

# Thanksgiving in Eritrea

For senior Sesen Beyene, celebrating Thanksgiving means a little more to her than what the holiday tradition typically holds.

After coming to the U.S. from Eritrea in 2006, Beyene has had to leave behind many of her family members back home. Beyene and her family have had to make do without them, but this somewhat worked out in the long run.

“Thanksgiving is very important to my family because we don’t have a lot of blood relatives here. The concept of being grateful has now really grown on us because of this,” senior Sesen Beyene said.



Thanksgiving for senior Sesen Beyene consist of reuniting with family members while eating a combination of traditional Eritrean and American foods.

This hasn't stopped Beyene and her family from attempting to connect with other friends that they have made while being in the U.S.

"We have made many new friends who have made us feel welcomed into their home, so we spend this holiday with them," Beyene said.

The growing relationships that she and her family have developed throughout the years with these people is what makes Thanksgiving important to her.

Attempting to find a balance between her Eritrean and American customs used to be difficult for her to deal with, but years of practice has taught her how to accommodate both ends of the spectrum.

"We make sure to include foods such as kay tsebhi, which is a spicy meat stew, and doro wet, which essentially is the same thing, but is made with chicken and eggs instead," Beyene said.

Traditional Thanksgiving dishes such as turkey and pie are included into their menu for the day as well, which only represents one aspect of their attempts to combine two cultures into one.

Within the Beyene household, their Thanksgiving combinations haven't changed much since they first began.

"My cousin and I first get together a week ahead of time and plan out what foods to make for Thanksgiving, we have at least one new dish to try making each year," Beyene said. "From there, we divide up the work between families, and start the actual cooking about two days in advance," Beyene said.

Family bonding is very important in the Eritrean culture, and the kitchen is always symbolic of the food and memories which are being made.

"Every year, my siblings and I make wings for the holiday. It's our long-standing tradition, and this is one of the

things we have to have,” Beyene said.

Once food preparations are taken care of, the rest of the Beyene family begins to arrive in the late afternoon.

The Christian faith is heavily implemented in the Eritrean culture, so including this aspect into their day is considered to be a major portion of their traditions.

“One of the elders in my family will lead a long prayer to bless the food, then we all dig in,” Beyene said.

Afterward, a coffee ceremony is held in the living room, which consists of preparing the coffee beans at home and drinking multiple rounds of it in miniature sized cups.

This then leads up to the Beyene family than sharing among one another what they’re thankful for, as a way to keep the Thanksgiving tradition in their routine for the day and to express their gratefulness for one another.

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## **Immigrant stories: coming to America**

On his awaited trip from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to the U.S., junior Kaleab Mengistu was only three years old when he first arrived to America.

The trip he took, along with his parents, older brother, and aunt, lasted a total of 13 hours. After making one pit stop in Italy, Mengistu arrived to Tennessee with his family in 2004.

Mengistu only stayed in Tennessee for a couple years, then made his way to Annandale, Virginia with his family in 2012.

Since Mengistu was only three years old when he first left Ethiopia, the memories of his early childhood are too vague to recall, but from trips he has taken back home, he is able to keep some memories with him.

"I was pretty young, but I can remember how some parts of Ethiopia were heavily gated, there were lots of gutters, and some dirty roads," Mengistu said.

It was through the memories of friends and family which helped him piece together what Ethiopia was like in previous years.

Regardless of some of the more rough looking areas, malls were continuously bustling with friendly faces, and helped balance out his memories of the good and bad.

"Some of the nice places I remember seeing and going to were shopping centers, which were considered to be the nice places in Ethiopia," Mengistu said.

Some significant differences he noticed were the lack of traffic lights in Ethiopia, as opposed to the abundance of them in the U.S.

"Driving around in Ethiopia is definitely always a risk since people don't have traffic lights to depend on," Mengistu said.

On top of that, stray animals are found all around the country, and has proved to be a danger to the people there, "A couple years ago, I got clawed in the calf by a wild dog, and the scar is still there," Mengistu said.

