



Survive
and
Thrive

For every undergraduate

**COLLEGE
SURVIVAL GUIDE**

EXPLORE WHO WE ARE

EMBRACE AND RECONCILE

Navigate challenges through college life.

TIAN DING



ABOUT THE GUIDE

How do you survive in college? When I arrived to UC Santa Barbara as an undergraduate student, there were a couple of orientations and information sessions on various resources, but no one to actually guided me through the process. As a result, I had to rely on myself to learn how to juggle all of my responsibilities as well as cope with stress from various other sources. I'm still searching for the answers as I get closer to graduation. However, I want to help those who follow me by offering something I never received – clear and flexible guidance. The College Survival Guide will revisit my unique experience as an international student, who came to the University of California, Santa Barbara at 17 to start the next phase of my life. By looking back on my experiences as an international student, I plan to create a guide that invites the readers to explore who they are and what choices they might make as a reflection of my own lived experience surviving and thriving at university. My message to you is this: stress is like our own shadow – we neglect it while it is part of ourselves – instead, let's embrace it and reconcile with it. If you are a new student at UCSB, then this guide is meant to help you navigate through the challenges of college life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my deepest appreciation to my mentor who has guided me throughout the process – Dr. Brian Ernst & Dr. Ljiljana Coklin; my editor Jenny Kwok, and my family and friends who always support me .

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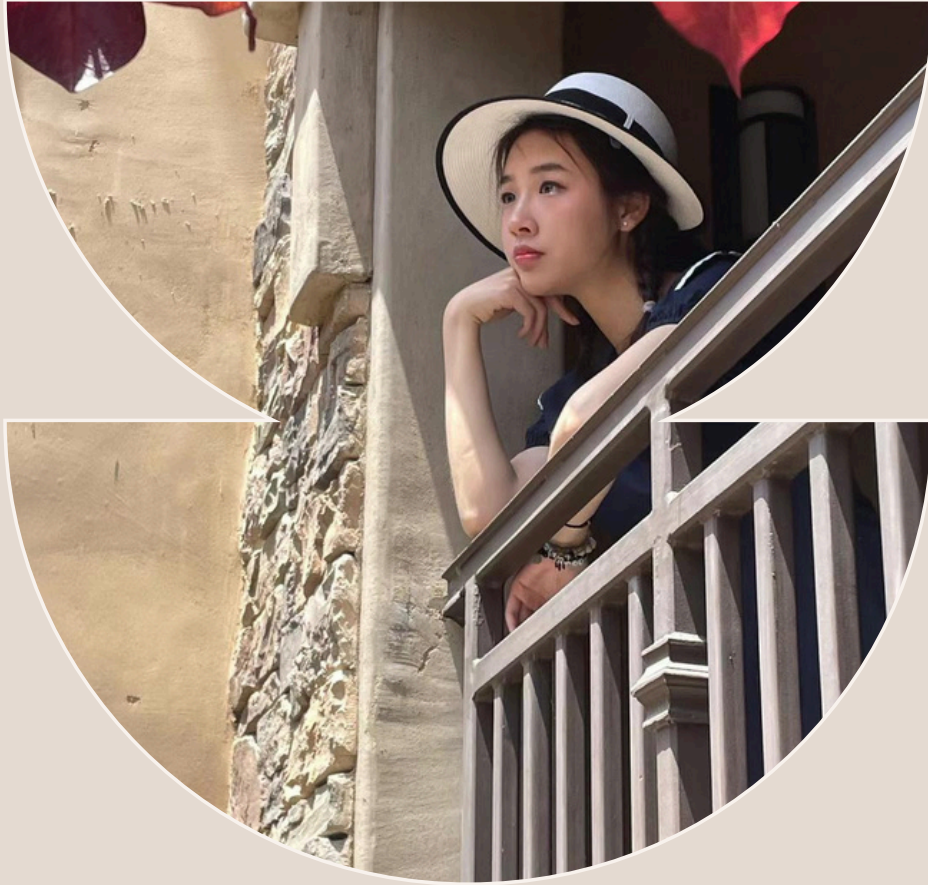
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DISCOVER WHO WE ARE

On the way towards our future, we're also gaining a deeper understanding of ourselves, including our interests, sexuality, cultural identity etc.



HI, I'M TIAN

Welcome to College Survival Guide.

Before I explain what is College Survival Guide, let me send my sincere congratulations to all of you for starting a new chapter in your life. No matter if you're a first year student, transfer student, or even a senior student, you're in a great time of your life where you can meet new people, discover new opportunities, and try new things.

LET'S DO IT!





WHAT IS COLLEGE SURVIVAL GUIDE?

Of course, college could be very exciting. However, college could be challenging as well.

How are you feeling right now, no matter if you started college or not yet. Are you feeling stressed about maintaining work-life balance? Are you feeling lonely because of the unfamiliar environment? Or are you feeling perplexed because you still haven't figured out what to do after graduation from college?

For readers who haven't started college yet, don't freak out. College is not an abyss, although I have those feelings above from time to time.

That's what my college survival guide is for.

Although you might be sleep-deprived before an exam; feel the saltiness of your tears; long to talk to someone while they're busy,

My college survival guide will answer your questions and help you navigate.

"It might sound cliché, but don't worry, there is always a way out."

Said Tian in 2024, an international student who started college at the age of 17.

She's a Senior student now, ready to celebrate her 20th birthday after graduation.

She is here to help you all the undergraduate students. To be exact, not only help you, but also 17-year-old self.



STORY OF SELF JOURNEY TOWARDS AWAKENING

THREE LETTERS “YES” AS A LIFE-CHANGER

Have you seen the meme? There are four signs ahead – no return, no left turn, no right turn, railing in front with a police officer. I burst into laughter when my friend showed me that meme, “Nonsense. Such a thing could never happen in my life. Because I am on a one-way street that I couldn’t return to. You ask me why? The moment my parents decided for me to study abroad, it became my ‘manifest destiny’”.

I can still recall that night when I sat on the bed in my parents’ bedroom. My parents asked, “Tintin, what do you think?”

For a while, the warm breeze in Australia seemed to stroke my hair from thousands of miles away, bringing me back to life with an icing top that I yearned for after my sudden return to home. I, as an exchange student from China for two months, adapted quickly and bloomed. I became friends with local students regardless of my poor English, enjoyed baking cupcakes with my homestay although I never baked before, solving Maths problems easily with the speed of light although the problems are equivalent to 1st-grade curriculum in China.

As an average fifth-grader in the Chinese public education system, there is nothing better than a relaxing life with compliments from peers and teachers that I never received.

So I nodded without hesitation, “Yes. I want to study abroad.”

“Are you sure? Once you made this decision, you couldn’t go back anymore.”

My dad's gaze seemed penetrating with a frown. The room fell into silence with freezing air for seconds.

I broke the silence with a resolute voice, "Yes."

How could a 5th grader know the heavy weight carried in my dad's sentences? How could a 5th grader know how life-changing responsibility carried in my answer "Yes"?

"FORWARD" JOURNEY TOWARDS MY DREAM ABROAD

Starting from middle school, I stepped on the accelerator, hurtling towards my dream abroad. I said "Goodbye" to my peers and teachers in my elementary school, bade Chinese public school system farewell, and greeted my new life in an international school far away from my hometown in China, where I had to immerse myself in English vocabularies.

Nowadays, those English vocabulary books are covered in dust in the corner of my study along with those test-prep books. For years, I finally memorized and comprehended the meaning of those unfamiliar vocabularies and learned how to take those exams that my peers in the Chinese public education system never heard of.

However, with more English vocabulary I memorized and more types of tests in English I mastered, the memories of being educated in my first language Mandarin as well as speaking the local dialect Suzhounese with my family faded away.

When I talked to peers from my elementary school in Mandarin after middle school, I couldn't stop myself from blending English vocabulary in Mandarin sentences. When they gazed at me with furrowed brows, I smiled nervously and looked away with a stammering Mandarin explanation. All I got back were crossed arms, "So...are you suggesting that you're using English vocabulary while you don't know the exact meaning? You don't even know the Mandarin translation!"

I wanted to say something to defend myself. However, at that moment, I recalled the brick red enclosure of my middle school. I was embedded in a different environment for so long that although my peers and I stood so close to each other, that brick red enclosure stood between us.

I couldn't answer their questions nor could I stand the laughter from my family for my inaccurate pronunciation of Suzhounese. At that time, I thought, "this is the price for studying abroad".

Fortunately, the loneliness from being away from my peers and from my family vanished into thin air at the moment I visited my dreamland – the United States. I was enchanted by the restaurants with global cuisines, the endless array of skyscrapers and luxury shops on 5th Avenue, and the beautiful architecture on campuses near Charles River.



I couldn't stop obsessing about the idea of studying abroad in the U.S.. Like an immigrant in the 1880s, I started dreaming of moving to a land of freedom, promises, and diversity.

However, I didn't know it was a dream built upon my fantasies due to my limited experience as a visitor. As a visitor, I didn't know how I would be excluded in all kinds of ways, including higher tuition fees, limited job opportunities, and restricted scholarship eligibility. I would never know until I lived in this country as a foreigner.

RAILING IN FRONT: HER NORMAL LIFE IS A PRIVILEGE FOR ME

In the fall of 2021, I dragged my two 23 kg suitcases alone to my dorm at UC Santa Barbara after I obtained keys from the residential assistants. When I finished fixing up my room, pain and weariness spread all over my body as if my limbs were out of place.

I sat on my bed with bed sheets that I had just put on, and gazed at the empty bed on the other side of the room. I wondered what my roommate looked like – blonde, curly hair or dyed, straight hair? What kind of personality does she have – introvert or extrovert? What kind of lifestyle does she have – early bird or night owl? I started picturing her in my mind and looked forward to meeting her.

The next day, she arrived. When I opened the dorm door, my mouth turned into the shape of the letter “O” by surprise – a Chinese family! They all had black hair and black eyes and greeted me in Mandarin. The moment I saw her, I had a feeling that we would become good friends because of a sense of connection.

I offered my hand for carrying some luggage for her. Her family smiled and said thank you in Mandarin. When we finished fixing up her side of the room, it finally felt like a completely cozy home rather than a half-empty dorm. Then, both of us went downstairs and waved goodbye to her family in the parking lot. Gazing at the van becoming smaller and smaller, I thought, “She’s so lucky to have her family accompany her to the dorm during the pandemic.” When we went upstairs together, we started chatting.

As I predicted, my roommate and I became good friends who not only have brunch in the dining commons together but also know each other through talk before we sleep. As the distance between us got smaller, I also realized that the accompaniment of her family to the dorm was a privilege of her identity as a permanent resident in California.

Although we have similar appearances, speak the same languages, and study the same classes in the same school, we’re so different due to our identity – my residential fee was doubled compared to hers; my tuition fee was an exorbitant price while hers is free; my home during Christmas holiday was the cold dorm with a broken heater while hers was the warm house in California with her family.



When she was away for the Christmas holiday, I called my mom thousands of miles away. In the dorm like an ice cellar, my heart was burning like fire. I couldn't explain why my parents needed to pay at least \$66,379 per quarter while her parents didn't understand the paradox – how could we be so similar while different from each other systematically?

The fire in my heart blazed more and more intensely along with pouring out grievances during the call. I decided to relieve my parents' financial burden as much as possible. From then on, I sacrificed my time in dedicating myself to maintaining a high GPA with overload courses for earlier graduation, conducting research projects to gain more skills and experience, and applying for jobs everywhere with my “always-updated” resumes.

I couldn't remember when my tear stains dried because I had no time for crying. Finally, my hard work was recognized by a job offer until I walked into the advising office in my major department. You might wonder why I can't just work. Because I am an international student who needed to get through the long documentation processes that no one else had to.



NO LEFT TURN: THERE IS NO HARD-WORKING BECAUSE YOU CAN'T WORK OFF-CAMPUS

The first step for applying for Curricular Practical Training (visa for off-campus employment) is to meet with my major advisor to determine eligibility to enroll in an internship course offered in the major department. Regardless of my careful examination of sentences word-by-word on the school website, I still couldn't understand how enrolling in an internship course is related to my off-campus job as well as the whole documentation process. I thought my major advisor would give me an answer.

However, what waited for me was an embarrassed smile with broken sentences, “Oh... actually...I didn't know either...But... I'll look into it. So that, when other international students come in, I can have the background knowledge for them.”

At that moment, my body was petrified and thousands of questions surged into my mind. Why the major advisors didn't know such significant information? Why did they start looking into the information right now rather than before? Why did none of my fellow international students even come to the office and ask?

I tried to elaborate more with my limited comprehension, “From my understanding, I think before the documentation process goes to the Office of International Scholars (the OISS), you, as my major advisor, need to determine whether this off-campus job is relevant to my major. If so, with your approval, I can move forward with the OISS.”

He nodded while his eyes widened, “I see. Do you have your job offer now?”

I nodded and opened my laptop, showing him the email with attachments, and said, “It’s college counseling for high school students. I think it’s a job for communication since I have to meet with students every week and discuss the application steps and progress.”

However, he shrugged and shook his head, “To be honest, I don’t think this is a job relevant to our major. Marketing and public relations would be better.”

I sighed, put my laptop back in my bag, and walked away. I recalled how I prepared for my online job interview with my friends at night and how happy I was that I almost jumped and shouted out when I received the official offer. Eventually, although I successfully acquired the job offer, I was still rejected by the U.S. system for international students' off-campus employment. Thus, the only way for me to work with legal authorization is through on-campus jobs – either competitive jobs (i.e. academic workers) that prioritize local students since English is not my first language or jobs that require intense physical labor (i.e. dining common worker) and have nothing to do with the knowledge I had learned. I had applied for the former for more than two years.

Simultaneously, an email invitation opened me to a new gate to relieve my parents’ burden – Scholarships.

