

# Lucile Vigouroux

LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

**1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE**

*Lucile Vigouroux, 17, graduated in June from the School of International Studies at San Diego High School. An accomplished equestrian, she will be enrolling this fall at Centenary College of New Jersey, double majoring in equine science and equine business management. She is interested in promoting more comprehensive and respectful methods to care for and work with domestic horses.*

## LE RÊVE AMÉRICAIN

*Le Rêve Américain.* The American Dream. As far as I can remember, the simple pronunciation of this name has always been enough to stir feelings of excitement, ambition and admiration in my family. Even when it was just that: a dream. For a modest French family like mine, the United States of America seemed quite rightfully like the other end of the world, and the accuracy of this statement extends beyond its literal meaning of physical distance: American culture as we knew it seemed fictional and our idea of American people relied heavily on the stereotypical belief that *all* Americans are friendly surfers who drive pick-up trucks. The American Dream was only something we could afford to admire and fantasize about; actually fulfilling it never was an idea we seriously considered.

Yet, despite the improbability that his family would ever set foot on American soil, my father was motivated by the empowering slogan: “No matter who you are, if you have a dream and are willing to work hard at it, in America everything is possible.” It spurred him to sell his business and pursue a race car driving career that would eventually make us lucky enough to fill four of the 675,000 spots reserved annually for permanent immigrants in the United States. The American government issued us Permanent Resident Cards. Preference Category 1<sup>1</sup>--we liked to call them *nos clés du monde de l’opportunité* (“our Keys to the Land of Opportunity”).

Bursting with excitement and curiosity, we began our pursuit of this famous “American Dream” February 16, 2008. Today, January 21, 2015, we were granted American citizenship.

Opening our naturalization ceremony at San Diego’s U.S. Immigration Court was President Obama’s recorded voice repeating these inspiringly powerful words: “In America, everything is possible.” For the first time, I was able to read the Constitution’s introductory sentence “We, the People of the United States” without feeling like an intruder. These “People of the United States” have accepted to consider me a member of their honorable nation, to treat me as their equal. To me, this inestimable honor is the American Dream.

<sup>1</sup> Immigration Policy Center, “How the United States Immigration System Works: A Fact Sheet.” 03/01/2014. *Web*. Accessed 04/14/2015

<sup>2</sup> Brady, “The Constitution of the United States of America as Amended” ARTICLE XIV. 07/25/2007. *Web*. Accessed

Consequently, among all amendments, the one that I am most thankful for is the fourteenth: its first selection guarantees that natural birth and naturalization both ensure equal rights and equal protection of the law: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States [...] No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor laws.”<sup>2</sup> As long as this amendment is enforced, I will not be denied the right to vote in elections for public officials<sup>3</sup> or to apply for competitive service jobs<sup>4</sup> simply because of my national origin.

Furthermore, I can safely rely on the fact that if I am ever convicted of a crime or tort, impartial justice will be conducted and neither prejudice nor personal opinion of French people will play a role in my sentencing. In fact, independent of the defendant’s origin, the American trial system is infinitely more fair by nature than that of the French. While in France the fate of the defendant, regardless of the severity of the offense, is in the hands of a single judge - whose judgment may or may not be entirely objective - in the United States twelve jurors confer to agree on the verdict. Twelve ordinary men and women, who are not affiliated with the government and have nothing to lose by exercising fair reasoning. Yes; some are racist, sexist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, homophobic; that is inevitable, but the combined judgment of such diverse people considerable reduces the risk that unfounded personal judgment influences objective legal judgment. This democratic procedure may seem banal to the average American, but I have learned not to take it for granted.

The American Dream is not perfect. We must be careful not to idealize it; just like any other dream, system, market, or organization, it has its shortcomings and imperfections, its injustices and deceptions. I myself have endured my share fair of discrimination. Yet becoming a resident and citizen of “The Land of Opportunity” has led to opportunities that I will never cease to be grateful for.

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<sup>2</sup> Brady, “The Constitution of the United States of America as Amended” ARTICLE XIV. 07/25/2007. *Web*. Accessed 04/14/2015

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Important Information for New Citizens” M-767 04/2012

<sup>4</sup> The United States Department of Justice, “Types of Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices Discrimination” n.d. *Web*. Accessed 04/14/2015