



For Immediate Release

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Exchange Student Reflects on Independence Day

How One Global Citizen Experienced Independence Twice

Washington, D.C.—Every year more than one thousand high school students from PAX – Program of Academic Exchange leave their homes to study in the United States for a year. The cultural change from any of the 70 home countries is profound, especially for those students originating from countries where some freedoms are unavailable. Their time in America often sets the stage for a future in which they embrace social change back home. For one student, it set the stage for an eventual emigration.

Zviad (“Zee”) Aznaurashvili, who was born in Georgia, spent a high school exchange year in rural Indiana and then returned to attend graduate school at Georgetown University. He now lives in the U.S. with his wife and is a Capital One manager living near Washington, D.C.

Zee first came to the U.S. as part of the PAX class of 1997/98. His home country had declared independence just six years earlier and still suffered from civil unrest. The experience, says Zee, helped him to recognize his opportunities. “I am fortunate enough to have experienced life-transforming independence twice in my life,” he says, adding that he doesn’t take Independence Day for granted in his adopted country.

“Independence Day symbolizes freedom from physical and social constraints. It means that I and anyone else in this country can pursue and ultimately achieve their personal or professional aspirations. It symbolizes freedom from any external or self-imposed limitations,” says Zee. “We have become world citizens who happen to live in the United States and visit family in Georgia.”

Now the Georgian-American and his family will be celebrating Independence Day as their neighbors do, but they also keep their home’s traditions alive. “Religious holidays are a different matter,” says Zee. “And New Year’s is a very big deal for us. We exchange presents then,” he said, “but the biggest present I got was a random family in the U.S. opening their home to me and letting me live with them when I was a high school exchange student. They are my second family now.”

About PAX

Founded in 1990, PAX – Program of Academic Exchange is a not-for-profit educational organization and one of a select few U.S. Department of State-designated Exchange Visitor Programs chosen to participate in the prestigious U.S. government sponsored Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) and Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) programs. Each year, more than 1,100 teenagers visit the U.S. as PAX exchange students. For information on how you can host an exchange student from another country, please visit www.pax.org/families or call 800.555.6211.