Growing up, I lived in a bubble that protected me from the harsh words the world said about me. Be it because I was a girl, a person of color, or a Muslim. My bubble was built on my family’s teachings and constant reminders of how fortunate I was to live the life I am living. My parents taught me life the way they learned it. They taught me to pray and to respect everyone, even if I did not agree with them.

I had a blissful childhood, but everything wasn’t perfect. I remember in third grade two girls telling me they couldn’t be my friend because I didn’t believe in Jesus Christ the way they did. I remember in middle school, a peer I had known since first grade shouted something along the lines of “Those stupid Muslims are all terrorists. They should go blow themselves up” while my class watched a movie in remembrance of the innocent lives lost on the night of 9/11. He eventually realized I was in the room and told me he didn’t mean me. I knew what he meant. Even if he did not believe it included me, it did.

But despite the hurdles, I know I had a very privileged and supportive environment compared to many of my peers. Through my mosque, I was extremely involved in my city’s interfaith events and through it was constantly aware of the overwhelming support I had from people of diverse backgrounds whether or not they knew me personally. I remember last year at the start of Ramadan, the local Presbyterian Church sent the mosque a beautiful flower bouquet to with us a “Happy Ramadan.” Following the Muslim Ban proposed by President Trump, we received a heartwarming note from nearby residents reassuring us that they valued our presence
in their community. Around the same time, the Rabbi of our local Jewish temple in unison with the University of Evansville arranged an inclusion rally to show their support for those affected by the proposed ban. And when the Jewish temple was shot at, we showed the same level of support and went to the peace rally and prayer they held at the Jewish temple.

On a personal level, I was always surrounded by people who were inclusive and celebrated diversity. I went to a very diverse and liberal high school with a very unique open and academically focused environment. This environment gave me the opportunity to have an open dialogue with people I disagreed with and taught me how to be more accepting of those I don’t agree with.

Aside from the social and political atmosphere of my hometown, I was extremely involved in the community. I volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, the Hospital, the library, the Senior Center, and the local science museum to mention a few. Through these experiences, I got to see the true goodness in my community.

In a literal sense, my hometown had very little to do if you weren’t involved. And even though I was involved, there were still times with very little to do. This was definitely one of the drawbacks of living in a small city. If my friends and I wanted to hang out, we would run out of unique options fairly quickly. I lived in a suburb of Evansville called Newburgh, so if I ever wanted to anything, I would have to make the fifteen-minute drive there because the only thing in Newburgh was a movie theater.

Though there are definitely unique aspects to Evansville, there are many things that I think are universal about hometowns. We had a Wal-Mart and a library. We had typical high school rivalries and most of my peers had a universal longing for the old Disney to come back. We all ate popcorn and snuck candy into the movie theater. And we are all a part of the world.