The education system in Ethiopia differs from that in America as well. Students were consistently ranked based on their grades, one being the best on the scale.

It was Mengistu's dream to come to America that brought him and his family here, "When I was little, my parents said I used to put shoes in a bag and tell them I'm going to America" Mengistu said.

"They then wanted to go to America after I kept doing that," which then led them here.

Mengistu misses his family back home, and hopes to see them soon enough.

“I try my best to keep in touch with my friends and family back home, but it’s hard because of the time zone differences,” Mengistu said.

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## **Ew, You’re eating what?**

With diversity comes differing cultures, faiths, and foods. AHS is known for being diverse within the school and the community, which opens people’s eyes to something new everyday.

Unfortunately, it is a common action among many to assume negatively of things that are different than what they are comfortable with, leading to them having a closed mind.

For example, when students bring different types of traditional foods for lunch.

Senior Ephrata Yohannes has been packing her own lunch since she first started attending middle school.

Her lunch typically consists of rice or pasta, but every once in a while, she would bring injera. This is the traditional food eaten in Ethiopia. It is eaten by hand, and is usually topped with another dish along with it.

To her, eating injera is nothing new, since she has been eating it all of her life. But one day, she brought injera for lunch, not really thinking much about the fact that this food was not commonly eaten by students in her school.

Once she opened her lunch, a number of students turned their way to see where that pungent smell was coming from.

Students turned their noses up to the scents of curry powder

and foreign spices that flooded her lunch table. They were unaccepting of her new traditional dish.

“I felt like I was put in the spotlight and I didn’t really know what to do,” senior Ephrata Yohannes said.

Comments kept flooding in from friends, and some strangers, as they all gawked at the food she was eating.

“I only took two bites of my lunch before I felt like I had to throw it away,” Yohannes said.

Even then, the smell of her food consumed part of the cafeteria, and continued to linger on afterwards as well.

The appearance of her new and unaccepted food disturbed other students, and she finally realized that she could never bring injera for lunch again.

When people react negatively to the cultures of others and evaluate it in the standard of their own, this is known as ethnocentrism.

The differing backgrounds of students surprisingly does not find a way to ward off against this term, as students still make harsh judgements about other people’s foods and cultures.

“Whenever people find out that I’m Somalian, they make so many jokes about how we eat everything with bananas,” senior Amal Hashi said.

Anthropology teacher Holly Miller tries her best in the classroom to combat against ethnocentrism by exposing her students to different types of foods and cultures.

“I like to bring in music from different countries, show pictures, and food too, to provide a variety of ways to try and break down judgments,” Miller said.

Although keeping an open mind may be hard for some people, her students try their best to avoid judging automatically.

“I try not to react with judgment, but often times the things she shows us come as a shock to me, and usually makes laugh at

first,” senior Jonathan Assefa said.

It is through small attempts like these, that can lead to an impactful change in classrooms.

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## **Immigrant stories: Coming to America**

Maisha Maliha was only five months old when she first came to America from Bangladesh. She traveled by plane for 13 hours, and first arrived to D.C, with her mom.

Since she was young, she did not have any memories of her own about coming here, but she remembers stories from what her mom told her.

“I remember my mom telling me that we had planned to land in New York, but it was the same day that the twin towers were knocked over,” Maliha said.

It was unknown if other attacks were going to happen, so planes had to take a detour in order to keep the passengers safe.

“We ended up landing in Boston instead, and made our way down from there,” Maliha said.

Her father was already a citizen in America, so when her parents married, the process of coming to America wasn't as complicated as it is for most people.

Once her and her mom had landed in Boston, Maliha then made her way to D.C. and began her life in America.

For some people, trying to fit in to a new surrounding can be hard to adapt to, but the situation was different for Maliha.

“Thankfully when I was in D.C., my school was relatively diverse already, so trying to fit in was not very hard for me,” Maliha said.

Compared to schooling in Bangladesh, one major difference Maliha noticed was that teachers were the ones who would move around from class to class, as opposed to students moving around.

