

Relocation during the high school years can be incredibly difficult and stressful, especially over a long distance. Starting over in a new school is intimidating for most students, and it was for me, too. I had to move to North Carolina from Virginia at the end of my sophomore year. There were numerous challenges, and it was almost too much for me to handle. Fortunately, I was able to overcome them and thrive as a successful student in a whole new environment.

In May of 2016, my mom passed away unexpectedly one morning at the age of forty-six. My entire world was flipped upside down. My brothers and I were separated, and I had to move to North Carolina to live with my father. After the school year came to a close, I packed my things and began the process of relocation.

The first month or so was the most difficult for me because I was still grieving and had none of my Virginia friends nearby to support me. However, I busied myself by preparing the necessary paperwork for enrollment at Porter Ridge High School in suburban Charlotte. My father and I went to the school to select classes for my junior year. I noticed quickly that there were many more subjects to choose from than offered by my previous school. Because I was excited about several of my new classes, I actually found myself anxious for my first day.

Once school started, however, I encountered a number of challenges. The first was the time schedule. My old high school started at nine o'clock, but Porter Ridge started a full hour earlier. As a result, I needed to go to bed and get up earlier. Then, I didn't really have anyone to sit with on the bus, making the ride to and from school a lonely and quiet one. My first day was probably the hardest since I also didn't know anyone to sit with at lunch. I wasn't accustomed to being the new kid. Nobody invited me to sit with them, so I ended up picking a somewhat empty table and sitting alone.

While the first few weeks left me feeling left out, things gradually started to improve. I made a few friends in my classes and finally started to fit in. I worked hard to keep my grades high and developed good relationships with all of my teachers, several of which I continue to visit from time to time. I particularly enjoyed my Latin class, as it was something that wasn't available to me in Virginia. It also was a great fit with my interest in the natural sciences. I also joined the FFA chapter at Porter Ridge, although it isn't nearly as busy as my old one was.

By the second semester, I felt right at home. I had friends I saw throughout the day and made several more with my new classes. I loved all of my classes, but English and history definitely were my favorites that year. I developed a particularly good

relationship with my English teacher, who has since been extremely helpful by checking my papers for applications and scholarships. I received great grades once again in the second semester of my junior year, and had taken both the ACT and SAT tests.

Now as a senior, I am enjoying many classes that were taken at my choosing instead of being requirements. I challenged myself and took the year-long AP Biology course, which is my favorite class since I started going to Porter Ridge. I also took advantage of the opportunity to work in the PRHS library, which has taught me a lot about the inner workings of the school. Currently, I am taking the Veterinary Assisting course, which will allow me to acquire a vet assistant certification. I hope to use it to find work to help me pay for college tuition along with any scholarship money I may receive.

Another significant issue that I encountered since relocating has been obtaining my driver's license. Before I moved, I was ready to acquire my learner's driving permit in Virginia. However, I was unable to do so and had to do things differently upon moving. The process is considerably different for both states, which made everything much more difficult for me. North Carolina did not accept my previous driver's education coursework, and I had to start over from the beginning. Fortunately I'm now well on my way to getting my license, but it hasn't been easy.

I've learned a lot of things along the way that would prove useful to anyone having to make a similar transition during their high school years. Most important is to be yourself. Don't feel like you have to change some aspect of your appearance or personality to fit in with a new crowd. Look for activities and organizations that meet your interests and get involved in them. The right people will appreciate you exactly the way you are, but it might take some time for them to find you and vice versa.

Another important tip is to not compare your new school to the old one. The more time you spend focusing on what is different, the less time you spend exploring what your new place has to offer. It took me a little while to realize this. I was too busy comparing the two schools at first. With time, however, I found that my new school has much to offer on its own, even if it isn't the same as my old high school. No high school is going to be perfect, but all of them have something to offer to everyone.

I also cannot emphasize how important it is to stay connected with people after relocating. Just because someone no longer lives close to you doesn't mean you should allow yourself to lose touch with them. My best friend lives hours away from me, but we regularly are in communication with each other. Distance can make it difficult, but it does get better over time as long as you stick with it. I would also say that you shouldn't

try to replace people in your life. Make new friends, but don't forget about the old ones. Good friends can be anywhere.

Relocating during high school can be incredibly difficult. However, I found it to be an easier transition once I started to look at the positive aspects of my new school and the surrounding area. I went from rock bottom to soaring above the clouds, going from strength to strength as I finished my high school years. I did not allow relocating to change my end goals, and I still plan on pursuing a degree in entomology. I have already been accepted to the University of Florida, and will be hearing from North Carolina State University, at the end of March. Both are among the top five entomology schools in the nation.

Successfully relocating while in high school, indeed in life, is as achievable as you make it. Changes can make things difficult, but it is up to the student to work hard no matter what. While I first thought relocating was a terrible thing, I've come to realize that I had it all wrong. It was really a blessing in disguise; giving me new opportunities and a chance to do even better than ever before.