Immigration

Following My Heart

Svetlana Davidzon

One of hardest things to do is leave behind everything you know to start a new life in a new place. Some people move to another country for a better life. Some people move to get a good job or for a better education. In my case, I followed my heart.

I am from Russia. In Russia, I had everything for an ordinary life, such as a good job, a home, and a loving family. In addition, I was a student at the Finance Academy, and if I lived in Russia now, I would have finished my education. I would have graduated with a degree in economics. I had to leave all of this for the sake of love, for the sake of happiness. I left Russia to be with my husband.

My first year in the U.S. was hard. I missed my family and friends. I cried every day because I was so lonely. My husband was supportive, but it was still hard. Because I did not know English, living in the U.S., I wanted to return to my country every day. I was afraid to go outside because I was worried I would get lost. It was hard and scary to rebuild everything from scratch. Many immigrants must have similar feelings to me.

After reading the beginning of my story, maybe you have two questions: “Why did you leave everything?” “Why didn’t your husband move to Russia?”

I left my country because I love my husband very much. He can’t live in Russia because it would be dangerous for him. He is Jewish and he does not look Slavic. Regrettfully, there is a lot of anti-Semitism and racism in my country. I was afraid for my husband’s safety. In Russia, he could be beaten or killed for looking different.

I wrote this because we all have different reasons why we came here. Some people leave everything behind and start their new life in a new place because of love. However, the most important reason why I wrote this is because I wanted to speak out. As immigrants, sometimes we don’t have a person to listen to our stories.

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The Importance of Telling Stories

At first, Alan Pelaez did not think he had a story to tell. But then he discovered that storytelling builds community and raises awareness. Alan is now a nationally recognized youth activist and supporter of immigrant and queer rights. “I exist,” he says. “I am undocumented—unafraid and unapologetic. I am also queer and unashamed.” Listen to his 8-minute story here: <ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2013/11/25/alan-pelaez-lopez/>