Since coming to America, Maliha has gone back to Bangladesh on two occasions.

“When I first went back to Bangladesh, I was 14 years old. It was to attend a bunch of weddings. Three of my cousins got married, and weddings in Bangladesh are a long process,” Maliha said.

In Bangladesh, a typical wedding has three different events tied to it, which kept Maliha busy on her trip.

“In total, I ended up attending nine events in my two weeks there. I wasn’t able to fully enjoy the country through, ” Maliha said.

One main difference between America and Bangladesh that Maliha recalled was the traffic laws. Despite there being traffic lights in Bangladesh, little to no people would actually use them to navigate through the streets.

“When driving around in Bangladesh, there aren’t distinguishable lines on the streets when driving, so people are just weaving around. It gets very dangerous,” Maliha said. In spite of that, she still would like to return to Bangladesh soon with her family if they go back again.

“I would love to be able to see my family again next summer, I miss my family back home,” Maliha said.

After being in America for many years, Maliha is very thankful for the opportunities that she has here in America.

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## **Student visits family in the**

# midst of crisis

Seven years of grueling war have left a country that was once the epicenter for tourism in the Middle East vastly different. Syria and the nations citizens have had to undergo major lifestyle changes since the beginning of the war in 2011. Not going out at certain times when bombs were flying overhead, only going outdoors when absolutely necessary, etc. all became new parts of life in Syria.

However, with seven years gone by, there have been significant improvements to life in the country in certain areas.

For myself, this was my second time visiting Syria in the past three years with my mom and sister. For a majority of the time I stayed in the capitol, Damascus, where some of my family members live.

Just two years ago it was next to impossible to enter other major cities outside of Damascus such as Aleppo and Homs. However, this time I was able to enter these cities that were formerly major conflict areas.

In Homs, I got to scope out the total destruction of a significant part of the city that marked the beginning of the conflict.

Upon entering the city, I was taken aback by the endless rows of apartment buildings where families used to live, shops in the marketplace and various places of worship that had been completely obliterated by missiles and mortar bombs.

It was the same story with varying degrees wherever I went as there was damage to infrastructure that will take years to rebuild everywhere.

Despite this, social life and life as a whole in Syria has improved greatly in the past two years. People are overflowing in market places, shops, malls, etc. and beginning to return to life as normal.

During my stay, I had the chance to visit some of the historical sites in Damascus.

I got to walk around the famous marketplace located inside of

the old walled city of Damascus known as Al-Hamidiyah Souq. When inside the old city, I also had the opportunity to view the historical and well known Umayyad Mosque and take a tour of the Azem Palace as well.

Throughout my stay I enjoyed attending the concerts of some well known Syrian musicians and singers. To my surprise, there were thousands and thousands of people at these concerts which marked the great improvement of social life in the country.

In addition to this, I also did many things that I would typically do back at home such as going to shopping malls, stores, museums, etc.

Despite the significant improvements to the social scene in Syria and progress that has been made over the past two years, there are still many issues at hand.

Infrastructure and housing is set to take years to rebuild, the extreme inflation of Syrian currency lead the economy to a serious crash and there a still hundreds of government-installed checkpoints throughout the country that make travel a real hassle.

It is always interesting visiting Syria because I enjoy viewing a different lifestyle and drawing connections from one country to another.

Despite the hardships of the past ten years, life has improved profoundly for many while there is still large room for continued progress.

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## **Around the world in only two months**

To summarize senior Zain Ghul's trip around Europe and the Middle East during this summer, it mainly consisted of: living in Airbnb's, riding on trains and visiting family.

Ghul originally planned to backpack around Europe with alumni sister, Serene Ghul, before heading off to a fellowship in Italy. They made a last minute decision to make this a trip with the whole family after their original plans fell through. "My sister wanted us to travel across Europe all the way to Italy, where I would drop her off and fly home," Ghul said. "She ended up not going, but we already bought the tickets; so, we went on the trip- and went with our parents," Ghul said.

This was her first time getting to visit all of these European countries and getting to see her homeland Jordan.

