

Housemates: Family in Disguise

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January 24, 2015 was the first time that the pastor of my home congregation approached me with information about the NBA XPLOR Residency. (I only know the exact date because I still have the conversation on Facebook Messenger!) I was 20 years old at the time, was majoring in business, and was 99.9% certain that I was about to get promoted to Assistant Manager at my job within the next couple of months. However, my

pastor seemed really excited about XPLOR so I decided to humor her and went ahead and requested for more information... just so that when I told her I decided against it, she would think that I had actually considered the Residency instead of just immediately dismissing it. When Bonnie, the Director of NBA XPLOR, called to tell me more about the program, I listened with half an ear, because really, I didn't care all that much at the time. When she had finished, I told her that I was grateful to her for telling me about it, but that I'd like to finish school before I considered doing anything like this internship, but that I would keep it in mind for once I had my degree.

Fast forward to September 2016, (I think that's when it was at least), and there's Pastor Stasia, leaving things like the XPLOR FAQs in my church mailbox, and telling me again about how her friend is in charge of the program, and from what she knows through Bonnie she thinks that it would be a really good fit for me. So, deciding I'd humor her again and considering that I was supposed to be graduating soon (and had technically said I would rethink the program when I was ready to graduate), I went to the NBA website and scrolled through until I found the area to request more information, and filled out the form again. This time when I got a call, it wasn't from Bonnie, but from Ben Bohren, a Mission Specialist for NBA XPLOR. I don't know what made my conversation with Ben so much different than the one nearly 2 years before with Bonnie, other than the fact that I was out for dinner with my family at the time, so they could hear my half of the conversation and would know if I wasn't actually paying attention to what he was saying, (I was alone when I talked to Bonnie). Still, at the end of the conversation I wasn't completely convinced. I told Ben I'd think about

it and he let me know that I could call or email him if I had any more questions and that the application would go live on the first of November.

Honestly, I figured that would be the end of it. I was happy with my life the way it was, I liked my job as an Assistant Store Leader at Payless ShoeSource and had a great boss that was willing to do whatever she needed to make it so that I could get my own store when one opened up. I just had to pretend to think about it for a while and then tell everyone that I wasn't interested and that would be that, I'd never have to hear about XPLOR again. The problem was that I couldn't actually stop thinking about it at all. It was all I thought about for weeks, and the more I thought about it the more I wondered if the reason I was dismissing it wasn't because I was happy with my life as it was, but because I was afraid of the change that it would take to do anything about it. I mean I'd worked at Payless for 4 years at that point, I could do the job with my eyes closed. Not to mention my store was never actually staffed correctly so I ended up working long hours by myself and sometimes 6-7 days a week. It wasn't so much that I liked the job, as that I knew how to do it and exactly what was expected of me.

So, with all of that constantly turning over in my head, when November rolled around I did the application before I could talk myself out of it. I decided that at 22 years old, it was more than past time for me to push myself out of my comfort zone and just *do* something for once in my life that didn't put my job at Payless first... which turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made.

And which brings me to now, January of 2018, approximately halfway done with my 10 months as an XPLOR Resident. I'm not going to lie and say that the whole thing has been a cakewalk so far, because nothing in life is actually easy. It's especially not easy to go from living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (a city that it seems like the majority of people have never even heard of) to living in Tucson, Arizona (which is roughly three times the size of CR). It's hard to be thousands of miles away from your friends and family, from the church you've claimed as your own. Every struggle though, has been worth it.

When I committed to doing the program, I was certain that money and living with people I had never met before were going to be the hardest parts of this program. Sure, sometimes the money can be a struggle, but not more than when I was working at Payless and making in a week close to what I do in a month now, which really just tells me I used to waste way more money than was necessary. I manage to pay my bills, pay an equal share towards our household groceries, and still have some left over to go out to eat or to a movie once in a while. Living with people I had never met before isn't nearly the struggle I had imagined either.

The number one thing that anyone needs to know about me to understand why this is such a big deal, is that I am not a social person by any stretch of the imagination. I am painfully shy, to the point that when I was a little girl I would whisper anything I wanted to say to my sister, so she could say it for me if we were around anyone other than just our parents. I have two friends back home that I didn't make through work. One of them I've been friends with literally my entire life because our moms have been best friends since junior high, and our dads worked at Hardee's together during college. The other I have been friends with since the sixth grade, and it took several months of being stuck on attendance numbers next to each other in gym class before we even became friends. So naturally, the idea of suddenly living with people that I had never met before made me extremely anxious. I really shouldn't have been though. I don't know how they decide everyone's placement, but whatever landed me with the housemates I got, I'm extremely grateful for.

It was probably close to a month before I actually felt comfortable starting a conversation with either of them, but I pushed through and finally started to relax around them. I slowly realized that they weren't going to mock me or anything like that. Now here we are in month five, and I can't imagine my life without either of my two housemates at this point. They have been supportive and kind throughout this entire experience. They made sure I knew they were there for me when my grandmother passed away back at the beginning of our time here, they have encouraged me when I'm feeling down or homesick, and they've listened to me complain when something annoying happens at my job. They have shown me that it's okay to be who I am even if I'm still figuring out what exactly that means. They have essentially become my family in this new place I'm learning to call home.

I'm not sure what made me hit the "submit" button that day when I completed my application for XPLOR, if it was that I was just as excited for the possibility of change as I was terrified of it, or if it was just my curiosity as to whether or not I could actually be one of the handful of people that they chose. Maybe I'll never know, but I do know that no matter how much I struggle this year and in every year of my life following, it won't be able to compare to the blessing I've been granted by being a part of this community.

NBA XPLOR is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a "heart for care" as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.**