

Opportunities

Araceli Bonilla

BEFORE YOU READ: What opportunities do you have in the U.S. that you didn't have in your country?

At First, I Was Afraid

Opportunities! Every time I think of the United States, the word that comes to my mind is opportunities.

When my son was three years old, my husband and I decided to move to the United States. We wanted my son to start school in the U.S. My husband and my son are U.S. citizens, and I had a tourist visa. When the time arrived to move, to be honest, I had mixed emotions. I was happy, but at the same time I was afraid. I wasn't familiar with this country and its culture. I didn't know the language, and, to make matters worse, I didn't know how to drive! Yes, you might think that I was *making a mountain out of a molehill*, but I was afraid.

At that time, my husband had found a good job in El Paso, Texas. We bought a nice house at a good price close to a Native American reservation. Things couldn't be better. The only problem was that the only people I knew were my three-year-old son and my husband.

Then I Felt Welcomed

Fortunately, my friendly neighbor introduced herself to me, and soon we started a friendship. She was so kind to me. She talked to me about different schools for my son. As soon as I could, I went to register him. After that, I began the process to become a U.S. resident. Within three months, I got my green card. That was a great opportunity for me because it allowed me to get an ID and then a job.

I signed myself up as a volunteer in my son's pre-K classroom. The experience was amazing. I met some wonderful ladies there. They were very



kind to me, and I felt very welcomed. They taught me different types of crafts and how to decorate classrooms. Most of all, I loved working with kids. One of the advantages of living in El Paso is that the majority of the people are bilingual. That made communication easier. I spent three wonderful years as a volunteer, but it was important to me to move forward with my career.

Enrolling in English and GED Classes

I was told that I could take GED classes, as well as English classes at a community learning center near my house. I was amazed when I found out that I could take classes for free. In my country, Mexico, we do not have the same kind of oppor-



The author with her husband and son at the ceremony where she received her GED.

tunities. Even though education is free, parents and students are always charged fees. That is why many people immigrate to other countries. They lack opportunities in their own country, their governments are corrupt, and the society has too much violence.

In my GED classes, I learned about U.S. history. The thing that amazed me the most was finding out that this country is made up of immigrants. Even before the white colonists came in the 1400s, other people migrated here from Eurasia thousands of years ago. These early immigrants were the first people* to live on this land. Now we call them Native Americans.

Finally, I graduated and got my GED. My family was there, and they were very happy. When they called out my name, my son yelled, “We are the best.” Happiness!

Proud to Be an Immigrant and U.S. Citizen

As time passed, and with a mortgage to pay, I wanted to help my husband, so I looked for a part-time job. Fortunately, I found one near my house. I took care of an 86-year-old lady. It was an

easy job that allowed me to take care of my family and complete my housekeeping chores. My son finally graduated from high school, and that allowed me to pursue my dreams. It was time for me to go back to school. And here I am, improving my English even more.

Opportunities indeed! Since I moved here I have faced several challenges, but I have had many opportunities. Today, I have the opportunity to vote on issues affecting my city and my community. I have met wonderful and kind people – teachers, students, and strangers – who smiled at me. I feel welcome. My fears are gone. I have been in this country for almost 20 years, and I am thankful for the opportunities I have had. I’m proud to say I’m an immigrant and a U.S. citizen.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What does the metaphor “make a mountain out of a molehill” mean? Share a time you made a mountain out of a molehill.
2. Find examples of short sentences in this essay. What impact does a short sentence have on you, the reader? (There is at least one example each of one-, two-, three-, and four-word sentences.)

Araceli Bonilla was born in a small town in Durango, Mexico, but raised in Juarez, Mexico, a border city across from El Paso, Texas, where she now resides. She is currently enrolled in Ysleta Community Learning Center, and she is taking a Microsoft Office certification course. Next semester, she will be starting to pursue her degree in Business Administration at El Paso Community College.

***First People Are Indigenous People**

To learn more, see <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-48-march-2019-indigenous-peoples/>.

Also, read “The Border Wall Runs through Our Home” on pp. 36-39 of <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-56-august-2022-our-immigration-stories/>.