This family vacation consisted of visiting nine countries in the Middle East and all across Europe in the span of a month and a half.

Her trip started on June 14, and first brought her to Jordan, which is located in the Middle East. The flight lasted for about ten hours, and stopped in London for layover. It then continued from there for another four hours.

"I spent two and a half weeks in Jordan and I stayed with my grandparents at their house" Ghul said.

From there, Ghul left with her family to Paris on June 29 to begin her trip of backpacking across Europe. That flight from Jordan to Paris only lasted roughly four hours, giving them an advantage to start their trip a bit early.

While in France, Ghul stayed in a hotel in Paris, rather than a hostel or an Airbnb, which is what most of her trip consisted of.

"This trip was a fun opportunity for me and my family to bond over the low quality hotels we stayed at, especially the one in Paris," Ghul said.

Despite having stayed in an inadequate hotel, Ghul had an amazing experience. She visited many of the well-known sights, such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and also got to see the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, and the Notre Dame Cathedral. All of these places are well known landmarks in France, and a common tourist attraction.

After staying in Paris for two days, she and her family took a

train to continue their trip into Belgium, which is north of France.

Once in Belgium, she got to visit Grand Place in Brussels, which is the central square, and also visited the Manneken Pis.

Onwards, she then left Belgium, and headed out to the Netherlands by train. The Netherlands is located north of Belgium.

From the Netherlands, she headed to Germany, which was least of her favorite places to visit while on the trip.

"My least favorite place to visit was Berlin. I did not like it mainly because it looked a lot like D.C. Architecturally, there was nothing special about it," Ghul said.

Though the setup of Berlin may not have reached her expectations, the history tracked behind Germany definitely did catch her attention.

"However, it was very cool to walk through the Berlin wall, which once separated east and west Germany in the 60's," Ghul said.

While in Germany, she also got to go into a university which included an observatory, which was something she was looking forward to.

Continuing on her journey, Zain Ghul also got to go to the Czech Republic, which was her favorite place to visit out of all the countries she went to during the trip.

"Prague was my favorite place to get to see during the trip. It was so beautiful and everything was cheap there" said Ghul.

"The architecture was stunning, and when walking across the Charles Bridge, you are able to see most of the city," said Ghul.

Her trip then took her to Austria, Hungary, then lastly to Italy, where she spent five days with her family.

Since Italy was the most amount of days, she was able to see more sights than any other place, these tourist hot spots included the Colosseum, St. Mark's Basilica, the Rialto Bridge, and much more.

"I had a lot of fun with my family which I will never forget.

This trip brought me and my family much closer together which was great” Ghul said.

Ghul hopes to be able to go back again next summer, so she can experience the sights once more.

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## **Japan culture comes to AHS**

Students can learn new languages, taste new food, and experience a glimpse of life in another culture. A new culture has come to AHS: The Japanese Culture Club.

The club was created two months ago and run by president Mikayla Parsons.

“I founded the club in the beginning of the fall season, and since it is new I have only been a member for two months,” Parsons said.

As the founding member and president, Parsons has major responsibilities such as recruiting new members, coming up with activities and maintaining her knowledge of the Japanese culture.

It is also important that Parsons helps the sponsor and keeps the intact.

Parsons works with English teacher Sasha Duran, the club sponsor, to make sure everyone looks forward to coming back every other Tuesday.

The next meeting for the Japanese Culture club is today, Tues. January 23.

Kids from all grades are interested in the club; there are about 50 students in the club in all. The smallest meeting that they’ve ever had has been roughly 20 students, impressive for a new club.

“Seeing club members smile during an activity shows me that the members are having fun,” Parsons said.

When the club meets, they participate in multiple activities.

On one Tuesday that they met, members made sushi rolls, which is where you put sushi inside of a bamboo mat and roll it.

Although, they do not just make foods and learn Japanese, they learn about the clothing and TV shows that they make.

“During the club, we learn about the Japanese language and writing, traditional dishes, the attire, sports, watch movies and shows, and leisurely activities such as playing games and just getting to know each other,” Parsons said.

