer mom — of Brandon, a high school junior; Matthew, a middle-schooler; and Abigail, a kindergartener.

You Can Still Dream—Just Be Prepared!

I feel very proud of myself because I never gave up. I'm very thankful to my family for their support and to every single person who helped me to be who I am now. I hope that my story can help people to believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And for all of you who are planning to start living the "American Dream," be aware that it is not easy. Be prepared!

Alejandra González, originally from Argentina, lives in Stafford, Virginia. She is the mother of three children and she attends ESL classes at the Rappahannock Area Regional Adult Education.

AFTER YOU READ: Use the Internet to look up the "American Dream." What is it? Where did the idea come from? Write a paragraph about it. Find a cartoon relevant to the American Dream. Share and discuss.