NO RIGHT TURN: “BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT A U.S. CITIZEN NOR PERMANENT RESIDENT.”

I still remember how surprised I was when I received that email invitation for the first time. Although I couldn’t see my face, my eyebrows probably raised and my cheeks lifted. The excitement of “possible recognition in a different realm than jobs” motivated me to click the link marked as “apply today” without hesitation.

However, how happy I was before is the same amount of how disappointed I was after. The criteria for scholarship eligibility were clear, such as good standing, completion of 90 units, and junior or senior class standing. I was satisfied with all the criteria except one – “U.S. citizen or permanent resident”.

It felt like my head was struck by a hammer.

Looking back at my years in college, my personal life was minimized in exchange for the maximum utilization of limited opportunities my university has offered me – I am a research assistant for a PhD. Student, an honor student in my major department, an undergraduate learning assistant, a volunteer tutor for a non-profit organization, and a mentor for transfer and first-year students...

How could I give up for now if I already fought for almost three years?

Dear Tintin,

Congratulations on your outstanding academic record at UCSB! You are likely aware that your strong record makes you potentially eligible to apply to a number of prestigious nationally competitive scholarships and fellowships. We are writing today to share the following upcoming events where you can learn more about these opportunities:

I kept scrolling through the webpage for scholarship information. The phrase “U.S. citizen or permanent resident” is everywhere. Like the sun in California, my eyes hurt when I stare at it. However, in only a few seconds, I was already at the bottom of the page. I held my breath, checking whether the last two scholarships contained scarlet letters again. Fortunately, they didn’t!

The corners of my mouth lifted and clicked on the official website.

NO RETURN: BECAUSE I AM A CITIZEN OF MY HOME COUNTRY, SO FORWARD

When I was still wondering why the names of these scholarships were not typical English names – “Yenching” and “Schwarzman”, the logo of the university caught my eyes – Chinese. They’re scholarships from the top universities in my home country. It seemed to explain why U.S. citizenship is not a requirement for eligibility.

Then, I was automatically brought to the interest form for scholarships. After I filled in my name and school, the last required field was to select my citizenship from the list. However, I couldn’t find “China”. Based on my experience, China should always be the one after “Chile” because all the lists I have seen are in alphabetical order.

I checked from top to bottom and bottom to top once again. However, my home country is missing. I tried to figure out this mystery by browsing more and more information on the website. However, nothing is more disappointing than the description of prospective applicants

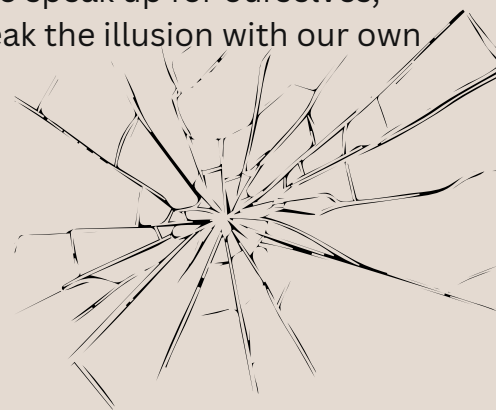
“...a strong interest in exploring different cultures, particularly those of China and the Asia Pacific region. Enrolled international students and students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan spend 12 months in residence at the Yenching Academy...”

I am not an international student from the perspective of top universities in mainland China, which has become the reason for me to be excluded from applying for scholarships. I searched online for more details. All I discovered was inequality.

“Although the website for Yenching Academy is embedded in the official website of Peking University, you must have a VPN to access it. Student facilities (in Yenching Academy) include private bathrooms and single bedrooms. The academy is established upon damaging the interests of local Chinese students and faculties.”

The information in front of me became fainter because of my tears. For a moment, I had empathy with Prometheus, whose heart was gnawed by the eagle every day. My heart was ripped into pieces because I realized the meme that I laughed at before had come true. I was trapped in the gray area – No return, no left turn, no right turn, railing in front of me with a police officer. The American dream is ONLY A DREAM that is built upon our silence to inequality, our yield to unfairness, and our fear of breaking the injustice.

We have to wake up from the dream on our own; have to speak up for ourselves; and have to break the illusion with our own hands.





LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

On the journey towards awakening, now I step on the accelerator again, knowing the direction is forward as always. And I will crash through the railings like how I tried my best to thrive in the university as an international student. I will become the unstoppable war chariot to blaze a new trail. I will be the vanguard in front and lead my fellows to fight for ourselves.

AND



**THIS IS NOT
ONLY A STORY OF**

Myself

**BUT ALSO A
STORY OF**

Ours

**TO BE
CONTINUED.**



CHAPTER



1

ADAPT TO NEW ENVIRONMENT

LET'S
DO IT

What you will discover

Transitioning to a new environment might be challenging. However, you're not alone. There are a variety of resources on-campus as well as within the community to help you adapt :).

Welcome

ADAPT TO NEW ENVIRONMENT

The first time I came to the United States was in the Summer of 2019. The 15-year-old me visited Washington DC, New York City, and Boston. The “short” two-week trip is a rich experience to broaden my horizon.

I gazed at the ancient artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, tasted the sweetness of the red velvet cupcake in Georgetown, and stepped into the Harvard Book Store to buy Harvard souvenirs.

You might say, “A two-week trip is not short.”

It’s short indeed. However, it only equals to $\frac{1}{5}$ of academic quarter which is not long enough to familiarize oneself to a strange city

Nowadays, I am a Junior student. There is only one quarter left before I graduate from UCSB. It has been more than two years since I came to Santa Barbara. The city is no longer “strange” to me.

As my mom said when she came here to visit me after Covid-19, “I experienced an identity shift.” She no longer is the one handling everything. Instead, I am the person who took her to Downtown Santa Barbara, introduced her to every building on campus, as well as arranged our ride from Los Angeles to Goleta.

Because I LIVED here for more than two years rather than a tourist visiting here for two weeks. After all, the 15-year-old me who visited the U.S. for my first time had no idea of membership-only big-box retail (i.e. Costco); or cramming for Knowledge and Drive test on DMV app and getting my first driver license, or opening my Chase bank account by myself.

Everything is just so different from my hometown.

The second time I came to the U.S., I was 17 years old. As an international student who came to an unfamiliar place during Covid-19 pandemic, my memories are a little bit bitter. I remember the unreal feeling when I first landed in LAX, couldn't believe I came into another continent where I see people who do not look like me and speak in a different language after I reopen my eyes for 12 hours on the plane.

And when I checked into the hotel, my body started to speak English as if it had naturally adapted, although I don't remember I speak poorly or not.

I remember how frustrated I was on my first day in the UCSB dormitory. The sky was already dark and decorated with stars. Regardless of the jet lag, I was too tired to keep my eyes opening. I recall my day – from taking the run bus but finally getting to Target successfully (fortunately this is a circular line) to shuttling back and forth between different stores to buy a variety of daily necessities (and I had to try to refrain myself from calculating the currency exchange rate). On my way back to the dormitory, I watched the orange sunset gradually sinking and felt the blowing wind becoming cooler and dried my sweat slowly.

Even if I wanted to lie down on the bed and take a nap, I forced myself to pull out the bedspreads, pillows and pillowcases from my big suitcases despite my sore muscles. I told myself, "Time to start organizing your new home." Although this new home is only a small bedroom with two twin-sized beds that I had to share with someone else.

At that time, I had no idea what awaited me. I don't know the personality of my roommates, don't know the course content my professors will teach, and don't know what kind of food are offered in dining commons. The only thing I could do was check my schedule on the system once again and searched the direction for those buildings on Google Maps and planned when I should leave my dorm and reserved 10 mins ahead in case I got lost.

I woke up the next day looking at sunlight penetrating through the window. It was so silent that I could hear a needle falling on the ground. In the silence, I realized that I was alone, since yesterday.

Soreness spread over my body and I felt difficult to lift my arms. But still, I got up and embarked my new journey. And I want to let you know there are resources available for you!

Resource Directory

BASIC NEEDS



FINANCE 💰

- **Financial Aid & Scholarship Office:**
 - Talk to the advisor to find out your specific needs, such as
 - Emergency Grant
 - Workshop for financial habits
 - Aid through employment



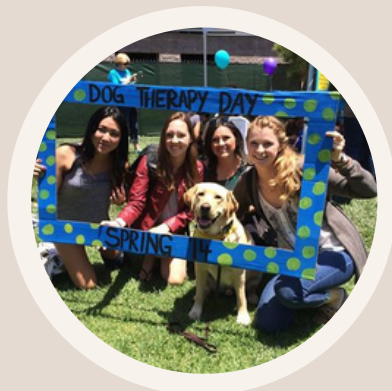
FOOD 🍔

- **Get Food**
 - **Food bank**
 - Local: *Feeding America*
 - On-Campus: Associated Students
 - Off-Campus Associations (i.e. Church)
- **Cooking Resources**
 - Check on-campus events for developing cooking skills as well as the library for affordable recipes



HOUSING 🏠

- **University Housing**
 - Residence Hall Rate + Contact Campus Housing
- **Community Resource**
 - Housing Coop
 - Local Affordable Housing Program



WELLNESS ❤️

- **Counselling & Psychological Services**
 - Group-Sessions, Counselling, therapy
- **Mindfulness & Meditation**
 - Workshops
- **Stress Reduction & Relaxation Techniques**
 - TedTalk, Library Guide

Resource Directory

BASIC NEEDS



ACADEMIC

- **Advisors**
 - **Major Advisor:** Know about the major requirements and plan your courses
 - **College Advisor:** Know about the information about switching college (i.e. from college of engineering to college of Letters & Science)
- **Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS)**
 - Get tutoring for different courses & learn studying skills in workshops
- **Professors & TAs**
 - Talk to them for any specific request related to the course as well as research opportunities



TECHNOLOGY

- **Free softwares through Campus License**
 - SPSS, Qualtrics
- **Free subscription through your school email**
 - New York Times, Amazon Prime Student.



SPECIFIC RESOURCES

- **Disabled Student Program (DSP):**
 - Request for academic accommodations for students with disabilities
- **Office of International Students & Scholars (OISS):**
 - Immigration services, cultural programs and related information for international students
- **Resource Center for Sexual & Gender Diversity:**
 - Obtain resources and support for LGBTQIA+ students to succeed
- **Educational Opportunity Program (EOP):**
 - Schedule an appointment with counsellors to discuss social opportunities and other support



BESIDES THESE...THERE ARE TWO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



EMAIL IS YOUR BEST FRIEND!

The best way to obtain information is to subscribe to different email listings. Besides from emails from your major advising, you can subscribe to emails of other majors, programs, as well as on-campus organizations to see what's happening on campus, including workshops, study abroad opportunities, internship opportunities, etc.

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REACHING OUT TO OTHERS IS THE KEY!

You can obtain information from people even before coming to the university. You can reach out to senior students and alumni to prepare for your college and familiarize yourself with the new environment. When you come to university, your professors, TAs, advisors, and counsellors all become your resources! It's time to expand your networks!



Navigating

ACADEMIC

Before starting your new journey, do you have many questions regarding to how to succeed in academics?

Throughout college, you'll make countless decisions, including choosing the right major to selecting courses. It's easy to feel confused and overwhelmed.

This FAQ section is designed to address your academic concerns and provide practical advice to help you thrive in your college years.

CHECK IT NOW



**LET'S
DO IT**

YOU CAN NAVIGATE YOUR ACADEMICS!

YOU CAN NAVIGATE YOUR ACADEMICS!

YOU CAN NAV

YOU

YOU CAN NAVIGATE

YOU CAN NAVIGATE YOUR ACADEMICS!

FAQ 1 - WHICH MAJOR?

Good question, first of all I want to tell you that although the choice of major is important, it doesn't determine your future. On the contrary, there are a lot of possibilities for most majors. My major, Communication, is a good example.

Before coming to USCB, my major was undeclared because I had a wide range of interests. Since high school, I have been attracted to many things, such as literature and poetry, creative writing, psychology, sociology, marketing, and music.

During my freshman year, I learned that UCSB's psychology program was highly ranked in the country. Before I got too excited about the social psychology course, I read through the major requirement sheet. And I noticed a lot of required classes are subjects that I was not good at, including Chemistry and Maths.

I wondered are these courses something I really want to learn? I took Social Psychology class for my interest and met my friend who is a psychology major. She told me that the full name of the major is "Psychological Brain Science" which emphasized in Brain Science a lot. That's the reason for biology and chemistry classes as major requirements. She shared her experience in the lab where she conduct experiments on mice.

She said, "If you would like to learn more about applied aspects of psychology, there is an applied psychology minor within Gevirtz School of Education which might be more suitable for you."

At that time I saw new possibilities -- I don't have to stick with one major. Simultaneously, another friend of mine who took Social Psychology as well was Comm major. That was the first time I'd ever heard of the major.

Out of curious, I asked her what the major was about. She told me that it is so broad and covers a range of things, from mass media to interpersonal.

"Basically, everything is Comm. If you're interested, take Introduction to Comm and see whether it is something you're really interested in."

Perhaps, what I gained the most from this class was not the knowledge of Social Psychology, nor the results of famous experiments. Rather, it was the advice from people **who have went through the process**. And most importantly: There's no rush for me to make decision about my major during freshman year. Instead, I could browse through majors that the university had to offer and those that were Instead, I could explore different majors and make decisions based on my interests.

Eventually, I'm glad I chose Comm as my major. It is "Jack of All Trades" that fits everything and integrates all my interests.

Thus, when you make the decision, consider the following selectively based on what you really want!