Parsons works hard to get the word out about her newly founded club. She makes sure that new members will not regret joining the club.

Sometimes, Parsons will go around and talk to her friends about the club so that her friends can spread the word as well.

“I highly encourage people to join because it is a club that members look forward to every other Tuesday and is definitely the highlight of my day,” Parsons said. “It is a place where one can make new friends who have similar interest as you.”

Of course, the weight of the club is not only on Parson’s shoulders. Duran helps Parsons run the club and supports her decisions and ideas.

Duran was raised and born here in the United States, but has Japanese background.

“I grew up in this area but I was born in Japan and my mom is Japanese so I am half Japanese,” said Duran.

Parsons pitched the idea about the club to Duran herself and Duran supported her and the start of the club.

Parsons knew Duran’s background of Japanese culture, so having her as the sponsor would be good for the club.

“Mikalah came to me the first week of school saying she wanted to make a Japanese club and she had known I would be a good person to ask just from previous years,” said Duran.

In the past meetings, the club members played traditional games, learned the unique Japanese alphabet and made food.

“In the future, we plan on practicing wearing kimonos and other things,” said Duran.

Even though the club is new, Parsons plans to pass the club on

to another president and continue it throughout the years at AHS.

They hope the club will make students more aware of Japanese culture even for those who are not Japanese.

Many students are very interested in the club and they like to interact with the other members and participate in the activities.

Students are obviously excited for the club with dozens of students participating in the first two meetings.

"We have a lot of underclassmen participating and we also have a lot of upperclassmen leading in the club this year and trying to make sure the underclassmen feel welcome so that their place can be replaced next year," said Duran.

Since the club meets on only Tuesdays, it is harder for underclassmen to come since it is not a late bus day.

"We still have a lot of interests and some of the kids will still even meet outside of the club and outside of school," said Duran.

It is still possible and encouraged for students to join the Japanese Culture Club.

Duran and Parsons create activities daily and work together all the time to make sure club members look forward to coming back.

They always plan ahead and make time to discuss things. They try to get people from outside of the school to come and volunteer for their club.

"Me and Mikalah are usually always on the same page, whatever idea Mikayla wants I will approve and make it happen," said Duran.

Overall, the Japanese club is a place where you meet new people that are not just there for the anime, but also for the culture.

It is an active club that does a new Japanese activity every time they meet. It is a place where people can laugh, be competitive, and have a good time.

"I want it to be a fun and safe place for students to come and discuss their shared interests and somewhere for kids to meet

other people they wouldn't meet in their other classes," said Duran.

Duran hopes to keep the club running long after Parsons graduates.



If you are interested in joining the club or have any questions concerning the club contact president Mikalah Parsons or club sponsor Sasha Duran.

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## The Independence of Catalonia

Recently, a city in Spain has wanted their independence. This city is Catalonia. Spain has been gripped by a constitutional crisis since a vote that was held earlier this month. The crisis has been declared illegal.

Catalonia's government said that 90% of the votes were in favor. Catalonia already has its own flag, language and culture.

This has a major effect on the famous soccer team Football Club Barcelona. Catalonia had a huge protest, this protest made Football Club Barcelona play a game in closed doors.

A closed door game means there is no one sitting down and it's basically empty. But the game was almost not played but Barcelona would have faced a 6 point penalty which is really substantial to the team's points.

Their star center-back Gerard Pique had an emotional breakdown saying this closed door game was the "worst experience" of his professional career.

This club will not have a place to play since they wouldn't be able to play for the Spain League. But, there is a club that Barcelona could play on, and this is the Premier League, if and only if Catalonia can manage to secure their own independence from Spain.

But this of course would mean Football Club Barcelona wouldn't have to play their top rival Real Madrid as much. The Catalonia's Government aim at getting their independence hasn't worked as they thought it would. Even with their own flag, culture, and language, they can't even get the most important thing a country needs, freedom.

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## **Immigrant Stories: Coming to America**

My name is Emely Castillo- Severino and I am a senior here at Annandale.

