

"Diary of a Reform Girl"

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I have always experienced change from the time I was a day old. Change is different from change in weather; change is something that goes from one state to another. This has happened quite often in my life; however I have cried my tears, adjusted and changed the chapter of my old life. Despite my previous experiences with change, I didn't fully understand it until mid-August, when my life became a roller coaster.

I have lived in various places, from bustling and busy cities to snow covered mountains with bears nettled in the woods behind you. Nevertheless my parents wanted to dwell in a place with people who thought like them. They did not want the immoral aftermaths of the world to affect my daily life. A dear friend of my dad's suggested that we pay a visit to the south, that way we can get to know people who were just like us. My family and I were welcomed to the small community although secretly, crafty minds had spied our fashionable wear and planned to reform us, rather quickly.

After spending plenty of time in the south, meeting and greeting families from various lifestyles, we settled in a small bungalow home right in the heart of people who were just the same. I am sure by now you have guessed my family and I are religious. Unlike the Amish or Mormons who live next door to one other, we spread out but we live generally close to each other and all follow different rules. Our landlord lived a few doorsteps beside us. Every morning I would look out my window and see horses, chickens, or ducks crossing the road. It was quite scene, different, but exciting. In the afternoon, the land lord's son would feed the animals or do farm work around the garden area. I never actually thought country boys were worth being seen around but my mind changed and shortly after I had developed a small crush. I had nothing to fear, why should I? My thoughts consisted of boots, boys, and sticks. I kept myself busy exploring the woods and soon I wasn't hunting all alone either. My parents, while driving down the road in the blazing sun, hot air whipping our faces, spotted a 'dog for sale' sign and in minutes a playful furry ball was included in the family. Goldie was supposed to be a blood-eating guard dog but it turns out she was everything but. She barked loudly in a strong, deep voice alarming

intruders and sleep soundly outside my door window every night. A one of a kind dog I will never forget.

Back then I didn't know what friends meant. I thought a friend was someone you talked to, now I know friends are more than that. Today I can probably say I only have three friends, although I interact with different people I could not safely call them my true and dearest friends. In about a year, I had made several playmates who eagerly came to play, as they knew I had modern toys that I had sneaked in.

And no we did not have computers, iPods or movies to keep us entertained either. We found things to play with and since mischief wasn't too far down our list, we kept active. My wardrobe no longer consisted of leather boots, shaggy sweaters, fancy stockings and silk garments. The meals that spread across our tables were made from food that grew outside, we were taught never to kill an animal therefore we were strict vegans. I now wore the clothing that everyone that was around me wore, a plain ankle length skirt and a cotton long sleeve shirt. Sturdy shoes used for walking, working and playing and simple shoes for church meetings. Everything was going well, despite the hanky-panky and crafty minds behind the church curtains, I did what I was taught and I played safely and fairly. There is never a smooth road in life, we often get comfortable on the roads we take that can become smooth then without warning our comfort zone is taken away from us. My parents told me frankly that they didn't think the community I lived in allowed me to think freely. At that time I just couldn't comprehend that. The community started years before my family and I came, we don't exactly know who came up with the idea but we can now say that a woman did bring the whole idea together and wrote a book about it, which people use as their daily bible.

Some say this person was a god, however she was just an average girl with only a fourth grade education and was somehow blessed with words of wisdom from our Father. There are countless times when she has even written for people to stop following every line she writes but they can't help it. No one wants to think for themselves; she gave them a booklet on how to dress, think, speak, walk and sleep in a book series. People will buy it because it's easier than figuring out what is the right or wrong way. People around me lived as if they were robots. They were programmed with certain information that they repeated to others, those

people taught themselves, their friends and family and the generation following after. My parents decided shortly after to sell our home, which seemed to take forever but actually sold rather quickly in just a few months. The question was, where to move?

The world map is big with tiny dots strewn across the page in every direction, beckoning my family to choose. A tiny dot sat in the middle of vast blue oceans; that was the island we would now call home. However, it isn't any island, it is my mother's home and in that case it's my home too. Even though it was our home, we weren't connected with the family that lived there so we arrived like tourists. Everything was new and exciting, the luxury resorts, sandy beaches and exotic foods. What was even more captivating was the rich history of the family connected to my mother.

As thrilling as the island was I wasn't ready to leave my home behind me with familiar faces and most of all, my dog, Goldie. My parents however did not give in to my pleading to stay and proceeded with their plan to move. My dog was taken elsewhere; I do not know where she remains now but all I can do is hope she is in good hands. My dear grandmother also found the island thrilling and vowed to never leave my side, as I am her favorite granddaughter. My friends I had grown to love are now becoming internet savvy and I can connect with them through online social networks. So my family and I changed the chapter of our past lives and moved forward not knowing where our path might take us.

The roller coaster ride began for me as my ears were pierced the following week, my skirt was above the knee and my hair was flat ironed and curled. This was a strict forbidden rule back home but now it was a part of my life. I can't lie, I don't hate it. But my life isn't always consumed with hours of shopping, designer wear and shoes because inside I still yearn for home. I was silent about it because I was afraid my parents might listen. Fearing that we might return leaving the luxuries of life behind, I kept my lips sealed.

My parents adjusted quite well to the fast-paced life. Throwing away any evidence of religious freaks, they adopted the lives of a modern family--from the outside, that is. Only close friends of ours know we still use the language we used back home and still have strict rules we

just can't break. Even though I enjoy fried foods, I swear I will never touch a hamburger or anything made out of a pig. So in some aspects that chapter of our lives we can never close. Many people think that religion is like being an average Christian: something you say you are to make you look good around pastors but really, where I'm from, religion is a part of you, it forms your world and how you think as a person.