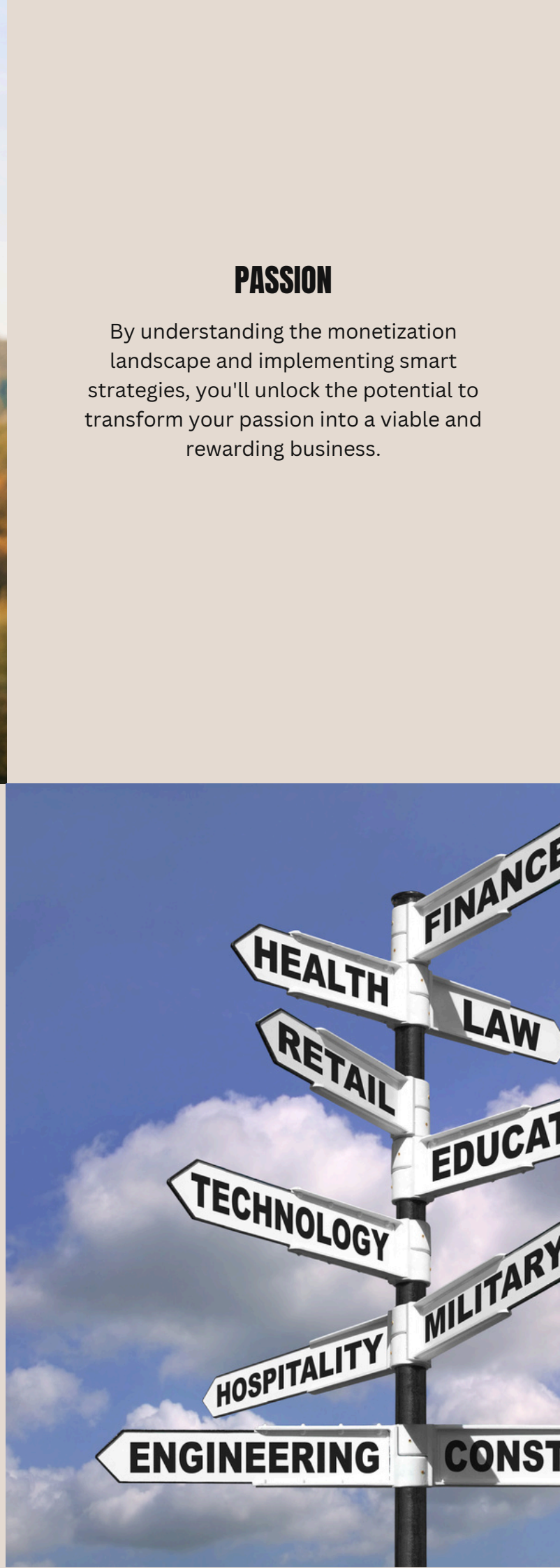
PASSION

By understanding the monetization landscape and implementing smart strategies, you'll unlock the potential to transform your passion into a viable and rewarding business.

CAREER

If your life goal is to pursue a job with high salary, you can make some plans aligns with your goal (i.e. Choose Pre-law as your major for your undergraduates).

Take your career plan into account is particularly crucial for certain occupations, such as Health Sciences and Law.



INSPIRATION

Career + Interest

**YOU CAN ALWAYS
HAVE BOTH!**

**IF YOU FOUND
SOMETHING ELSE
INTERESTS YOU,
JUST SWITCH!**



FAQ 2 - WHAT COURSE?

No matter you declared your major(s) or not, you can always take some introductory classes in different majors! It is not only an exploration of subjects, but also a good opportunity to know yourself -- find your interests and passion.

Remember: Although it's important to consider what classes fulfilled graduation requirements, it's significant to figure out what education means to you -- to obtain a diploma? to prepare for future careers? to be EDUCATED? University is a place for getting to know the world from different perspectives. It's worth for you to take advantage of every penny of your tuition fee.

Even once you've decided on a major, it's not "once and for all". Because you can still change your major! However, before doing that, talk to both major advisors and ask about major requirements and career choices. Specifically, if you are switching from one college to another (e.g. Letters & Science to College of Creative Studies), you also need to talk to a college advisor.

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH CREDITS FOR DECLARING ANOTHER MAJOR...

Same! It's best to talk to an advisor to see if it is possible to submit a petition (e.g. enroll in more than the published maximum units). I personally encourage doing this because education is not business -- students should have the right to gain knowledge based on their passion rather than school requirements).

WHAT IF MY PETITION FOR EXCESS LOAD IS NOT APPROVED?

Same! It's best to talk to an advisor to see if there are other options, such as declare a minor -- which requires fewer credits and less workload.

Some subjects even offer a minor only (i.e. Professional Writing and Applied Psychology at UCSB). These programs emphasized on certain aspects of the corresponding subjects. For example, applied psychology minor is more practical compared to psychological & brain science major.

TALK TO AN ADVISOR IS ALWAYS THE BEST!



MY HOMESICKNESS

My friend once told me, “You're very independent.”

I shook my head.

“No, not at all. I'm very dependent on my close relationships, like the one my mom and I share.”

My so-called independence is a product of having limited choices. I came to college during the COVID-19 pandemic, I didn't know anyone there, and my family could not visit to support me. Thus, all I had to rely on was myself.

As I crossed the sea to the other side of the world, I checked my major sheet as well as Rate My Professor to know which classes to take; I googled the directions to Costco by bus; I learned how to maintain my work-life balance through hanging out with my new friends.

When I told my mom how much I accomplished within one week – opened my bank account at Chase, scheduled an appointment with career peers, asked questions during my professor's office hour – she exclaimed, “Wow. You've impressed me a lot. Within 1 month, you have already adapted to your new environment.” But I know, there was still one thing that I couldn't handle...

Whenever I feel tired, I go downtown for a walk. I treat myself with a small cup of McConnell's Earl Grey Tea plus Eureka Lemon. I tried Earl Grey Tea during my first visit to McConnell and I just stuck with it. It was sweet and silky. When the sweetness dissipated, the slight bitterness of the tea melted away on my tongue. That is the reason why this is my favorite – it is a mixture of sweet and bitter. In terms of taste, my mom prefers something more bitter, such as coffee or tiramisu. Well, if she were around, I think she would like the Turkish Coffee. And the tiramisu gelato from the gelato shop across the street.

At that moment, I realized why I felt empty all the time despite seemingly adapting well to the new environment: it was because of my mom – or the lack of her, who was no longer by my side, but whose presence lingered everywhere I went.

I would share with her what I learned in class because she would have found it interesting; I would think of her when I discovered some new stores I found downtown and guess the flavors she would like; I would think of her when my friends took me to Universal Studio and knowing my mom would like to give this roller coaster a try and would tell her how to get into the line the fastest.



I miss her and my home so much. I missed the days when my grandpa asked me what dishes I wanted to have before I visited them every weekend. I missed the stories about my mom's childhood that my grandparents shared with me in local dialects. I missed the conversations my mom and I had when we went on for a walk after dinner, as we ate the ice cream she bought.

But now I see her on my phone screen as she lays on the black couch at home, and hear her familiar voice coming from the speaker of my phone — although sometimes her image becomes static due to unstable internet connection. I could see her arms outstretched as if to give me a hug but I am unable to feel her warmth.

However I would hide my homesickness from my roommate because I was not brave enough to show her such weakness. Thus, every time my roommate came in, I would start laughing, pretending I was in a happy conversation with my mom.

That year, the only time I was freed from acting was during Christmas, when all my roommates went home. Those days were cold. The heater for my room was broken and I hardly left my bed. However, I knew I couldn't just let myself be stuck in my bed all the time, so I got up and went to take a shower to clear my mind.

3 minutes later, I stepped into the shower. The water was flowing, and I stretched my fingers to test the temperature: it was icy cold just as it was when I had just entered the bathroom. I waited for another minute, but the water was still cold, and my body started trembling, so I quickly wiped myself with the towel and went to bed. *Ping!* A new email notification informed me “hot water will not be available for the rest of the day today and most of the day tomorrow”.

Suddenly, I burst into tears, unable to control my whimpering, no longer worried about my crying being heard by others, no longer worried about whether or not others would understand this dependence on my mom.

I just collapsed, fell apart, and felt paralyzed and turned into a pool of stagnant water.

Of course, I wanted to go home so badly, but I didn't know when I would be able to since there was only one month for Christmas break. If I were to go back home, I would need to follow the domestic policy in China of being quarantined for 14 days before continuing home quarantine for another 14 days. By then, my entire holiday would have been wasted.



Hello Winter Break Residents of San Rafael,

I am writing to update you on a scheduled service that our building is receiving. Essentially, over the break, our team is working on the boiler that provides hot water for Carrillo and San Rafael. This is done over break to reduce the number of students that get impacted. The scheduled service was supposed to end today but due to some additional issues, hot water will not be available for the rest of the day today and most of the day tomorrow. This impacts us in a few ways. Without hot water, our heaters cannot function since they are water based. You also will not be able to get hot water for showering or washing your hands for example.

I cried for a while until the sun went down, then I got up from among the warm covers, turned the light on, pulled a warm nightgown out of the closet, and sat down in front of the computer.

For me, writing has always been my way of easing myself into the world, and I just let my emotions spill out onto the page. Vaguely hearing the sound of the ocean tide using the beach, I wrote,

“She threw all her thoughts into the sea. This sea has borne too much - thoughts, attachment, and adoration from the last star turned off the switch to the sun closing its eyes.”

I recalled that before I left my home country, I told my friend that I was going to a school by the ocean. My friend said, “Then, whenever you see the sea, you will think that on the other side of the sea, is us.”

The thought warmed my heart while making me feel sad. But as my paper became text filled, my heart was calmer.

I thought about home again. I calculated the jet lag for my home country and believed my mom should wake up. Then, I made a call to her. Hearing a familiar voice from my speaker, I said, “Mom. I miss you so much.”

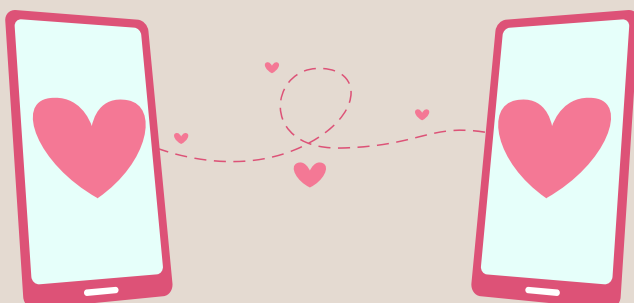
She said, “So do I. And we’re having a reunion dinner today.” She sent me the picture – On the familiar table, dishes cooked by my grandpa filled the table. I saw my favorite eel and pigeon soup, as if I could smell that fragrance in the air. I felt my stomach growling.

Exaggerating my expression, I cried out, “Aaah! This is clearly a late-night poisoning. You did it intentionally – to starve me!”

She laughed and said, “Sorry about that.”

However, hunger spread all over my body. It was so unbearable that I put on my coat and walked to the living room. There was only little food left in the refrigerator – a can of mashed potatoes, which was called “Western Dishes” on Chinese Social Media. I grabbed a spoon and scooped up a mouthful. The mashed potato was cold and a little bit too salty although I love potatoes.

I recalled that the dish I used to eat most during my childhood was sautéed mushrooms with potatoes. My grandpa can control the flavor – It’s not that salty, not that tasteless, it’s Goldilocks’ just right. I would make that plate empty because I would even pour the soup into my rice, making it flavorful. Sometimes I would even hand my little bowl to my grandpa and say, “Yummy! I want more!”



The days at my grandparents' house were more than ten years ago. I thought, how could I have ever imagined that I will be living in a foreign country, by myself, alone....

Thinking of this, I sighed, “Mom...All my roommates went back home...But... When can I go home? When can I feel the warmth in your arm? When can I sit by my grandparents and listen to those interesting stories again?”

She sighed too, “Honey. I don't know either... The only thing we can do is see what's happening and enjoy the life we have so far. Let's wait for the policies – when the quarantine will be in a much shorter time, when the government is going to open its borders.”

Going home is not a luxury but also an extravagance. Firstly, the round-trip flight is expensive. Secondly, the quarantine policy prevented me from enjoying life freely with my family.

Going back home is such a high price in this situation.

“So, the only thing I can do is wait and pray?”

“Not exactly.” Said my mom. “You should **enjoy your life** abroad.”

I kept in mind what she had said to me.



Time gradually came to the New Year. One of my friends asked me if I wanted to come to her apartment to celebrate the New Year, to which I agreed. Before heading over, I went to the supermarket and bought some drinks and snacks to bring over.

When I arrived, the little room was filled with unfamiliar people. My friend introduced me to her friends one by one. At first, it seemed like we were shy. However, our conversation became much smoother and relaxing when we started cooking together.

I'm not good at cooking, and I dislike the feeling of getting my hands sticky from dipping them in flour. However, for this time, I want to because I want to contribute to the celebration of New Year, even a little bit. Even the friends I never met before were so patient enough to teach me and showed me each step regardless of my request of “Could you please show me just once again” because I am a slow learner. Looking at them folding the dumpling wrap in a very elegant way, I mimicked her methods and started wrapping them slowly. Although sometimes I put too much stuffing and asked her for help with wrapping. Gradually, our dumplings filled the whole plate. She gazed at the dumplings I put on my side and said, “Look! You're getting better at it! They are beautifully wrapped!” I smiled, “Only because you are a good and patient teacher.”

As we filled a whole table with different dishes, the fragrance of food filled the air. I couldn't wait to taste the food we made on our own but my friend stopped me.

“Let’s take a picture first.”

Thanks to her reminder, I was able to share the picture with my mom.

“Mom. My friends and I are celebrating New Year's too.”

She sent me a thumbs up emoji and said, “Have fun!”

I like to have some soup before I eat. When I tasted the soup, the warmth spread all over my body and it felt like I was back in my grandpa’s home in my childhood – it was warm, it was surrounded by people, it consisted of my family.

Despite our differences and unfamiliarity with each other, we all still shared the same feeling of living in a foreign country. Thus, we gathered together to celebrate our festival and bring warmth to each other on the winter night.