I am from the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo. I was born there and lived there for most of my life. I also went to school there until I was 10 years old.

At the age of 10, I came to the United States. My mom told me she wanted me to have a better future and education.

As soon as I got here to America, I started to cry because I

missed my dad and all of my friends. Since I missed them, my mom let me go back to the Dominican Republic to visit.

After that, I have not been back since. When I arrived, I saw how different everything was from my country.

Things such as the public busses, the cars, the streets, the schools, the food, the culture and even the people.

I did not know any English when I got here. I took an English class at the school when I was in the Dominican Republic but it did not do me any good

The schools over there are very different compared to schools here. For example, public schools in the U.S are very nice and they do not have to have a class range.

Public schools in my country were for those who were not financially stable and could not afford to send their kids to a school with decent academics.

I went to private school called Colegio Palma Real located in the capital.

The schools all ended around 12 p.m, you had the choice to pick whether you wanted morning and afternoon classes. I personally chose the morning classes.

Also, everything was walking distance. I could easily walk to the grocery store, the clothing stores, and different kinds of restaurants.

My country is well known for baseball and the nice beaches. In the streets, you would see a ton of children playing baseball. And the beaches would always be crowded with a lot of people. Since we had nice beaches and a beautiful country, tourists would always be around, I would see them everywhere.

When I arrived to the United States, I attended Braddock Elementary school for 5th grade and I started to learn English.

My teacher said that I was a fast learner at learning another language because it is usually harder for other people to learn English at my age.

Therefore, by the time I was in 6th grade, I already learned a lot of English and could have fluent conversations with other people.

I still miss everyone in the Dominican Republic since I have not been there in almost eight years, but now, being 18 years old, I love all the friends that I have made.



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## **Organizations internationally-minded**

There are many clubs and societies that we offer here at Annandale. Some clubs and societies that we have are to explain cultures from around the world and to teach you new languages.

Some clubs such as the Latin Honor Society sponsored by Normalee Ash, the Spanish Honor Society sponsored by Maureen Hunt, the Just World Interact club sponsored by Laura Wells,

and the Muslim Students' Association also known as MSA sponsored by the Arabic teacher, Ola Layaly.

These clubs are open to anyone who wants to join. In MSA, you do not have to be Muslim to be in the club.

The members participated in the tailgate this year and performed henna on students for \$3. "It is not really religious, it is more of a cultural thing," Layaly said.

About 20 students are in the Muslim Students' Association. The meetings are typically every other Wednesdays. in the upstairs gym.

"We are not really strict about people coming to the meetings," Layaly said.

In the MSA, students discuss first and then they are open to asking any questions. They answer questions and share ideas.

Mostly students who are not Muslim join because they want to know more about it.

"We have many people who are not Muslim join because they want to know what the religion is all about," Layaly said.

Students in the club last year did an Iftaar party. Iftaar is when you break your fast after the sun has gone down.

You bring a dish to share with the other members of the club and everyone participates to make it fun. "It's typically like a potluck and we waited until the sun went down and then we start eating," Layaly said.

Usually, during Iftaar people pray. In the club, it is not mandatory for members to pray since most of them are not Muslim. But if students want to pray, they have a moment set aside to do so.

Meet with the Muslim Students' Association on October 25th after school. "It is a blast, students love it," Layaly said.

Learning about Islamic culture is not the only clubs here.

There is a Spanish Honor Society that will be starting soon.

In the Spanish Honor Society, about 20 students are in the club also. They have not started the actual society yet The interest meeting will be during this week.

They have already started accepting applications. You have to send in an application and are hand-picked by Hunt herself.

“The purpose of the club is to promote Hispanic culture and the Spanish language,” Hunt said. “In the society we usually do cultural presentations, talk about community events, and make plans for tutoring of other students.”

There is community service for the tutoring and it is a lot of work. Typically the community service hours are done outside of the club.

But in the actual meetings, students that participate in the clubs have lots of fun.

There is also the Just World Interact club offered at the school sponsored by Laura Wells. A range of 30-50 people tends to join the club. It is more to learn about the world and what is going on in it.