My parents made most of the major decisions while moving to the island. After all I'm still a child--all I should be doing is surfing and sailing right? That's what I thought until the issue of school arose. Back home children were homeschooled. Books were thrown across the table; you did the work and then went out into the field. After all, children didn't have to worry about colleges or careers. The ideal future for a true religious child in my community was to help others, like being a missionary, pastor or house-wife. So in some cases, for a girl she mostly learnt the 411 on house cleaning and cooking. What these parents failed to realize is, not every child grew up and decided to stay in that community. Many ventured off into the real world or joined other religions, having a basic knowledge of math will only do you so much when you are trying to apply for a high paying job somewhere.

My parents back then secretly had goals for me so I did more school work than others did, also my home-school curriculum was based around my religious values, opinions and goals. Therefore certain activities were not on my high priority list, such as sports. In my community since sports was based around competition, they felt that competition separated people. The whole idea of a community is to keep people as one, thinking and behaving the same way. The whole idea of sports didn't flow right with us, so therefore I did not learn sports. Of course now I regret it and I shall forever blame my parents for allowing me to be humiliated when I am asked to participate in sports.

Other activities such as drama, dancing and other 'frivolous' things as they called them, were prohibited. My grandmother felt that in order for me to succeed in this life, I needed a real education in a structured environment. The question remained: where to send her? You simply can't dump a "Little House on the Prairie" girl in a classroom filled with hooligans and ruffians.

To our dismay they did not have any real Church or religious schools on the island so we were left with the two options, public or private? We settled with a small private school, surprisingly just doorsteps from my new home. My parents assumed I wouldn't have any problems with this school since it so-called accepted kids from various backgrounds. What my parents didn't know is, any school you could go to will never be the same as home-school.

That night before school I laid in my bed tossing and turning. I wondered how students would look at me, what would they think? I thought I wouldn't be too much different because I would be wearing a uniform--just like them. But to my dismay the uniforms were out of stock so I was left with skinny jeans and a baggy t-shirt--not a good combination. Also I was afraid my personality would shine through and some may not like it. Soon the morning sprang upon me and I was greeted with the tall glass doors of my school building. Students showed up behind me giggling and laughing. They paid me no mind and walked gingerly into their classrooms. I tried to do the same, only problem with that was I had nothing to laugh about. I walked a little faster fearing I might be late and walked into the school building. The floors were faint blue and the strong smell of paint permeated the hallways. I pounded up the stairs and looked up at the bright numbers pasted on the doors. I found number 8 and without taking a breath, I opened the door.

The chatter I once heard outside the classroom doors stopped, I stood there frozen like a deer in the front of headlights. The classroom wasn't that small compared to what I had imagined; it certainly wasn't my familiar oak table in the dining room either. My teacher instructed that I find a seat next to a girl with jet black hair. She welcomed me with a cheerful hello, another blonde girl beside her smiled, slightly, I'm not sure. I didn't even bother looking around me. I just wanted to sit down in my seat but the teacher had to switch the desks around so I was standing there looking at the ceiling. I tried my best not to stand out, how wrong was I? I'm the only girl wearing skinny jeans and a bright red t-shirt in the entire school. My mind was spinning rapidly, my palms were sweaty so I quickly wiped them on my pants--oh no not my shirt. To my rescue, the teacher found a desk and I hastily sat down, took a deep breath and placed my book bag beside my feet. I glanced around the room at the students: some were still

engaged in their conversations, others stood afar, observing me.

"So, where are you from?" asked the girl beside me. My mind was blank and I couldn't think now. My lip began to tremble but I didn't want to show it. One may think my behaviors are ridiculous but you have to understand my background. The class-like-setting was completely new to me. I didn't know what to talk about; I was still learning about pop music and R&B.

"From--from Washington, D.C" I mumbled quickly.

"Oh cool, I'm Maddie by the way."

"I'm Genesis." The girl smiled and got up to talk to someone else beside me.

I'm going to fast forward now, where I have pretty much known everyone in my entire school. Most of them are generally friendly, others are still observing. Each day we learn we have something in common and our friendship grows. As I lean forward on my desk and listen to the chatter beside me and the loud thunder of students climbing the staircase, I look down at myself and realize I am now one of them. When they look at me they see an average girl from America.

Very few know where I came from and how last month I would never be seen in jeans. Just because I was raised in a religious community does not mean I am any different from them. I was always a girl who loved fashion, clothes and music. I was simply waiting to be set free. My father always used to say people based their dreams around the media and most people try to live a life like a movie, so when they met people who lived a life other than the 'American Dream' they can't understand it. I realize how much the media affects us; I thought that school was an all-day fun parade with kids your age waiting to accept you as you are. In popular movies they rarely show students doing any work or the new kid sitting all alone at a lunch table. It's mostly just a quick scene of the classroom then on to the cafeteria where everyone is laughing and getting along. I have found that in this life we will meet many wonderful people but only few can we call a friend. I have also learnt a lot about life while outside of my community. Before, I felt like I was thrown into the world when I

wasn't--I had the guidance and support of my family who made the right discussions for me. Everyone likes the feeling of being in an enclosed environment with familiar faces where you don't feel left out, everyone and everything stays the same and nothing changes. Life isn't a movie and as soon as we realize that, we can accept change with open arms.