I found my little family here too, a community that I belonged with, And I knew, my family thousands of miles away will smile if they see me celebrating the festivals too because we shared the same feeling – happiness belonged to festivals plus a little longing for seeing them. Before the midnight, I made the same hope as every New Year,

“I hope the people I care about will live happily and healthily.”

Plus an additional hope,

“I hope I can reunite with them soon.”



CHAPTER



2

THOSE SHOES THAT DON'T FIT

LET'S
DO IT

What you will discover

The metaphorical “shoes that don’t fit” describes the overwhelming sense of discomfort you might experience throughout college from different sources of pressure.

By acknowledging these challenges and equipping yourself with the right tools, you can find ways to adjust those ill-fitting shoes. Let’s navigate this path together and transform discomfort into strength and adaptability.

BODY IMAGE - LIE, LIE, EVERYWHERE

How to teach fish about water?

That's a question my professor asked during a communication class. I remember, time seemed to stop. The whole class fell into silence – no sound of typing nor the sound of pen nib scratching on the paper. My mind fell into nothingness – I could not think of any ways to teach fish about water because...

fish doesn't have a moment of its existence without water. Water governs the life of the fish while fish is embedded in the wash."

"The only way is to take the fish out of water – an uncomfortable and horrifying experience." Said my professor.

I was a fish who was trapped in the glass jar for a long time without realizing the existence of water. However, I jumped out of it, landing on the new continent and freeing myself.



That was the first day I came to the United States. I was exhausted after a 12-hour flight and sat on one of my two 23 kgs suitcase that was filled during my wait for the hotel shuttle. There wasn't a genuine feeling that I left my home where I lived for more than 16 years until I looked around the brand new world around me – The signs were written in a different language; the units and measures were something I need to search for an online converter to make sense of; and the people around me looks differed from me with different backgrounds. As a Chinese idiom said, "America is a big cultural furnace."

In the crowds waiting for the hotel shuttle bus, my eyes were caught by a woman, wearing a pink short-sleeve top with her abdomen exposed in the cool air. I could spot her round body shaking heavily when she moved. Although I knew the stranger's gaze was rude, I couldn't take my eyes off her. She smiled happily and hummed Taylor Swift's shake it off.

Thousands of questions emerged in my mind.

How could she expose her skin in front of the public?"

How could she wear such a light color that is supposed to be a color of 'young and thin women'?

How could she find clothes that fit her?

HOW COULD SHE DO ALL SUCH THINGS...WHILE I COULDN'T???

By my naked eye observation, I could tell that I am thinner. However, I was wearing an oversized boyfriend t-shirt with a size of extra large and a pair of male sneakers in black and white.

I almost never wore a skirt throughout my middle school and high school except for performances. I never wore high heels or any shoes that were perceived as “girlish”. I never realized my clothing style, perception of the body style, as well as my life with inferiority complex was a product of the culture – a culture that oppresses and objectifies women in an implicit way until I jump out from the water. I recalled my experience for these 17 years:

I hated myself for a long time, simply for being ugly. In China, clothes purchase is simple and hard. It is simple because regardless of online shopping or going to retail stores, I simply grab the biggest size clothes without hesitation in regular shops that I shop at. That’s why it’s hard as well – not all clothes shops have my sizes. To be honest, most of them don’t. Ones that sell “oversized” clothes are very few and indeed I hate wearing them, hate my bulged breasts as well my fat massed in the abdomen that makes me look like a cumbersome clown rather than a delicate and petite doll that are everywhere on social media.

When I open my white and pink cabinet, the first thing that comes into your sight is darkness (a sharp contrast to its colorful appearance) – oversized black boyfriend T-shirts (size XL), black sneakers, and loose-fitting trousers. Such a phenomenon was caused by me, being a woman whose height is 5 ft 8 inch, 150 lbs, with a size 11 for female shoes, living in China.

It might sound surprising and unbelievable. However, I never thought in that way when I was in China. I accepted all of these as a normal part of my life – I have no rights for wearing dresses, nor high heels, nor any clothes that expose my abdomen or thighs. I accepted the fact that it’s my fault for being fat while all the girls on social media implicitly pressured me to diet, exercise and learn how to apply make-up in order to fit the beauty standard.

They are shining in the public gaze while I am hiding in the darkness. They are the “Brandy Melville girls who can fit the so-called one size fits all clothes” while I feel ashamed in those clothes that don't fit me. They are the K-pop idols in real life which are featured by the camera while there are no selfies on my phone.

I remember all the shame and humiliation – I couldn’t stand looking at myself in the mirror, couldn’t bear the tightness of the clothes that those girls wear, couldn’t endure the laughter from my peers because of my shaking breasts when I ran.



I get used to suppressing the burst of my tears by covering myself with the thick quilt in order to prevent my roommates from hearing. I get used to telling myself that I should diet and exercise. I get used to the gossip behind my back about nobody being attracted to me because of my body and I'm just a nerd.

However, the cultural shock as well as the training in my discipline – communication changed me. I realized the beauty standard in my home country is just a product of marketing. It is so strong and fragile simultaneously.

It is strong enough to be ingrained in so many girl's brains in China because you can see them everywhere. It is so fragile that such a standard just disappeared out of thin air in the United States. The shackles that tied me tightly started crumbling gradually. What if... I just wear a brace top for once simply because I want to give it a try.

I still remember that day, taking out the brand new gray brace top that I never wear after purchase from the bottom of the chest. I could feel my hands trembling slightly with sweat. And I walked towards my mirror, slowly raising my head and gazing at my reflection. I saw the surprise in the eyes of the girl in the mirror.

At the end of day, she came back to the mirror with a smile because of the compliment she received.

“By the way, I love your outfits! You look so cute!”

That was something I never experienced before. Like sunshine shining through the window and flowers blooming in the corner of my heart.

However, I knew the other side of it – how happy I feel right now might come from the same source of the pain I had before. It's the same cage that I locked myself in – to put myself into others' perceptions.

I remember how I long to break the cage, to be freed from a world of judgment and criticism.

**To be freed from the pressure of not wearing make-up,
To be freed from the public gaze and comments,
To be freed from all the shackles that simply tied me for being a woman.**

And my answer to all the judgments is, “Thank you and I don't care.”

Saying “I don't care” is easy while doing “I don't care is hard.” Because we live in a world around others almost every moment. It seems that there is no way for us to break through.

However, there is. As we “locked” ourselves, we can liberate ourselves. As communication is capable of making individuals hate themselves due to their body shape, it is also capable of empowering those individuals and making them love themselves simply for being themselves.

THAT'S WHY I STAND HERE & CALL FOR YOU.

YOU'RE AN INDIVIDUAL THAT IS
MUCH MORE THAN JUST
PHYSICALLY ATTRACTIVE.

**“YOU SHOULD DECIDE
WHAT TO wear RATHER
THAN THE MARKET AS
WELL AS WHAT TO eat ,
WHAT TO do FOR
YOURSELVES.”**



MY MENTAL HEALTH JORNEY

WARNING: Contained content about homosexuality, suicide, depression, bullying

The doors of my home had new locks, with both passwords and fingerprints for identification which assures security better than before. Since there were two doors, there were also two locks, both inside and outside.

While one day, my parents stood outside. The door still kept closed even though the electronic screen showed that the identification was correct. However, I stood inside, gazing at them through the spyhole. They were waiting for me to open the door while I expected them to get me out of here – An icy world fulfilled with only black, white and gray.

“The key is inside the tiny white bottle on the table.” I heard my mom saying from a distance. I turned toward the direction of the bottle, a bottle packaged with Agomelatine & Sertraline. I never imagined that years after, those vocabularies I have seen in clinical psychology will come into my view, right there in front of my eyes. Immediately, I shook my head and murmured, “No. The key isn’t there. It must be somewhere else.” I refused to open the lid with an inexorable force.

For many days, I sat there, looking at my parents saying “Let us in.”, listening to their sighs and replying “I...I just cannot find the key.” The whisper of Mephistopheles lingered in my ear, “Hey...You didn’t want to follow your parents’ will, didn't you?” Days and nights, such susurrations kept hovering through my ear to brain, the only reply I gave was silence.

I walked in front of the spyhole once again and saw my parents’ misery. “We want to help you. But...the only person who can help you is yourself.” I gazed at their eyes filled with glistening teardrops. “I just cannot find the key” was also an excuse I fabricated. But today, I’ll tear up such an excuse into pieces. You see, the key was right there in my palm all along. I stepped forward and inserted the key into the hole of the lock slowly. The door opened, and along with the movement of the door, a colorful world bloomed, as did my acceptance of myself.”

I wrote the UC application essay at the age of 16, during my senior year of high school. I wrote such a piece because I saw the prompt from the UC application.



“Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic

achievement?” And I believed that my journey in overcoming mental health challenges is a good topic I could write about.

Thus, I was brave enough to write down the process of not disclosing myself to reconcile with my parents. I thought such a challenge would never defeat me again.

I was wrong. Regardless of my bravery in writing this experience in an application essay, I never told anyone around me. And I could not handle my experiences appropriately at the time, its shadow hung over my heart for a time.

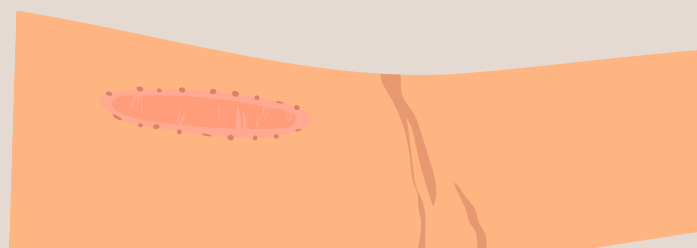
When I read all my journals in chronological order, I could feel my transformation vividly – from an unsophisticated girl who wrote about her crush and prayer for easier exams to a depressed teenager who was dogged by the nightmare of death every night. Although the handwriting remained consistent and recognizable yet the content seems to have been written by two different individuals. As I read through my journals, I know the source of my transformation.

When I was 12, I went to the boarding school that was an hour and a half away from home. Going to this international school is a consensus decision between my parents and me – to prepare for my future study abroad.

However, I had been through so much at that boarding school; I can still remember the suffocating feelings. Every single day of school, I would count the days left till Friday noon, when I could finally get on the school bus that took me home. I would put on my headphones, listening to songs until my parents picked me up at the station. However, as soon as Sunday evening arrived, I would watch the sunset and feel great sadness at having to leave for school again. Sunday meant the start of another hellish week; I had to get on the bus headed towards prison.

During my adolescence, I endured too much.

I witnessed bullying in school, and knew there was news reporting one of the victim’s eardrums was poked through in school; knew the widespread Blue Whale Challenge (a "game" reportedly consisting of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators over a 50-day period, initially innocuous before introducing elements of self-harm and the final challenge requiring the player to kill themselves) on campus and saw my one of my classmate lifting up his long sleeve to me during English class and realized what under the long sleeves – scabbed scars. He even asked me if I had a cutter knife. I shook my head while the girl sitting next to him handed him one. Before I said anything to stop him, he made a vicious cut in front of me, right in the middle of the scabbed area.



I saw his arm bleeding and I asked, "Doesn't it hurt?" However, his answer left a mark in my heart. "No. It's relieving... Don't you wanna try?" I shook my head again.


In addition to all of these, I learned much more – my sexuality was against social norms, even if I did nothing to the person I adored except handing her my diary which contains my wish to spend more happy times with her; my academic excellence was useless because all my classmates were just comparing whose clothes is the most expensive and speculating who was wearing the authentic and who was wearing a fake; the darkness of the compulsory education system at the international school (even at the international school, all students are mandated to complete 9 years of compulsory education in China) because physical punishment by my teacher was allowed, and reports from my parents and other individual parents just disappeared into thin air. I remembered the day my parents went to the school to talk to the principal, their visit was seen by my teacher. Then, he started questioning me about the exact purpose of my parents coming to school. I lied, "They are helping me to pack up something." Then, he shook his head and said, "I saw they are heading to the principal's office." I looked away, avoiding his sharp gaze and said, "I don't know." I couldn't believe that the next day, rumors were flying around, targeting those students who filed a report to my teacher. I, along with a few students, was condemned by my peers simply because their parents bribed the teacher by sending him gifts and money as an exchange.

I learned what others were talking about behind me every day. Boys laughed at my shaking breasts when I was running; questioned how I could eat so much more than other boys; called me "fat tomboy" because I had short hair; and gossiped about the rumor that I like girls. Girls regarded me as someone who has an Electra complex because I had a good relationship with my dad and one of my friends even planned out to insult me by tying me up in the ladders in her lofted bed in her dorm.

I also learned that human relationships were more complicated than I thought. The relationship in a 4-people dormitory was like a Combinatorics math problem -- ABCD is a layer of relationships. ABC, BCD, AB, BC, CD each of them is another layer of relationships. I couldn't tell why my roommate told me that she hated the other roommate, and then greeted her with a sincere smile and even hugged each other like they were best friends.

Fearing the complexities of layers of relationships, I switched to a two-person dorm with my classmate at that time. I thought it would be an oasis but I was really stepping into the abyss. Because I was with my roommate almost the entire time from Sunday evening to Friday noon, conflicts were unavoidable. A lot of times, I had no idea how or why she was upset. Without knowing my exact fault, I couldn't apologize.

"You are only good at studying. Besides that, you're nothing, not to mention your low emotional intelligence."



Without knowing my faults while hating conflicts, my days consisted of careful considerations of each word I'm going to say, topics that were too sensitive to avoid, as well as what specific terms to use.

Eventually, my mantra became "I'm sorry., I refused to go to school for a ridiculous reason – I wanted to study but I was afraid of managing relationships. And I perceived myself as a disgusting person with low emotional intelligence.

