



WHEN OPPORTUNITIES GOT SMALLER IN USA

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If we made a poll 3 years ago to see which country people thought it was «the land of opportunities», for sure the majority of them would answer that the United States of America were. I've been living in the USA most of these last 3 years and I've realized, now that I just came back, that probably at the present time the answer wouldn't be so clear. In these lines I pretend to explain you my journey through this «land», and how it turned out to be very special to me.

These last years the USA have been in the news, mostly for sad reasons. As you might recall, problems began with the presidential reelection process in 2000, where the World saw how the most industrialized country in the world could suffer core organization problems. But it wasn't until the terrorist attack to the World Trade Center that the Americans themselves realized that there were people that hated them. This was such astonishing news that many Americans have not still recovered from. It all got worse with the «explosion» of the Technological Bubble by the end of 2001. By then, many Americans lost their jobs and many looked back to the recession period with fear that it could come back. Finally, during 2002 and 2003 we had to get used to news about war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, trying to erase all these people that USA thought that they were dangerous to them.

I have always wanted to work in the Unites States. Since early ages I've been reading how people could achieve their dreams, everything was possible in USA. That was why I wanted to be part of that «American Dream». I studied Telecommunications Engineering in UPC and I was lucky to be offered an internship in the US to do my final degree thesis. I didn't doubt and quickly jumped into the plane.

This internship was in a prestigious research laboratory, in Santa Barbara, California. A town located about 90 miles (150 Km) north of Los Angeles, in the coast. It is a very pretty town, between two interesting attraction poles, the wealthy living of Montecito and the typical student life from UCSB (University of California in Santa Barbara). Soon after I begun the internship I was offered to remain in the company after finishing my degree, which was fulfilling my dream. Such offer was implying the request for a working visa, that wasn't supposed to be a problem by then, with so much work to do and the economy going so well.

But it was during a short visit in Spain to present my thesis by September 2001, when the Twin towers collapsed in New York, and with them arrived the end of a period. I came back to my workplace and all plans remained the same, the visa was in progress and, even though Americans were not the same after 9-11, it all seemed to me as if nothing had changed in the other coast of the States. But with the end of the year there came very bad economic results and some companies began to lay off thousands of people, being California the State that suffered the most. I kept

believing that my position was ensured until that came to me. My engineering status offer was turned down, therefore I was technically «laid off».

I was luckier than most people because I could finally keep my engineering position in the company. Some friends of mine were not so lucky and had to go, and some other interns that wanted to stay in the company after their internship, couldn't. In general, during all 2002 and part of 2003 many companies applied a «freezing» strategy in the Human Resources departments. There was in some cases a lot of work to be done, and a big need for more people to be hired, but many managers were scared to see that companies next door were closing down. Therefore the Unemployment rate went up steeply and stayed there almost until nowadays. One area that was not affected at all was the military related jobs, but in these cases the job description was asking for US citizens only, thus not serving as a relieve for all those engineers like me that had moved to California during those crazy technological years.

Despite the troubles, I was able to work in the company in interesting areas within the speech processing area. My work went into topics such as Text-to-Speech synthesis, Automatic Speaker Verification, speech databases creation and robotics.

After 2.5 years I returned to Spain on September 2003. The overall experience was very fulfilling. I am very happy I took the decision to go to another country to work because it gave me a totally new perspective of the way things can be done. I realized there is not a «good» and a «bad» way of doing things when it comes to differences in cultures, there is simply a «different» way.

I encourage everybody to go to another country and merge with another culture for a reasonable period of time (tourism is nice but it only shows us the façade of a country). If problems arise, one just have to keep trying until they get better. I found my personal experience to be a life changing one.

AUTOR



Xavier Anguera Miró. Nacido en Tarragona en 1978. Ingeniero superior de Telecomunicación, graduado en 2001. Máster Europeo en Lluenguatge i Parla (MELP), 2001. Durante los últimos años de la carrera se especializó en el tratamiento de la señal y de la voz. Ha trabajado durante dos años y medio en el Panasonic Speech Technology Laboratory, en USA. Actualmente es estudiante de doctorado en el departamento de Teoría de la Señal y Comunicaciones de la UPC.

