

Application Essay Example (Common App): International student discovering her identity

Where do I call home? This is a question I struggle to answer because I don't belong anywhere. I was born in Dubai, but I am an Indian-Canadian, currently living in Saudi Arabia – an interesting combination. Making it more complicated, I don't go by one name. My real name is Neharika, but I am Nikku to my Indian friends and family and Nikki to the rest of the world. Having different names gets confusing, especially when I have to introduce myself, debating whether I should go by my real name or nickname.

My journey began in Dubai, my birthplace. My parents named me Neharika, meaning dewdrops. Originally, I saw my name as a burden because it constantly needed correction when pronounced. Like anyone with a complicated name, I needed a nickname. Ever since I was a baby, my parents and all our Indian family and friends have called me Nikku, establishing a direct connection to my Indian heritage.

When I was just two years old, we moved from Dubai to Calgary. Compared to Dubai, Calgary was much further from India, making it harder to stay in touch with my roots. The change in cultures — from Indian to western — forced me to change my nickname. Nikku was too traditional, and I needed a local, more western nickname. That's how Nikki was born.

Five amazing years flew by, and I began to feel like Canada was my home, but I also began to forget Telugu – my mother tongue. Forgetting Telugu meant losing the Indian part of me, which I didn't want. Luckily, my parents decided to move to a place closer to India, allowing me to reconnect to my Indian roots because I could practice traditions and Telugu. However, I wasn't old enough to establish a strong connection to Canada that could make it my home.

But even in India, I felt out of place. Everyone in my family grew up in India, making me the only one who didn't. I forced myself to ignore the fact that I was not like my cousins or aunts or uncles or grandparents and acted like everything was normal — but it wasn't.

Living in Saudi Arabia didn't help me define my identity either. Since I've lived here for more than ten years now, it's the only place I should call home — but can't. My parents work for a company that offers their employees all the necessary facilities like education, recreation, and accommodations. But the community is so diverse, with over 50 different nationalities. Therefore, I can't call Saudi Arabia my home because I've been surrounded by various cultures instead of the Saudi Arabian culture. Hence, I never developed a deep enough personal connection with the country to call myself Saudi Arabian.

I have always been confused about which place to call home, and who I should be at that home. Nikki is the girl who lived in Canada for five years and played ice hockey but isn't authentically Canadian enough. Nikku is an Indian girl who can speak, read, and write three different Indian languages but isn't authentically Indian enough. Meanwhile, Neharika is still a mystery.

I realized I've been assuming all these identities to fit into the environment around me, like changing my name or making myself act as if I belong to a place. I limited myself to one name and home. But I shouldn't because I am Nikki and Nikku, Canadian and Indian. As I'm growing older and becoming more independent, I need to create an identity that reflects my story: both my Indian and Canadian sides. As for Neharika, no one knows what she's like, including me. Thus, as I'm entering the next stage in my life and preparing for my new home – college – I know exactly who I want to be: Neharika.