How could my parents know about the trauma I had gone through? At every parent-teacher conference, the teachers praised me for my good grades, saying that I was a hardworking and diligent student. I was the child that every parent at my school would envy...they knew me as an excellent student.

But they didn't know me as a vulnerable girl. The only "person" that knew everything was my diary.

That month, my mom, who took the responsibilities for both finance and sales at her company, left for a business trip for an entire month. When I went back home from school, I went straight back to my bedroom and started crying. My dad rarely noticed my emotions. Even though he might have noticed a few times, he didn't understand why I felt the way I did. Thus, I regarded my mom as my last straw to clutch at. When she came back from her business trip, I handed her my diary, holding my faith in her as my last resort, for she might be the last person who could understand me.

However, when I walked into her bedroom, the diary was beside her, and she looked pained..."I can't read it anymore."he said,"How could you write something like that?"

Suddenly my vision blurred. I took the diary away from her and ran to my bedroom to hide it in the bottom of a drawer. At the time, I felt remorseful, berating myself for doing such a stupid thing – how could I expect someone to understand me?

I couldn't stop crying and I couldn't breathe.

Because I know...my last straw was gone....

At that moment, I thought about the boy in my class who harmed himself. I started empathizing with him who was depressed, with my roommate who lacked care from her parents, with every character I used to not understand in the novels.

I understood and empathized with them because I've fallen into the abyss and feel the despair of not being understood by others. Thus, I'll provide them with sincere understanding. It may seem like an act of kindness, but indeed it was a selfish self-redemption – If I understand others more, they may understand me, which I never received before. I put myself in others' shoes and find excuses for every mistake they made, take the blame myself. Having experienced such isolation for myself, I wondered, "They must have their own reasons for doing the things they do." It's all my fault.



From my traumas, I learned to emphasize with others...However, the seed of trauma was planted deep in my heart and gradually became the source of my low self-esteem.

At the moment I ran away from my mom's bedroom, I stopped talking to them and set an invisible wall between us until my mom reached out to me and apologized. Then, she started spending a lot of time with me during weekends and giving me a ride to the school bus station every Sunday. She talked to me and kept me company until I had to get on the bus. She would watch me fade away and then drive home.

I started to disclose to her again and we reached a consensus – I shouldn't continue my education at this school anymore.

“Such a toxic prison.” She said, “This time, we're going to make the decision with more caution. I can't let you fall once again.”

I nodded, and asked her, “May I have a small request?”

“What is it?”

“I...don't want to go to any other boarding schools. I am afraid...May I just...stay by your side, go to school in the morning and back home at night?”



“Of course. We'll find one that satisfies everything you want.” I knew, my mom realized that I was broken and changed to another person. However, regardless of the changes, I am still her precious child. She was the last person who could wrap my traumas and wounds gently.

Because in my country, the idea of therapists did not even exist. My mom used to regard them as “Someone with disorders too since they meet with ‘people with mental health disorders’ everyday.”

She found a school that has “everything checked” and she believed the new journey will not be like my past anymore because she'll be by my side and assure my health. And we had talked to the admission counselors for a lot of times to make sure this is a school that I want to go to.

However the seeds of low-esteem started budding, branching out and swallowing me – good grades which I used to have, the only thing that others perceived as great, was no longer there. I was ranked at the bottom when I entered the new school.

I couldn't bear the pain of falling so low. So I started exceeding my limits – waking up at 4:00 a.m. every day to exercise (for losing weight) and practicing for the English foreign language exam, memorizing vocabularies on my way to school on subway, and unlocking the parental control on the laptop provided by my school in order to catch up with my classmates (otherwise the laptop will automatically shut down at 10:30 pm).

I didn't want to be the fattest girl nor the worst student in the class so I sacrificed my time for meals to do homework and practice more and more questions. I believe that my efforts will not be in vain.

However, I was once again crushed by reality. After finishing my first attempt of the English foreign language exam, I was anxiously waiting for the scores to be available. The release of the score was delayed for one day, making it exactly on my birthday. On June 28th, the first message I received was from my teacher – “Score is out. Check it.” I saw my peer, who almost got a full score on her first attempt, was featured on the school newsletter.

I was the second one...but she was way ahead of me. I couldn't help but bawl when my teacher told me, “Your peer got almost a full score.” She was too shining and burned me.

My mom said, “Still, it's your birthday... we should celebrate.” We went to the supermarket together and wanted to buy some food and we'll cook a meal together.

However, the pain just spread all over my body...I want to throw everything out...In the supermarket, where my mom and I couldn't find the restroom, I leaned on the trash can and started throwing it in front of the public. It was embarrassing but I just couldn't bear the nausea anymore.



“I never got the chance to eat the salmon my mom bought for celebration because I threw myself in bed and woke up the next morning. I guess god just had fun for me on my birthday and the days after....”

When I was an 11th grader, my low self-esteem became worse because of my struggle with AP Calculus and my body image – I became even heavier than before I engaged in weight loss. Everyday, I felt tired and desperate after I got home from school. Before I went home, I stopped by the convenience store and bought SWEET snacks, such as white chocolate and Oreo cookies. This was an unstoppable craving – I wanted to fill my tongue with sweet taste as it could make my life feel sweeter. However, the only thing I felt was pain filling my stomach and I started throwing them out because I ate too much. I felt empty – the snacks filled my stomach but could not fill my heart.

My mom noted the change. On a Sunday, I was brought to the hospital without knowing what would happen. The woman sitting in front of me asked me, “what is your concern?” when my dad was sitting beside me. I looked away, gazing at the sunlight penetrating through the window. It was dusk again.

Suffocating silence fell between us.

She said, “If I feel uncomfortable talking about my concerns, my dad could talk about it for me.” I nodded.



He started explaining in an awkward way...Looking at me for confirmation while I did not have any expressions on my face. Indeed, a lot of his descriptions were wrong but I was too tired to fix them nor go against him in front of others.

One simple conversation classified me into someone with disorders. When I read through the doctor's instructions, I saw some familiar terms that I studied from AP Psychology – Agomelatine & Sertraline (Pills for treating anxiety disorder and depression). I never expected those terms would come across my life.

I took the pills the next day. As I took them, sleepiness swept over me, and I knew that I couldn't handle another calculus test on my own at school.

I fell asleep during my class and wondered if that was the feeling of being “cured” . I'd rather continue being ill than going to a therapy session like that – stifling and uncomfortable.

At the same time, the medicine that the doctor gave to me seemed to label me as “someone with a disorder”. And I was afraid to tell others about it. Because I can't lose anymore.



I reached my conclusion – I will be independent and strong enough to recover on my own. During college for a long time, I ignored my pain, my despair, my exhaustion and kept telling myself, “You’re feeling this because of your poor tolerance! Endure it! Become stronger! You can do this! You don’t need a doctor!” Simultaneously, when I meet with my friends, I’ll smile at them, listening and emphasizing with them because I want to provide assistance regardless of the fact that – I can’t even take care of myself well. In order to help more people, I started my idea of making a resource navigation tool as well as writing the College Survival Guide. But I knew,

I am not the right person to talk about survival...

Doing two one-year long projects with internships and jobs at the same time, I felt overwhelmed that my mask even failed once.

I remember I cried in front of my friend for the first time at college.

I recalled my efforts for three years, the uncertainty of the future, my rejection letters, my exhausting internships, and my thesis that I had trouble writing. I couldn’t stop my tears.

I remember she said,

“You need help.”

How could I not know the fact that I need help...I knew I'm at my limit because stomach ache and headaches became more frequent. On one weekend, I almost slept for two whole days while I'm always a morning person.

I'm just too scared to ask for help because I don't want to admit the fact that I was defeated by my life once again. I have logged into the service request link at CAPS several times. Every time I logged in, my hands were trembling and tears just filled with my eyes. I filled in all the information in the form but cannot hit the submit button.

Whenever it came to the submission, I felt my heart beating so fast and I was out of breath. Cannot stop my hands from trembling, I shut down the form. I knew I was holding a double standard between others and me – I've always been there to call for destigmatizing mental health; assure others not to be afraid to talk to someone else about their concerns; tell others that we should treat mental health issues the same as physical health – People are just ill!

However, I got caught in the chrysalis of stigma and couldn't get out of it. When my friends shared their experiences dealing with mental health, a paradoxical feeling emerged in my mind – I felt glad to be trusted by others while puzzling – how could they say “they went to therapists” without any fear?



My friend continued, “I think you feel not well...I went to CAPS at once and had a great experience...I think it'll be great if you give it a try.”

From my perspective, she just admitted she once felt miserable and she couldn't handle it on her own. She asked for help.

But I hate the feeling of being defeated as well as asking others for help because I should be independent and strong enough to handle everyone on my own.

I was wrong for a long time.

Firstly, asking for help does not equal being defeated. Secondly, my reluctance to seek help will not help destigmatize mental health at all. My friend's bravery in sharing her experience is the key to destigmatize.

I fell into silence for moments. She said, “I'm not telling you this because it's pressuring for me, I'm telling you this because I'm worried about you as your friend. I just feel that you don't seem as positive compared to the you I just met. I can see your exhaustion in your words.” She was right...because I was sleep deprived for days.

“I just want you to get better. And remember, even if you look so tired and depressed right now, you're always the sincerest and warmest friend who bought me food when I was sick. And I believe that you can do it.”



This gentleness of hers, this sincerity of hers, touched me.

Later, I messaged her and said,

“I've made an appointment for a brief assessment at CAPS.”

I was going to face myself.

Not going to run away from the fact that I'm in pain, tired of forcing a smile, and desperately trying to control every inch of my life.

I'm going to try to live because I miss the time that I am able to warm her heart. And I want to be the one who can take care of myself. Taking care of myself includes “relying on others” and “asking for help” rather than trying to be strong on my own.

When I filled out the Service Request Form, I felt the wind, feeling my body become lighter. For me, I just took a big step.

When I got home, I took every full garbage bag that piled up in the apartment and threw them out. Hopefully, there will be no more ants coming into my apartment as well as biting my heart.



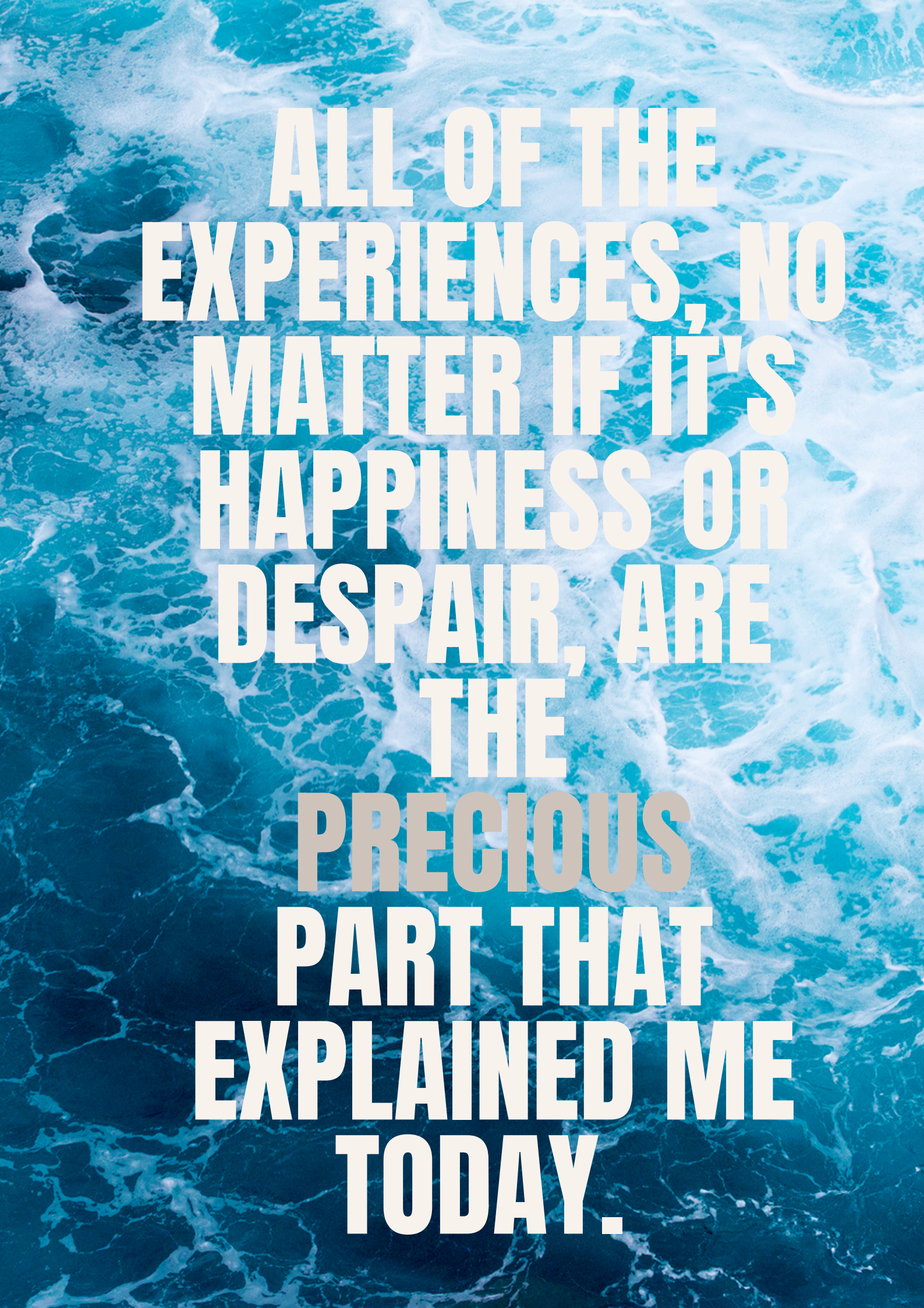
At the end of the day, I started recalling the question that has accompanied me through years of tranquil nights – If I could go back in time, what advice would I offer myself? Before, I always thought about things like – not going to the middle school I attend, doing more projects with professors during my free time at high school, maybe even staying at my mom's side instead of studying abroad.