There is a lot of projects to help people around the world. “We are currently collecting books for Swaziland, so we will be donating books to a school with disabilities in Swaziland, Africa,” Wells said. It is great to be involved in clubs that help kids and students around the world.

They do things in the club to try and help others during the life. Not only to just donate. People who have been punished for something that they should not be punished for.

In other countries, people have been imprisoned for protesting or doing things peacefully or silently.

“We will be doing ‘Write for Rights’ which is a project of amnesty international where we write letters to support people

who have been wrongfully imprisoned in various countries," Wells said.

Another big part of the club is, they hold a festival in the springtime. "We've been doing the just world festival now, I think for at least 5-8 years, maybe more," Wells said.

There's a lot of beneficial learning experiences at this fair for students. "We invite lots of different international service organizations, to come in and present and we have different cultural groups present. It's a good time" Wells said. Students who might still be interested in joining the club can still join.

"All grades are welcome to come, they can just show up at our next meeting, which is Tuesday, November 14th at Clausen Hall after school," Wells said. "We meet once a month any student but ant student is always welcome to participate in our service project, so like if you just want to come for rights for rights, you can sign up on X2V0L and come and if you decide you want to join then you can join the club." This club has been at Annandale High School for a while. "We're actually sponsored by the Annandale Rotary, which is a club for adults in the community," Wells said. Contact any of the teachers if you are interested in joining these clubs today.

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## **Student's family affected by Hurricane Irma**

Many people all over the Carribbean were affected by the recent Category 4 hurricane, Irma. Some of our very own Atoms and their family were impacted from it. Families either did not have the money to evacute or did not have a place to go to.

Our school is full of students, teachers, and other faculty that have other family members located all over the world. In different states and different countries.

Seniors Grace Hatch, Sapphire Rush, and Janice Milian Guerrero. share how Irma destroyed their homes and left them worried about their families.

Hatch's family is from Jacksonville, Florida which is towards the Northern region of Florida. "They experienced a lot of damage to their home and yards. Such as many large trees, fences, a ton of flooding and debris," Hatch said.

It's shocking to see and experience something like that. A place that you once called home now destroyed.

"My aunt's main concerns were that they were going to have a lot of damages to the house and her business, meaning they would worry about receiving no income," Hatch said.

Homes weren't just destroyed, businesses were too. How can people make money if they don't have a job to work at.

"But my uncle was more concerned about the damage caused to the house affecting if they could live there or not and if someone was injured, it would majorly impact them currently but what would that mean for the future," Hatch said.

She was concerned for their behalf and it was not easy knowing she had nothing in my control to help them or the situation when it was happening.

Some families did have the chance to evacuate before Irma hit land.

Senior Sapphire Rush's family did have the opportunity and choice to leave. Rush explains how her grandmother left everything behind to save herself.

Rush's family was originally from Southern New Jersey but over the years they separated.

Her grandmother moved to the Miami area in Florida. When her family found out about the hurricane, her grandmother immediately dropped everything and went back to New Jersey, yet she left all of her belongings and her dog.

"My grandmother went back to Florida after the storm was over to find her backyard completely ruined, her basement flooded

and her home falling apart," Rush said.

Her grandmother had to leave her dog behind because she could not find a plane that could transport her dog with her, the dog was then left at a doggy hotel in Florida.

When her grandmother came back after Irma, she tried to contact the hotel her dog was located at but heard nothing.

"The doggy hotel the dog was placed in never notified if the dogs were okay or anything, so to this day we do not know if he is even okay," Rush said.

Rush does have other family besides her grandmother that does live in Florida but did not have the chance to leave before Irma. It's hard to go through something this devastating to know that your family is out there, possibly injured or dead.

Having no way to contact your family because the phone lines and electricity are damaged. "We do have other family in Florida, a few cousins or so but we haven't heard from them and have no clue if they're even okay," Rush said. "Cellphones are not ringing at all and no social media posts have been posted, but we are trying not to expect the worst."

