

Ports of Entry

Port of entry - *a place, such as a port or airport, where people or goods can enter a country.*

Longman Dictionary

"Of all the books in the world, the best stories are found between the pages of a passport." I agree, because those stories are about you. You could be reading a Harry Potter adventure book, a Nancy Drew mystery novel, or watching a Clint Eastwood western, picturing yourself as a character in those stories, defeating a fire-breathing dragon, solving a mystery, or maybe just riding off into the sunset. But in the story of life, you are the main character.

Port of entry: Sheremetyevo International Airport, Moscow, Russia. The border guard stamped my passport “Шереметьево”. I was six weeks old, and we had landed in Moscow. That’s where we lived for the first few years of my life. When I was three years old I encountered my first story of lost hope. It happened at a Winter Festival with various competitions and prizes held by my grandmother’s place of work. One of the challenges was a poem recital under a christmas tree. I confidently went up on the stage, and cheerfully told a poem in Russian about Father Frost. For some reason, I had a firm belief that I would win the best prize ever, a real car. I was extremely disappointed to find that the prize was just a small package of candies.

Port of entry: Shota Rustaveli International Airport, Tbilisi, Georgia. This entry stamp in my passport makes me feel hungry. Almost every weekend, my family went to a restaurant by a river, and we feasted on incredible Georgian food while hearing the sound of flowing water. The melted cheese of khachapuri oozed into your mouth as you bit into its crust. We learned how to eat khinkali, a Georgian dumpling. You take a fork and pierce the

little stub on top of the dumpling, then you flip it over and bite into the soft dough surrounding the meat as the hot juice inside flows into your mouth.

One night, in Tbilisi, I found myself in the middle of a sports fiction novel. Thousands of people gathered to watch the Georgian All-Stars play the Harlem Ambassadors in basketball. Excitement filled the stadium as the two teams marched onto the court. After the introductions, they began to play. The scores were close, nearly tied. The halftime bell rings. The teams announce a competition for children, and ask for volunteers. I rush to the middle of the court with other boys, and the team captains explain the game. The referee whistles, and we complete a few challenges. The last challenge is to grab a basketball and score a point. I run to the other side of the court. I see that I am the first one there, and I prepare to shoot the ball into the basket. I quickly glance around the stadium. It feels like thousands of eyes are looking at me. All the attention makes me nervous. I lift up my arms and throw the basketball. I have never really been into basketball, and I am not very good at it. I am stunned when I see the ball hit its mark and fall into the hoop. This was an unexpected outcome. I felt proud of myself.

Port of entry: Miguel Hidalgo International Airport, Guadalajara, Mexico. Our next post after Tbilisi was Guadalajara, Mexico. On a cool October morning, I entered an adventure novel. We drove out of Guadalajara early in the morning, while the sun was still below the skyline. Our destination: Tequila Volcano. It took a few hours to get to the base of the mountain, driving on bumpy cobblestone roads. When we reached the mountain, we got out of our car and stretched our aching muscles. It took us half an hour to unpack our gear. Then we began the hike. It was not an easy hike, and I would stumble on rocks and loose vines as I walked. A few times my mind filled with doubt, and I would think to myself, “Will

I make it? Will I be able to reach the top?" My legs were burning as I climbed higher and higher. Finally, we reached the peak of the volcano, and I looked down into the crevice below me. I expected to see the dull grey color of rocks, but what I saw was a marvelous sea of green, brown, and blue. I saw trees leaning at funny angles, and I wondered: why don't they fall?. It seemed like they were defying gravity. Huge boulders, which looked like they could tumble downward at any moment, were hanging out into the crevice. As I looked around at the view below me, I felt like I could accomplish incredible tasks.

Moving around a lot may seem difficult, scary, tedious, and repetitive, but it leaves you with new impressions, friendships, and stories. It prepares you for the future, and helps you believe in yourself. All of my experiences have shown me that I am writing my own story, because in the book of life, you aren't just the protagonist, but you're also the author.