

# It's been a long road and took an airplane to finally get here, but I made it

By Ashliegh Ramirez

Greetings from the East Coast! I am thankful I reached the fork in the first road of my journey through life. I am now on the second road, the pursuit of my higher education.

I hope the youth I have spent time with (the girls in Daughters of Tradition, STYLE Council members, kids from Young Life and WyldLife, Youth Prevention activities group, girls from Royalty court, younger children of the community and all the other youth I met through pow-wow and traditional dancing) are all doing well and have started the school year on a positive step.

I pray you are pursuing your dreams. I wanted to share the idea with the youth who are not sure what they want or where they want to go in life that a dream can come true if they start working toward it now.

I started to contemplate what I wanted my life to be when I was in the eighth grade. A 10-day field trip the following summer to the East Coast provoked this.

While on that trip to New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Washington, D.C., I absolutely fell in love with Boston. This same year, I started playing softball and the Boston Red Sox easily became my favorite baseball team. Two friends and I daydreamed that one day we would go to college in Boston.

I was a freshman, just starting my high school career. I still had my daydream of going to school in Boston. I told my mom and she told me to look online at the schools I was interested in to see what they were looking for in students.

Not only would I have to compete to get into the private universities that interested me, I would be competing against kids who went to prep schools specifically for university entrance. My grades and SAT scores would be important, but my résumé of extracurricular activities would play a large part in being selected.

After the holidays my freshman year, I thought I better step up my game plan. I joined the leadership class and worked hard to get the highest grades I could. I started working part time at JC Market in Newport when I was a sophomore. I took two math classes my sophomore year just so I could get my math requirements out of the way.

Part way through my sophomore year, I contemplated pursuing the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program at Newport High School. In short, you start this diploma program as a junior and it includes college-level courses spread out over two years. If you don't get the diploma but you obtain the certificate for a class, some universities will give college credit.

There are fees to take the tests, so I asked my mom if she thought I should try for the IB diploma. I knew I would need her support to help me keep up the course load. Missing school for Royalty events would not be easy; it would mean more homework and trusting a classmate to fill me in on anything I missed. If I could continue my extracurricular activities and get good grades in my current course work, it would be a good sign that I'd be successful in the IB program.

I was able to maintain all that work. The two years of the IB program were stressful, exhausting and at times I thought not worth it. I had a serious medical problem in both my junior and senior years that took me out of school each time for a week. This caused me to miss junior year softball conditioning and senior year preseason softball games.

In order to maintain my GPA, I chose to cut back to four IB classes my senior year. I adjusted my course schedule and found time to take a fun course. My goal of an IB diploma was shorted; however, I realized I wanted to study medicine.

I narrowed down my pick of universities, taking into consideration class size, the size of the campus, the courses available and the proximity to Boston. After four years, I truly wanted to be in that area for my higher education.

I applied to only three universities for admission. After I hadn't received any news for admission, I started to panic. I did not even apply to any local universities in Oregon as a safety net.

I finally got my first letter. I was accepted to the school but the program of study I wanted was full. It was my third-choice school and if I went there I would need to choose another program.

The next letter came a few days later; it was late on a Sunday night and I was barely awake. As I opened the letter, I was so nervous.

It was just a small regular-size envelope from my second-choice school (I had always heard college acceptance letters were big envelopes full of paper). Just a single page inside; I braced myself for bad news.

I skimmed through the letter expecting to cry, but then realized I had been accepted to Lesley University and had received a scholarship for four years, which would cover 26 percent of my tuition for my first year. It was awarded for my grades and extracurricular activities.

A few days later, I got an e-mail from the Lesley University softball coach, who wanted to know if I was interested in playing softball in college. Of course I was and Lesley University immediately became my No. 1 choice.

The following months of high school flew by. I completed my IB classes, played softball while recovering from surgery and spent time with friends as much as possible since I knew we all would be going separate ways soon.

Graduation came quickly in mid-June, then I was out in the middle of Oregon's high desert for a month-long sabbatical to volunteer at the Young Life camp. I was home briefly with my family and friends, then spent one more week away at the WyldLife camp as a counselor. A few more weeks went by and it was time to fly to Boston on Aug. 31.

When I landed in Boston and pulled up in front of Lesley University on Sept. 1, I was looking at my dream realized. I had made it! I was in Cambridge, Mass.

During the next few days, I traveled around the area with my mom. I saw my original first choice – Boston University – and was glad I didn't choose to go there. It is enormous, spread out over several miles with hundreds of people everywhere.



Courtesy photo

Ashleigh Ramirez (left) and a new friend, Sarah Hurley, attend College Day at Fenway Park in Boston, Mass.

I became familiar with the Cambridge area, learned about the bus system (kind of scary for a girl who didn't even ride the school bus much, let alone public transportation) and met some nice people. I went to my first softball meeting before school even started and I remembered why I had come across the United States.

I still miss my family and friends, but this is the life I have wanted for the last five years. It is still surreal for me as I walk across the Harvard campus, explore Harvard Square, go to my classes and end my week with softball practice.

Those IB classes were worth all of the work. I now have the discipline needed to succeed in balancing school, sports and life in general. I challenged myself and was able to prove to myself I could do it.

I have met some wonderful girls here who don't replace my friends at home but have expanded my group of friends. I still can text and call home to my friends and family, and with technology I can even see what they are up to with Facebook and video chat with Skype and FaceTime. Being this far from home is hard, but I have found it is possible. I know I am blessed and all the things that have happened in my life have been for a purpose.

If I can travel more than 3,200 miles from the Siletz Reservation to the other side of the country where the sun rises over the Atlantic Ocean to reach my goal, other youth need to know they can reach their goals too, no matter how far away they seem.

Realize that you can have your dream! It takes deliberate planning and a lot of hard work, tears, sweat, fear and anxiety – but it is all worth it when you are living it!

I would like for anyone reading this to please share this article with your children, grandchildren or any other youth you know.

Youth who would like to ask me about leadership, the Siletz Tribal Youth Leadership & Education (STYLE) Council, college preparation and the IB diploma program can e-mail me at ashliegh.victoria@gmail.com. I am in college with plenty of homework, so I will try to answer e-mails as fast as I can.

If you are interested in continuing the work of the STYLE Council or if you have a student who is considering the IB diploma program, you can contact my mom, Angela Ramirez, at angeladawn-ramirez@gmail.com.

## CEDARR

Community Efforts Demonstrating the Ability to Rebuild and Restore

**Mission Statement:** We will utilize resources to prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs, delinquency and violence; we will seek to reduce the barriers to treatment and support those who choose abstinence.

Nov. 7  
5:30 p.m.

Siletz Public Library  
255 SE Gaither, Siletz