I fancied that I might be totally different if I chose another way.

When I look back, I saw myself struggling in the mire, falling down and getting up again and again. In countless hollow holes on the rugged road, weakness spread all over her body. She cried hoarsely in the darkness for help.

However, I'll answer differently this time. I would not answer her call if I was there. Instead, I will hide myself and look at her from a distance. Seeing her strengthen herself slowly, standing up, and crawling out of the hole desperately with tears in her eyes.

I held my breath although I wanted to tell her “You're not alone”; wanted to give her a hand when she was suffering, and wanted to protect her from harm. However, I kept silent. Because I believed I wouldn't be who I am today without experiencing all the pain I've been through – being able to empathize with others, treating others with understanding and sincerity, and accepting myself who has become overwhelmed in the past, and even now from time to time. Because I no longer viewed it as my failure. Instead, it just means I exceeded the limit and needed to take a break.



**ALL OF THE
EXPERIENCES, NO
MATTER IF IT'S
HAPPINESS OR
DESPAIR, ARE
THE
PRECIOUS
PART THAT
EXPLAINED ME
TODAY.**

WHEN IT'S CATASTROPHIC

My college application season starts during COVID-19 pandemic.

Three years ago, I wrote, "I'm experiencing history which will never be forgotten by us."

I always believe that historical events, such as the black death in Medieval Europe to the Holocaust in World War II, are far away from me. In a peaceful age, no such events will re-endanger us. However, I was wrong.

I never have imagined that one day I'll experience a global epidemic. From a bystander to a sufferer, I was having online classes through Zoom while reading the emails sent by College Board telling me that my SAT was canceled again. I frequently watched updated news of epidemic distribution and the increase of numbers of sufferers, I suddenly realized that these numbers are not simply data, but thousands of actual lives....



In the myths, we humans are weak, pitiful and insignificant, when we signed in front of the God's will, the flood around Noah's Ark, the fall of Tower of Babel, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. However, overlooking the long process of history, we, the people, lived until 21st century due to a remaining faith and hope of "Survival". It's my first time to feel that I'm not the only soldier in this battle, but the whole of mankind. When I sent masks to hospitals in Wuhan, I felt that I'm doing something meaningful and saw the crack of dawn.

Ah, everything will be all the past and gone with the wind. The Sun Also Rises."

I cannot believe this was the writing I wrote three years ago, realizing COVID-19 already became part of the history. However, this history will exist in my memories vividly. I could still recall the feeling of being suffocated by the masks in the lecture hall where people sit separately for health and safety reasons, the sourness of arms after being vaccinated in CVS, and the strain of singing in the choir with masks on. Fortunately, humans survive from the catastrophes successfully because we're strong when we're united together.

But...although we are able to defeat natural calamities, we seem never to defeat our biggest enemies – ourselves and we're not able to unite together nor to understand each other.

During the epidemic, I saw the hatred laid upon my fellows deeply.

Many Asians, simply because of their looks, lived in horror – from being beaten in the street to hate speech, from being identified as “infected” to....there was too much hatred caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Asian not only became the ScapeGoat but also the victim of the calamity.

When the pandemic and virus per se are politicized – “Chinese virus”, the term itself put so many people on the dartboard and became the target for others’ hatred. Otherwise, it seems there is no way to unleash one’s anger and grievances. So, nations become suspicious of each other and identify each other as the witch in the Salem Witch Trial and tie another nation to the gallows and say, “This is the culprit who caused all this.” The citizens of that nation became the criminals who bear the charges with the Scarlet Letter for arbitrary reasons, such as appearance.

I always question, when catastrophes have already taken place on humans, should we focus on venting our anger or finding the one to blame or the response and action for preventing more people from danger? We can distribute information about health interventions and vaccinations, can make policies regarding masks within organizations, and create a healthier and safer community! However, we chose to find the culprits as we can punish them and vent our anger.

As I mentioned, as the media became politicized and flooded with misinformation, it is important to seek more accurate information. For example, should we wear masks or believe the former president that wearing a scarf is enough for protection? Seeing accurate information not only for the sake of protecting ourselves, but also to view the real world. Thus, becoming a critical news consumer is indispensable for identifying the truth from the false. As a Comm Major student, I took a class on *News, Politics, & Democracy* taught by Professor Dan Lane and would share some valuable aspects I learned.



Becoming

A GOOD NEWS CONSUMER

01

CHECK CREDIBILITY

Help you evaluate how much it tells you about the “truth”

- **Believable:** Did this seem believable?
- **Trustworthy:** Do I trust this news source?
- **Expert:** Is the source/journalist an expert?

02

EVALUATE EVIDENCE

Ask what evidence is presented, not all evidence is created equal!

- **Pyramid of Direct Evidence** (See next page)
- **Indirect Evidence** (can be helpful but less so than direct evidence)
 - i.e. spokespeople, press releases, computer models

03

LOOK FOR CONTEXT

Make sense of evidence presented, consider the following:

- **History** (that led to the event)
- **Comparison** (to similar events)
- **Connection** (between these players & outside parties)
- **Predictions** (of what comes next)

04

LOOK FOR TRANSPARENCY

Help us know what to do with the evidence that's provided, more transparent, the better

- **What do they know?**
- **How do they know it?**
- **What they don't know?**

i.e. does the reporter tell you who provided a piece of evidence, mention tried to seek a comment from somebody?

05

SEEK DIVERSE SOURCES

Ways to help us determine the basic facts of a news story

- Read an article on the same topic from **different sources** (i.e. CNN, NYT, FOX) -> find common information to establish basic facts.
- Websites of **fact checking** to verify specific claims

PYRAMID OF DIRECT EVIDENCE



**Observer
Eyewitness
Account**

Who have the 1st-hand
knowledge --BEST!



**Jounalist
Eyewitness
Account**

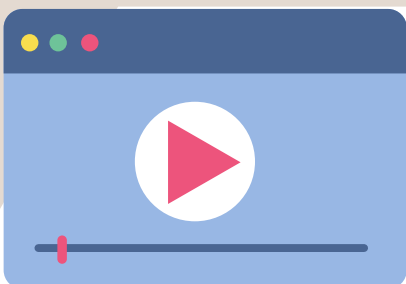
Can be biased!



**Documents,
Records**



Can be
altered!



**Videos,
Audios,
Photos**



I understand that the sense of unease because of the mass information flooded in the media, not to mention some of the information targeted your fellows directly (such as Chinese and Asian Americans during Covid-19).

What can we do?

For me, when the situation is so unsettling and volatile, the most important thing is to take care of myself and people around me through obtaining updated and accurate information. Knowing “what’s going on” is the way I make sense of the world and engage with the community I belong to.

In the United States, I see people voice out their opinions all the time. Looking back the three years I’ve been at UCSB, I have witnessed at least two strikes and many petitions regarding different events (i.e. even the change of location for graduation ceremonies).

Sometimes, voicing out one’s opinions is effective in raising awareness and making societal changes.

That’s why I decided to write because of my past experiences (which you can see in the sexuality chapter). And I have continued writing as the way to voice out for the values I believe in. My writings carry my thoughts, emotions, past, present and future. However, the reason I’m writing here today is to tell others –



Speaking out requires courage, not speaking out does not mean you’re not brave enough nor you’re not engaging with your community.

There are many different ways we can engage with the community – to critically evaluate information online, to discover the values we believe in through discerning different perspectives, to protect ourselves and people we care about...

Thus, It’s okay to keep silent in a situation with uncertainties. It’s okay to not participate in any protests or strikes when you feel unsafe. It’s okay to not to vote when it is not anonymous.

Because it’s one’s personal freedom.

And you can make your own choice without being afraid of others' judgments.



CHAPTER



3

HEARTFELT EMOTIONS

LET'S
DO IT

What you will discover

Navigating relationships is part of the college life. And let's admit it -- it's challenging.

As you balance your studies, social life, and personal ambitions, understanding and managing your emotions becomes crucial.

LONG DISTANCE

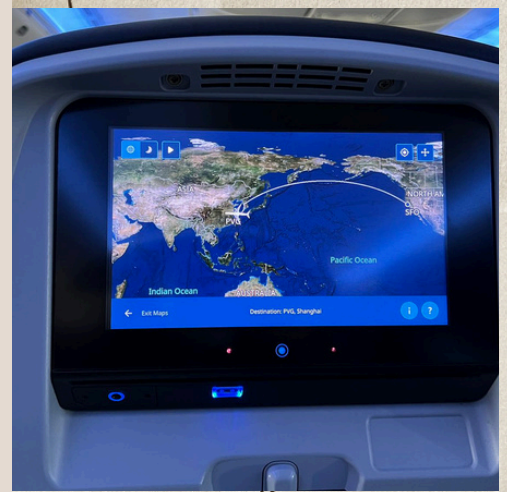
When I decided to study abroad, I knew homesickness would be my "default". Opening Google Maps, the Pacific Ocean separated between my family and I. It looked only 1 inch away on the map while in reality it's 6435 miles.

However, physical space is not the only thing that separates my family and I apart. On winter mornings, when I open my eyes at 6:30 a.m. in Santa Barbara, it's 10:30 p.m. in Suzhou, China. I could imagine my mom's breaths during her sleep after a day's exhaustion and put down my phone. My "Good night" was deleted in the chatbox that I never sent.

In particular, going back home during COVID-19 was not easy for every international student. However, due to effort, I eventually made it.

I remember the moment I stepped off the plane felt like floating in a dream. Step by step, I followed the instructions and took the COVID-19 test. Although Switching back to Mandarin came naturally to me, I couldn't believe the fact that I was in another continent after a 15-hour flight.

It felt unreal.



Due to the Chinese Covid-19 policy at that time, I was isolated right after I got off my flight. Dabai – people who covered themselves fully in protection clothes and masks took me to a derelict building. There was only a bed, a table and a chair, and the woke-up knock from Dabai for taking the daily covid test in the early morning. Until 7 days later, they handed me a mask and gloves before I headed home. On the bus, I saw the familiar signs on the elevated road and the familiar landmarked skyscrapers that are 2 subway stations from my home. I suddenly realized it was not a dream. I am on my way home!

Climbing up the stairs, I saw my mom, greeting me with a smile. After 9 months, she became more weary with wrinkles and a few pimples on her forehead. I looked into her eyes and saw myself in her reflection – petrified and unbelieving. She took me into her arms and said, “Don’t worry. It’s real.” The hug felt so familiar – it was warm, tight, and secured.

Although the summer only lasts two months (compared to my departure for 9 months), my mom and I started recollecting all the memories we shared before I studied abroad. We went to every restaurant that I once loved (if they were still open) and discovered new restaurants that opened when I was abroad, visited her friends’ home together, and talked about everything from her work to my study, and made a bet – whether or not I would start a romantic relationship throughout my college years which I firmly believe I will not.

My mom is always lucky when she plays card games and she never loses a bet with me, including this one.

Fate is just mysterious with surprises that you never expected. As I couldn’t tell the coursemate I met during my TA’s office hours for practicing Japanese will discuss Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s *Hell Screen* with me, watch Jan Švankmajer’s stop-motion animals with me, and write short stories together with me. The night we went for a guitar performance was our “*Before Sunrise*” when we just kept talking and getting to know each other.

I didn’t know that the person who shared so many interests with me would be my partner after 1 month.

However, even before we started our relationships in March, I already knew what I will face in the future. He was graduating soon from UCSB and waiting for the results of his grad school applications. I, on the other hand, was just a sophomore who hadn't fulfilled the graduation requirements yet.



Time flies as he had to make a decision for his future which he decided to go to New York. On the night he made the decision, we attended an event together. However, we were put into different discussion groups during that event.

That was a cold night. Even sitting by the fireplace, my body was still shivering. I heard him talking from a distance and looked over to him. Although I could hear him, I couldn't hear exactly what he was saying and I felt...he was close to me yet so far away – I could see him, I could hear his voice, but I...

Although I was comforting him for being rejected by UCSB's program in the morning, I became the one who cried out at night. Because I knew, there were only a few days left for us being together.

Before his graduation, we spent a short and happy time together. It was short enough that I cried happily during his graduation ceremony without realizing that we are going to depart from each other soon – I can't believe it's already June...

When I went back to Santa Barbara for my third year (which was also my last year at university), I suddenly realized the time I spent with him was such a luxury. Sitting on the bus from downtown SB to my apartment, I walked into the river of my memories –

hearing the melodies of the old songs we sang together when I sat on his passenger seat, smelling the fragrance of Mexican cheesecake he brought me from the bakery that located near his apartment, tasting the sweetness of his birthday cake, and feeling the warmth in his arms.

The places we create memories were still there as well as our memories. The only thing that changed was I went back home alone now. I passed by the noisy crowds, saw people holding hands and talking about things happily. Couples were shopping together and discussing what else they needed to buy for tomorrow. They even kissed each other without noticing the crowds beside them.

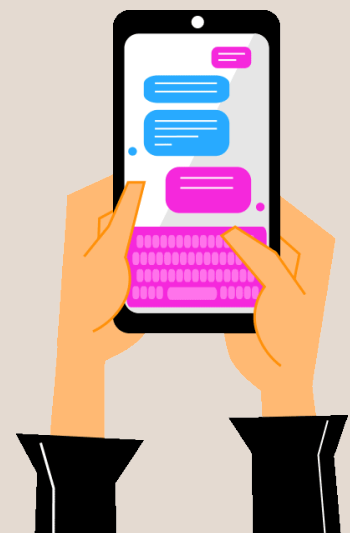
I realized I was one of them once. Perhaps unknowing, I have made people in long-distance relationships heartache. I thought about my boyfriend again, the time we were apart was even longer than we were together.