Florida was the last place to be severely hit with the Category 4 beast. Other territories such as Puerto Rico. Janice Milian Guerrero has family in Puerto Rico who experienced strong winds, flooding, and power outages. Puerto Rico was next to the Virgin Islands which was strongly impacted by Irma. Knowing the conditions of other islands worried Guerrero more than she expected.

"I was worried about them during the hurricane because of how most of the house foundations they live in were found," Guerrero said.

At one point, Guerrero couldn't get in touch with her family. "But now I am actually scared and stressed because I'm not able to communicate with them at all," Guerrero said.

Irma is not the only hurricane that has hit Puerto Rico lately, hurricane Maria has left 100 percent of this small territory without power and allowing no one to be able to get in contact with them.



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## Exchange student becomes an Atom

Have you ever thought about leaving your family, home, and friends behind? How about if it was to experience a whole new country or school? Have you ever thought about leaving your family, home, and friends behind? How about if it was to experience a whole new country or school? Junior Joao Teixeira, a foreign exchange student has done just that. Coming all the way from Portugal, Teixeira came to the the United States about a month ago. Coming to make a life changing experience. "I made this decision about a year ago and it's not a decision you make lightly," Teixeira said. "I left my whole world and I came here, without knowing anybody. Just landing here in another country with a new culture just a month ago."

His mother was a big factor on why he decided to do the program. Teixeira's own mother had experienced the program herself and pushed him towards the decision that he made. "My mom did this exact program, the foreign exchange student program about three years ago," Teixeira said. "She always encouraged me to do it." It wasn't an easily made decision, even at first he was pretty indecisive about it. "A lot of people would be scared to do something like this, to leave their friends and family behind, which is exactly what I did," Teixeira said.

After a lot of what ifs and why nots, Teixeira made the decision to go for it. "Well I mean, this is something I am going to regret if I do not do, it would be a nice experience," Teixeira said. Teixeira mentions that everything is different, especially the school system. Coming from a foreign country to America, you're going to experience a different lifestyle. "Such basic things are different for example, students don't move, we have fixed classrooms. Teachers are the ones that move over there," Teixeira said.

That is not the only thing different about the school life in Portugal and America. "We have almost no choice of subject, we also don't have pre calculus, calculus, algebra, we just have basic math," Teixeira said. Adapting to a new school isn't the only thing you have to go through when being an exchange student. They have to live with a completely different family, basically strangers. Teixeira is staying with a host family while in America. Staying with a host family is apart of the Foreign Exchange Student Program. A host family is a family that offers their home to the exchange student.

The student then lives with them just as if it was their own home with their family. In Teixeira's case he is going to live with his host family until the end of the school year. "My host family is really nice, I really got lucky. They came from Mexico about 20 years ago. I have two older host brothers and a host sister who is my age," Teixeira said. He gets along

with his host sister since his other two host brothers are in college.

“I got to know her friends, and we’ve really gotten along really well,” Teixeira said. Coming to America, the culture from Portugal is very different. Especially coming to such a diverse school, surrounded from people all over the world. He gets to know to them and realize he either has a lot in common or almost nothing in common.

“We grew up watching Disney and Nickelodeon and all that stuff and we see like American High School series like the riding the yellow school bus and having lockers. Now that I’m here all my friends are very excited telling me ‘Oh my god you ride the yellow bus! You have lockers!’ so you can tell that school in Portugal is completely different,” Teixeira said.

Even with experiencing a whole new culture and loving it, there is no place like home. A new experience gives a new perspective on many things.

“Coming to America has made me realize the good things that I have on a daily basis, back in Portugal the weather is so good,” Teixeria said. You would assume people think America is the best country there is or have some similarities, but Teixeria sees it in a different way. “We often think ‘Oh we are so much worse than America, they’re so great, we are nothing compared to them’ but I mean once I came here I definitely started to appreciate my country more,” Teixeira said. People should really be more open to the program. It is difficult to decide but at the end of the day, you get to live through something that is a once in lifetime oppurtunity.