

The Charm of Adventure

By Andrew Cantone

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"Where are we?"

"Andrew, sweetie, we just went over this, we are in Baltimore," replied my mother, befuddled as to how many times she had to explain where we were before I understood our plans. It was spring break of 2012, and my family had decided to visit Washington D.C. over break, after making a quick, yet extremely memorable, day trip to Baltimore. Clearly, I did not have the best attention span at the time, yet the city's aura wielded an unrivaled ability to grasp my attention immediately.

"Also known as 'Charm City,'" my

dad proclaimed with a wide grin. Knowing my father, he chose to announce this fact to provoke my brothers and me into asking further questions regarding the nickname so that he could share his sagacious knowledge.

"But isn't this like a... bad place?" asked my little brother naively, although my prejudice of the city was fairly similar based on the rumors and research I had collected over time. As I had anticipated, my father went on to explain the origin of the "Charm City" title. The nickname was created following Mayor William Donald Schaefer's request to "come up with something to promote the

city" ("How"). Although it wasn't as attractive as I would have imagined a city with the nickname "Charm City," would be, I did observe a variety of its bold characteristics, making the setting much more remarkable. I gazed up at the small yet marvelous bridge looming over us, draped from it—the renowned Maryland state flag. Although I was primarily familiar with this flag because of its appearance on the Baltimore Ravens' jerseys, a team I was not very fond of, its presence hanging from a bridge was astonishingly less hostile than the form in which I had traditionally perceived it.

The Flag

I examined the black and yellow checkered pattern sharply contrasted with its red and white checkered cross, representing the family crests of the Calvert and Crossland families, which would forever remind me of my own family's explorations on this notable day in my future second home ("Maryland"). I began to ponder the flag of my very own home

state, New Jersey. Had I ever seen my own state's flag? Was Maryland really the only state whose flag I was familiar with? These thoughts, along with the magnificent scenery surrounding me, left a streaking smirk across my face as I knew that this very moment, staring in awe at the colorful Maryland state flag, would forever be ingrained in my memory as my first impression of Baltimore.

The adventures that my family and I engaged in on this unforgettable day altered my perception on Charm City, ultimately impacting my college decision and where I could consider my second home.



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Adventure Awaited

With the thought of adventure flooding my mind, I was keen to explore the marvels of Charm City. "Where are we going first?" I asked my parents. They pointed across the harbor, where I gazed attentively at an extraordinary, vibrant building structure with various shapes of different colors, reminding me of a playful Lego wall I may have constructed as a second grader. We ven-

tured into one of the largest tourist attractions of Charm City, the National Aquarium, which is consistently ranked as one of the nation's two top aquariums and has hosted over 51 million guests since opening" ("Our"). As if the fascinating outside of the aquarium hadn't captivated me enough, the inside was perhaps even more mesmerizing. With colossal tanks collectively filled with more than "20,000 fish, birds, amphibians,

reptiles and marine mammals living in award-winning habitats," allowing every tourist to immerse themselves in the marine environment, it's no surprise that it's Maryland's largest paid tourist attraction ("Our"). As my family and I departed from our marvelous experience within the National Aquarium, I looked back, longing for another aquatic adventure in the future.

Something at the House of Poe

After our first exciting visit of the day, my family and I made our way to our next destination: Edgar Allen Poe's burial site. As we made our way down the streets of Baltimore, I watched the modern atmosphere of the city's inner harbor gradually transform into a whole new setting. Much different from the contemporary architectural designs we had witnessed moments before, we now stood engulfed in a red brick jungle, consisting of many quaint, old-fashioned buildings and churches. Outside one of these outdated-styled churches was the Westminster Cemetery where Edgar Allen Poe, the man responsible for associating Balti-

more with its representative raven, was buried. The setting of this site, surrounded by an impoverished and desolate neighborhood, as well as the fact that it is the burial site of Edgar Allen Poe, whose writings were frequently considered to be "morally questionable and in dubious taste," help to enforce and enrich this description of the site (Robinson). My parents attempted to educate my brothers and me on the interesting facts of Poe's mysterious life, particularly his background; however, we were far too enthralled by the cemetery's scenery to attend to the information being fed to us. Admittedly, my brothers and I were

never the most mature for our ages, especially at this time, so we chose to take advantage of what the cemetery had to offer – tombstones of course. Hurling over gravestones, ducking under shallow arches and leaping from one elevated platform to another, my brothers and I were able to design our own adventure with just our imaginations and the materials Charm City presented to us.



A New Perspective

After several other tours and visits within Charm City, we concluded our exhilarating day of adventure by dining in a restaurant within a large building looming over the radiant Baltimore harbor, where my eyes were enthralled by the magnificent array of lights cast over the calm water. Upon locating the most notable attraction of the day, the National Aquarium, I detected a striking new feature which I had not noticed before, an illuminated wave detail positioned on the side of the building, adjacent to the Lego-like wall design I had previously marveled at. My intensive gaze was broken as the waiter tapped my shoulder, presenting my plate of crab cakes. It was a unique vision for me, since I had never been a huge fan of seafood. However, one bite of a renowned Maryland crab cake and its succulent, sweet, savory crab taste tantalized my mouth.

With a new adventure on my plate, and several adventures digested throughout the day, I gazed once more out the large glass overlooking the glowing, magnificent harbor and build-

ings. I wondered if I would ever have more adventures in Charm City down the road, imploring my future self to consider Baltimore as a potential home or a more frequent destination. In the dis-



tance, I observed the prominent Maryland flag, embodying the Calvert and Crossland family crests. These crests stood not only as a reminder of my family's remarkable adventures on this day, but as an eternal symbol for adventure engraved on my mind. Little did I know that my adventures in Baltimore after this quick trip would completely alter my perception of the city's charm and ultimately my final college decision, allowing me to accept the city as a second home.

Although the entirety of Charm City may not be the most charming, I have found through my experiences that the attractions within the city, along with the

community of Baltimore, help contribute to the city's overall charm. My adventures within Baltimore have helped shift my view of the city from frightening to more welcoming and pleasant; while still bearing in mind that certain areas will always require caution. Through my experiences in Baltimore, I have discovered that the pride and connection among the citizens within the Baltimore community is unrivaled.

"Where are *** we going?" I asked, taking out my earplug to hear my mother's response.

"We are going to the D.C. – Baltimore area to look at colleges," replied my mom. My mom's mentioning of Baltimore triggered the memories and adventures we had upon visiting the city for the first time, exactly three years ago.

"Where would you guys like to visit first?" asked my father, expecting an indifferent answer, if any answer at all.

"Baltimore!" I exclaimed eagerly. "D.C. can wait again."

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