Tears just slid down my face. And I texted him,

“I miss you so much.”

And I received his instant reply,

“So do I.”



At least, I knew he shared the same feeling as me. I recalled the night before we departed from each other. He told me there was one last place he wanted to show me. I remember when he started driving the mountain road, I anticipated that the road forward would become narrower and more difficult to drive. There were fewer vehicles on the road and the vision became darker, leaving only the two of us in the dark silent night to go forward, as we're traveling to the unknown future.

Thinking about the unknown, a sense of fear and uneasiness emerged in my heart. I fell into silence and wanted to cry. Both of us did not say a word.

However, when we reached our destination, we were under the vast starry sky together. At that moment, I finally understood the definition of "vastness" and why humans' journey is the sea of stars. I did not feel I was trapped by the sky. Rather, I felt I was embraced by it.

The universe was in front of me while the wind and frogs' chirping into my ears. I wanted to sing while realizing that the sounds of nature are the perfect accompaniment to the calmness of this moment. I thought about the knowledge I randomly read from a geography book, "The light we see in our eyes may be from dead stars many light years away." It was similar to the long distance relationship I will face with him, isn't it? – Our love will span time and space to reach out to each other.

At that moment, I thought it's worth it for us to face the unknown together and go towards the starry sky.

Although the future is unknown, I will wait. I'll be waiting for the starry sky that belongs to us, waiting for that star to shine and our senses of insecurity will be crushed into dust and disappear.

No, waiting is not the right world. I'll protect our starry sky, I thought. I'll take care of myself and enjoy a life without your physical presence; I'll keep in touch with you (thanks to technology) and share different moments of my lives with you; I'll make plans for both of us so that I can see you again.

At least, I was not alone. Because I knew, someone in the other side of the continent was thinking about the same thing as I do.

CHAPTER



4

TOWARDS OUR FUTURE

LET'S
DO IT

What you will discover

As your college years come to an end, the journey towards your future begins. This chapter helps you explore the possible paths after graduation, whether you're considering further education, entering the workforce, or exploring other opportunities. First, let's begin with a question:

**DO YOU HAVE A
SPECIFIC PASSION YOU
WANT TO PURSUE?**

YES :)

NO :(

MA/PHD PROGRAM

Primary Goal:

- Advance knowledge through research and prepare students for careers in academia, research institutions, or specialized fields

What you'll experience:

- Work under the guidance of professors in the field you're interested in
- Partial or full funding for your tuition provided by the School
- Involvement in research and conducting your projects with others

DEGREE FOR WORK

Primary Goal:

- Obtain professional licensure or certification (i.e. JD for lawyers) for work

What you'll experience:

- Develop specialized skills and competencies through education and hands-on training.
- Practicing in the field you're interested (i.e. law firms)

PROFESSIONAL GRAD

Primary Goal:

- Be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed for immediate employment in their industry
- Advancement in the career (i.e. MBA)

What you'll experience:

- Focus on practical skills, case studies, and applied knowledge relevant to industry.
- Coursework includes hands-on projects, internships, and practical assignments.
- Network with others

WORK

Primary Goal:

- Be independent & feed oneself
- Obtain hands-on experience
- Prepare for grad school/hop into another job

What you'll experience:

- Network with other
- Focus on doing the "foundational" work to gain basic skills
- Participate in formal training programs

What if I don't know

KEY TIPS



TIME TO EXPLORE YOUR INTERESTS!

You can explore your interests through a variety of avenues, including participating in research led by professors, undertaking internships or part-time jobs through job boards, and even engaging in different types of extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs).



COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS

Utilize the human resources around you! For example, you can visit professors during their office hours to learn about their research and their lives as professors. Additionally, you can ask the counselors in career services to connect you with experts in the field you're interested in.



REMEMBER: TAKE YOUR TIME!

Discovering your passions is a process rather than a race. Allow yourself the space to explore different paths at your own pace, without placing undue pressure on yourself to have all the answers right away. Trust in your curiosity and embrace the opportunity to learn and grow with each experience.



REMEMBER: NO ONCE AND FOR ALL!

It's okay to take detours or change directions along your exploration. Each experience contributes to your growth and understanding of yourself. Trust in your ability to adapt, learn, and make choices that align with your evolving interests and aspirations.

WAYS TO CHECK SCAM

Check the HR LinkedIn Profile Page

It is always great to check the HR who reach out to you on LinkedIn. Because some job scams may not even have LinkedIn Profile for their HRs! Scroll down and read the file if you can find one.

Check the company's official website

By viewing the company's official website will give you a sense of the company. If the website looks very sketchy, it will be best to be skeptical and do some additional research.

Check Glassdoor

READ through the comments rather than seeing the score because some companies will ask their employees to write positive comments to increase the overall score. The score that is "too high" is also suspicious.

Check Public Forum (i.e. Reddit)

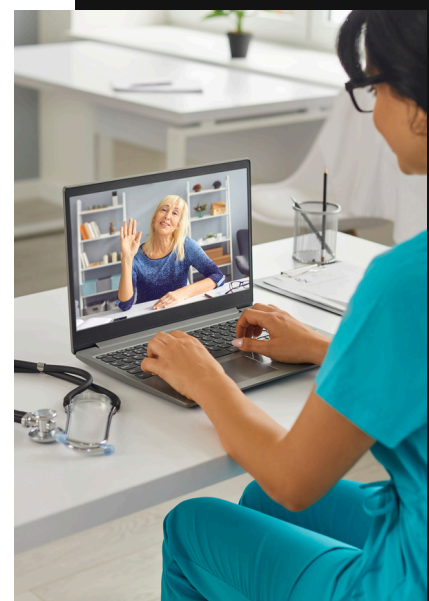
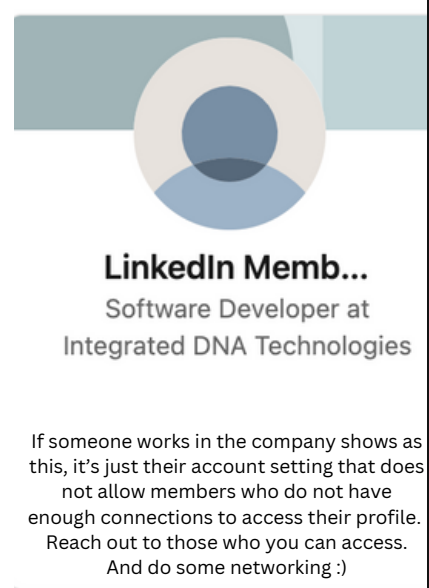
Although it is important to take Glassdoor reviews and reddit posts (i.e. r/Devilcorp) with a grain of salt because anyone can produce them, finding the pattern through the information is helpful (especially when many comments align with each other).

Reach out to a (former) employer

On LinkedIn, you will able to see alumni at your school working there as well as some employees working there. Send them a message through "add a note" when you connect to express your interest in their experience! (It's free without LinkedIn Premium)

Ask your Career Counselor

The Career Service at the university is always your best resource :). Reach out to career counselors and ask them to check the companies for you! They are the experts in the field.



TECH

CAREER RESOURCES

TOOLS + EVENTS + CAREER SERVICE + HUMANS = USE RESOURCES WISELY

TOOLS

T

- **Resume Feedback:** VMOCK
- **Career & Education Planning:** FOCUS® 2
- **Interview Prep:** Big Interview, ChatGPT (Provide specific information & generate prompt! But use it wisely!)
Check w/ Career Services for FREE Access

EVENTS

E

- **Networking:** Connect with alumni and get advice on starting your career
- **Recruitment:** Join info sessions hosted the employers and get more information
- **Career Fairs:** Meet with representatives from global employer network

CAREER SERV

C

- **Counselors:** Make an appointment with your counselors and discover your interests as well as your major learning outcomes
- **Workshop:** Learn about effective strategies for creating a resume and cover letter, preparing for interviews, and navigating LinkedIn

HUMANS

H

- **Alumni:** Reach out to people who already work within the industry and learn about their journeys
- **Grad Students & Professors:** Explore the research world, get tips for grad school application, and Letters of Recommendation
- **Employees in your interested company:** Obtain insiders' insights

Note:

Peers from other disciplines are very helpful in terms of networking because they're different from you and might be looking for someone with a different skillset, or have more information that other people in your field don't have access to.



NAVIGATING REJECTION LETTERS - MY STORY

It was the 18th of March, and I was overwhelmed for two reasons – finals and graduate school decisions. I checked my emails on an hourly basis, hoping for any updates from the grad schools I had applied to, thought about every possible outcome and their corresponding plans, and prepared all course materials to prepare for my upcoming exams. Today was supposed to be Johns Hopkins' decision release date. When my boyfriend and I sat at the Greek restaurant in Boston, it was already 5PM EST.

My boyfriend asked, “Nothing yet?”

“No,” I shook my head and once again refreshed my email, but it was the same: nothing except for new junk mail. I double-checked the application portal, but still everything remained the same as it was when I had first submitted my application.

– the application material checklist, and the status displaying “submitted”.

The aromatic scent of my dinner plate filled the air, but I lacked the appetite to eat; my boyfriend had to slice off a piece and feed it to me. All I could do was look up and refresh my email every few minutes. Many times I called the admissions office, but was never called back again. It was always a cold, automated voice recording saying, “Your admission coordinator is currently unavailable.”

“I know you’re anxious right now... but...” I finally looked up and I saw my boyfriend looked worried. I nodded and said,

“Okay. I don’t want it to ruin our vacation. I bet I should pretend they’re going to delay my decision.”

However, my time was ruined by the admission decision because I found myself unable to fall asleep at night and started searching for any released decisions on social media. When I saw others who submitted the application even later than me got their admission letter, I wanted to shout out “Why” and curse while I refrained myself from doing so. Because I don’t want to wake others.

However, I stayed awake for a long time. And the situation became even worse on March 26th because of an unexpected rejection.

On March 26th, my boyfriend and I were in a student lounge of NYU. He had left for the bathroom, and I was fiddling with my laptop. All the tabs for my final project had been closed, so my laptop would not overheat and I wouldn’t hear the laptop fan rattling again. The only things left on my Chrome window were several application portals. Habitually, I would refresh the page and enter my login credentials to access my account. Although most of the time, nothing changed.

That day, as I sat on the black leather sofa, I refreshed all the portals and suddenly saw the familiar phrase on the Northwestern portal: “COMPLETE”. I had thought that I would have had to wait for the official release date on the 28th. It wasn't until my hands, subconsciously sliding my keyboard, that I realized there was one more column marked “Decision Details”. I clicked on it.

A big, highlighted “DENIED” appeared on my screen; indeed, it showed that I was denied one day ago, without any notification.

Decision Details

TIAN DING-Integrated Marketing
Communications - Denied **Denied**

The rejection letter was very simple and straightforward – just four of the same lines that I've been familiar with since three years ago.

I froze. The dream that I fought for for three years was broken by four simple perfunctory sentences.

“Thank you....Unfortunately...Best wishes...”

With silence, they rejected me.

My vision blurred as I called for my boyfriend who came immediately. He looked at me with disbelief until he saw the laptop screen, and hugged me tightly in his arms. I was fully aware that I was in a public space, and even though it was embarrassing to cry in front of others, I just couldn’t stop my tears.

Perhaps the winter in New York was too dry because my cheeks hurt when the tears moistened my skin; but that was not as painful as the pain in my heart: the sadness of having nothing – was it all for nothing?



He handed me the tissue and wiped away my tears gently.

I looked at my watch. It was almost two o'clock in the afternoon. My boyfriend pecked my cheeks and said, "Remember, I love you," and headed to his class.

I nodded and waved, "Bye. Don't worry."

However, I couldn't stop my sadness from spreading through me, so I called my mom. After a short interval of time, I heard her slightly tired voice on the phone mutter, "Hello?"

"I got rejected by Northwestern."

"I'm sorry, it must be rough for you, honey."

Then, she said to me gently, "If you want to cry, it's okay."

"Will you stay with me for a while?" It was midnight in China, but I just wanted someone by my side.

Her gentleness crossed time and distance, saying, "Sure. "

I grabbed my handbag and stepped outside the building. Suddenly, my ears were filled with different sounds, people's talk, phone calls, and cars. I crossed the street and walked to the park.

It's loud, fast-paced and bustling with people. In the crowd, no one will notice someone crying.

I walked to a corner and squatted due to my stomach ache. I felt dizzy and nauseated filling up my stomach as I'm going to throw out.

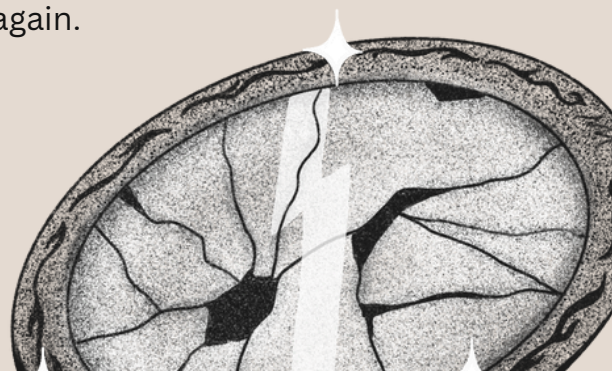
Memories came to my mind like a tidal wave – the repetitive measures of dictions when writing my personal statement, the days when I couldn't close my eyes because of the anxiety of waiting for the decisions, and the nervous shiver before the interview.

I recalled that time three years ago when I was bawling in bed because I received five rejection letters in a week, not to mention one of the five coming right after I woke from the dream that I was admitted.

It felt like gazing at a glass window reflecting the colors of the rainbow and it suddenly shattered. Every shard of glass seemed to pierce my body.

Lying in bed for a while, I eventually got up and looked at myself in the mirror. My eyes were filled with tears and small veins with dark circles surrounded them. My lips were colorless. I couldn't recognize the haggard and thin girl who looked back at me painfully.

