I Cannot Bear Tears of My Mom

Moving to a foreign country for the purpose of studying has always been exciting to me because I was going to experience something that very few people do in my country. Though, I did not expect that it would be so difficult to leave my home city, since I had acquired my college degree at a university that was far away from my home city and this never made me feel anxious. I thought it would also not be a problem if I left the country until it was time to leave and I saw my mother crying. Oh my God, I could bear anything at that time except for tears of my mom.

I asked: why are you crying?

She replied: you are going to a different world that I have no knowledge of. What you are gonna eat? Will you be able find a friend to talk? Who is gonna help you when you become sick?

I said: Do not worry mom, there are three hundred million people over there.

She smiled just for a second and that made me really happy. Actually, the most important concern that I had was what I was going to eat. I heart that it was difficult to find food to cook such as rice, beans and wheat because the only thing American people eat was fast-food and that would be very expensive for me. Therefore, I decided to take some food with me and placed almost a hundred packets of ready-to make soup in my suitcase. There was no space for clothes because the idea was ‘I could find clothes easily but not food. I cannot forget the time that my friend was laughing at me by saying you poor student. How can you live on these things?’ When I first entered Meijer, I felt like I was in dream. Actually I found US an amazing country because you can find a wide variety of foods from different cultures that you cannot find in your country. For instance, you do not need to go to China to eat Chinese food. They are all here. We, Turkish people, are addicted to tea. We have a famous kind of coffee too, but it is only for special guests. I saw a lot of American people are drinking coffee, then I thought I have to adapt this culture of coffee. I went to Sparty, purchased a ‘small regular coffee’ because the guy before me asked for a small regular coffee. Then I observed that there is something on a table and everyone who bought the coffee are going there and adding something to their coffee. I did the same. I went there and add everything that I saw on that table to see how they taste. Actually, it was too late when I figured out that the table was not just for coffee and some of things on the table were for lunch. My coffee was sour because of that tomato ketchup.

My professor from my home-country was graduated from a university in US, so he told me ‘Mehmet! All American people smile so when a girl smiles you; do not think that she felt in love with you. It is just their culture.’ So whenever I saw a girl working at MSU and smiling me, I keep telling myself ‘okay this does not mean that she loves you, she is doing her job.’ It happens because people who are working at university campus in Turkey are so formal, so they do not even smile. But some interesting thing happened
when I went to Turkey. I needed some official paper work so I talked to a lot of university clerks. What I figured out with clerks in Turkey was that when you first enter their room, they look at you and you can easily read the impression on their face. It is exactly two questions: who are you and why are you here? These impressions on their face do not change until they find answers for these two questions. Of course, you keep explaining who you are and why you are there until you get a sense of ‘he understood’ from their face. I have lived in Turkey for 23 years, but was able to figure this out after the first year of my life in US.

Relationships were interesting too when I first came. In Turkish culture, you should be as close as possible to the person whom you are talking with. It was my first days on campus and I was talking with one of my classmates. What I did not understand for that time was that as I tried to go closer toward him; he kept going one step back. This continued until the wall stopped him. I was assuming, perhaps, he did not like me or he was scared, but why? Or, I smelled bad. Then, when the same thing happened with another person, I asked my friend about it. He was laughing, and saying ‘this is their culture man. They value individualism and want to protect their personal boundary.’ There are a lot say about the language. When I passed TOEFL, I thought I learned, at least, the most common phrases in English. There are a lot but the only thing I remember was that I was at a meeting and there was a guy who was doing the presentation. At the end of the presentation, he said ‘please help yourself’ I was actually confused with these words. I immediately thought how can a person help himself or herself? if I needed help I would ask my friend to help me but how I can help myself if I need help. I sound like if you need help, then do it on your own.

This is my third year at MSU but I believe there still a lot I will and need to learn.