I decided to wash my face. However, nothing was cleansed, especially for that painful expression. Although I was too weak to clench my fist, I swore to myself that I will not be in such a situation again.



After coming to college, I started fulfilling my swear through seizing every opportunity. From being a research assistant for two different projects to volunteer at the nonprofit organizations, from working at the school while interning at two different companies simultaneously to overload almost every quarter to maximize the knowledge I could obtain from different disciplines, I am an honor student with 1 major and 2 minors while graduating in three years; I am an individual who handles two one-year long honor projects simultaneously; I am a strong candidate for these applications, not only in my statements of purpose, but also in my interviews when I talk about my stories without fear.

But now, everything I worked so hard for for three years was all in vain – decimated by three simple sentences. Mockingly, I asked my mom, “Why does my friend, an admission counselor, always encourage me when I will be eventually slapped in the face by reality? She sees a girl that I am not. Then I am filled with false hope. However I know now: it was all just a dream.”

But to my surprise, my mom refuted, "Don't you think that the recognition from the people around you is much more valuable? It's the recognition of you as a REAL person after getting to know you! How much about you do admission officers really know?!"

On the bustling street, I froze like a statue. I heard nothing but her voice echoing in my mind. I fell into silence because I couldn't answer.

After my boyfriend's classes ended, we went back to his apartment together. I laid on his bed due to tiredness from walking around NYC for two hours. I asked him,

“Even if I'm rejected by all grad schools, do you still think I'm a good person?”

He nodded and stroked my hair gently, "You're being silly.”

“Then, tell me what's so good about me?" I asked.

“Very empathetic and always able to understand the feelings of others. Very gentle and sensitive to other's emotions, and very kind.” He gazed at me gently and hugged me in his arms. I could feel the warmth spreading over my body.

And I suddenly recalled what my mother said – the recognition from people who really knew me.

In my boyfriend's words, I am a soul that can help and warm others rather than some simple cold lines in a piece of paper and being defined by GPA, TOEFL Scores, research and internship experience. My 19 years of life cannot be explained in a 500-word statement of purpose, nor can be defined by a resume filled with bullet points.



Those are only part of me. Admission officers will never see my tears I shed when I received the rejection letter, nor my relieved smile right now. In a daze, I saw myself a few years ago, who felt so insecure after being rejected by 15 colleges and questioning my ability to succeed in college.

I questioned whether I am able to survive in college.

I didn't even know what was waiting for me – as a 17-year-old girl alone in a foreign land.

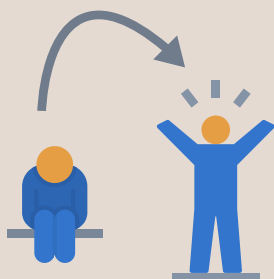
I wanted to go back to the past and say, “Thank you.” to myself.

I wanted to say, “The tears you have shed, the despair you have felt, and the cry out I had alone, are not in vain.”

“Thank you for being brave. Even your legs were trembling and your eyes were filled with tears; even though you kept staggering and falling over and over again, you eventually stood up to face the storm.

You did it. Although you will still cry during ‘the season of applications’, you are able to cope with your misery through writing and growing up through difficulties.

I have stood up over and over again and I am able to stand up again.



Then, I tried hard to sort out my thoughts. If my past was not defined by my statement of purpose, my future will not be defined by a rejection letter from a graduate school.

Furthermore, I could utilize the year after graduation to give myself a break, to apply to jobs, to travel around to places I have never been, to try out different things and have more experience, to enrich my life.

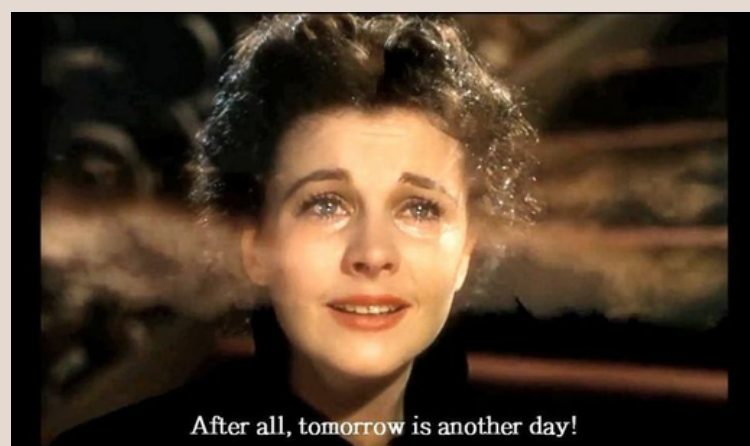
“No choice” is also a choice itself and opens for new possibilities.

My thoughts finally came back to my imaginary apartment in New Jersey. I'll have my new life here, ride the Path train to meet different people everyday, and navigate all the uncertainties with people who love me by my side.

Out of nowhere, I said, “I want to drink strawberry milk slushie now. Because I want to taste some sweetness to welcome my sweet future.”

On the way to the milk tea shop, I thought about Scarlett O'Hara. Let the past go with the wind. I will eventually move forward to my future and happiness.

“Tomorrow is another day.”



BECOMING AN ADULT

"Your defense mechanism is... your mom. She's like cotton, wrapping up all your wounds and trauma."

I remember that night on Thanksgiving, the dim light, the touch of cotton pajamas against my skin. At that moment, my hand, which was adding milk to Americano, paused for a second. "Yes, my mother is very nice and sweet, always." 17-year-old me responds to my 19-year-old roommate with a smile. The aroma of coffee wafted and filled all around, including the surface of Samsonite's business suitcase to even my bedsheet. I think of my mother, regardless of the 10,357 km away from me. She is like that fragrance, permeating every corner of my life.

"She is more of a cool friend than mom, driving me to the comic-con for 4 hours round-trip the day before my TOEFL exam and reassuring me, 'It's useless to cram for one additional day. I've seen all the hard work you've already done.'; Would bet with me that I would get into a romantic relationship before I graduated from college; would teach me how to play cards and board games, and bring me to the gathering of her friends. She is my best friend." "That's soooo nice." "My roommate exclaimed.

However, my answer, along with the milk, gradually melted in the bitterness of Americano, melted in the passage of time, melted in the number candles 18 which was blown out by me.

After seven days of nightmare hotel quarantine in my home country, I celebrated my 18th birthday on the second day of quarantine at home. I wore a black fishtail dress that was stored in my cabinet forever, waiting for the delivery of Mont Blanc Tart, and played the song *Coward Mont Blanc* by my favorite Vocaloid.

"I think it's good," my mother said, holding the eye shadow palette in one hand and brushing in another. "I'm satisfied with it. Why not see it yourself?"

"Wow, Is... this...me?" Looking at the lady with curly hair, cherry lips, and thick eyelashes in the mirror whose mouth turned into an O shape. She looks familiar while strange simultaneously.

Then, with the ring of the doorbell, my mom's phone shot the moment that I made a wish and blew out the candles.



The Mont Blanc Tart with chestnut was less sweet than I expected. Rather, the aftertaste of bitterness lingered and danced on my tongue. Suddenly, I recall the taste of Americano, which was so bitter that I had to put in an excessive amount of milk and sugar to sweeten it.

However, I knew if I ordered those fancy cakes covered with fondant on future birthdays, people would tease me, "That's childish and naive."

"Does this suit your taste?" My mom's voice pulled me back from my thoughts.

"Of course! Definitely! I was just distracted and thought about something."

"What are you thinking about? If it doesn't matter for now, then it's better to eat the cake as soon as possible. Otherwise, it will just taste bad and stale. If you are full, I'll put it in the refrigerator."

"I'll eat it now." I shook my head, picked up the fork and began to eat the rest of the cake, "I was thinking, after eating Mont Blanc tart, I shouldn't be a coward anymore (referencing the song), right?"

"Yes, my honey."

I nodded and ignored the shining screen of my phone, lit up with messages that read,

"Happy 18th birthday and welcome to adulthood."

When the weather became chilly, I went back to the States. On that plane, the distance between my mom and I stretched further apart.

Cold air penetrated my body under the inky sky. I gazed at the stairs and my two 23 kg luggages. Step-by-step, I took them upstairs.

The living room was empty. The queen-sized mattress and deconstructed bed frame were put in the corner. I heaved a sigh and took out screwdrivers from my bag to start installing.

"*Everything is fine, as always. I got back to my apartment safely. Good night, mom :).*" I clicked send on WeChat and went back to tighten the screws.

I forgot how I installed the bedframe and put the queen-size mattress on it, but I remember the pain that traveled from the sensory receptor on my fingers to the nerves. Bright red came into my vision. I pulled a bandage from my luggage and wrapped it up around my finger.



胆小鬼 蒙布朗 (Mont Blanc)

My body became heavy and I fell on the huge but empty bed, hugging myself. My heart was filled with loneliness, perplexity, numbness, and anxiety while I was preventing them from reaching others. I shivered and murmured, "Tears are salty, like the ocean in Santa Barbara," as I slipped away into sleep.

When I woke up, I was panting heavily, sweating all over my cheeks. There was no light penetrating through the curtains. I went to the bathroom with my hands covering my stomach. I thought about that time in summer in the bathroom at my home when I had a severe stomachache, my mom was by my side. I cried due to pain and gasped heavily,

"Mom..."

"I'm here." She hugged me and wiped my tears softly.

My stomach hurts like it's being torn to fragments as well as my heart. My consciousness, along with the words I'm going to say before losing consciousness, vanished into thin air eventually.

"When it comes again, I will shout silently in the bathroom 10,357 km away from you."

"You would not hear it nor know it. Because these are all trivial matters in adulthood."



Now, "Mom, I'm not feeling well. I just had another stomachache" was deleted on the keyboard. Instead, I stopped typing, pretending I'm still in the dreamland. I took a pill and went back to bed. Coldness spread all over my body.

I hugged myself again and thought "That's the necessary step for becoming an adult."

"That's the indispensable thing for not being a coward."

"This is adulthood. There will be no more milk for sweetening, only bitter coffee. There will be no more cotton for wrapping my wound, only me licking blood from cuts like a lone wolf. There will be no more mother's help, nor privileges as a minor – be excused for every mistake because I'm young and small."

My heart aches from time to time when incoming freshmen call me Xuejie (Similar to alumna in English, but is not necessarily used for graduating students, Jie means sister in Chinese), while I'm the same age or even younger than them.

Everybody just expected me to act as a senior professionally, expected me to be a mature adult, while I'm only a shoot who was growing through pulling upward by time.

In a wrong time due to my age, in a wrong place away from parents, as a wrong person who is always late-maturing, I was carried off by the time and forced to grow up.

These things were deleted on my keyboard eventually.

1 month later, due to the ineffectiveness of expressing her great displeasure for several times, my mom can't bear my perfunctory attitude and called me,

"I don't know why, but you just stopped sharing things with me..."

Suffocating silence fell between us.

"Mom, I am an adult now..." I explained vaguely.

"That's unfair to me..."

"I'm fulfilling the responsibilities as a legal adult." I argued but she shouted,

"You have no idea how helpless I am this month for not knowing your life. Recalling how many times you have rejected me for sharing! That's...selfish."

My mind fell into a whirlpool and the only thing appeared in my mind is

"Why is she acting like this?"

"Why was I criticized for being a reassuring child without parents' worries..."

"Why? Why? Why?"

Her sudden icy tone cut through my last disguise like a sharp knife. The dam I built subsided and collapsed instantly. Emotions gushed out like surging torrents.

"Could you please..calm down a little bit. Just, listen to me."

She kept silent as a response while I was talking.

"Mom, I really want to be a good child without your worries. As an adult, I...should figure out the way of life myself. And you can tell, I did it poorly."

I continued,

"Even though I tried to distance all of my frustrations and anxiety from you, I still instinctively approach you... because I've been used to telling you everything at first instance without jet lag; feeling the warmth in your embrace; taking off my mask and being myself.

"You have blended in my life imperceptibly throughout these 18 years."

"I haven't quite gotten used to life in the U.S. Your absence formed an empty hole in my heart." I tried to control the volume of crying so that my roommate next door could not hear me. It's been a long time since I've known what it's like to not be able to control your sobs.

"I miss you and home so much." I took out tissue and wiped my tears away. "Feel free to laugh at me...It's only one month away from you, I already can't endure not sharing my life with you anymore. Such a coward..."

Silence again.



I could hear my mom taking a deep breath. It sounds not only like an exhalation as great weight is off her mind, but also like a heavy sigh.

"Thank you for sharing with me. You are trapped in the 'shackles' of being an adult while forgetting that you're always my precious baby and my best friend as well."

My mouth opened but I couldn't say anything because I realized how silly I was to forget who I am.

She continued,

"Please open your mind forever in front of me. I'm always your home. And you know what...I need you as well. I relied on you as well. I want you to share your life with me, rather than I share all the time."

I was even more surprised. Because my mom, 30 years older than me, said, "she needed me and relied on me."

I remember the sunlight which coated me in the afternoon was warm, like the temperature of mom's hug and the feeling of home.

"Thank you, mom."

I guess I just picked up the identities that I forget for 1 month

– My mom's precious child as well as her friend.



CHAPTER



5

DISCOVER OURSELVES

**LET'S
DO IT**

What you will Discover

You'll learn how to set meaningful goals that align with your passion and define your own version of success in the digital landscape.



DARK FAIRY TALES: EXPLORE MY SEXUALITY

Content Warning: Contain grotesque content

The pink princess-style mosquito net that surrounded my little bed protected me like a guard in the darkness. My bookshelf was filled with Disney princess picture books. When I opened the closet, colorful pettiskirts came into my vision.

My childhood bedroom was a dream made of fairy tales. It is sweet like syrup. So do my childhood memories, they were fairy tales in reality.

I lived a carefree life. Whenever I want something, I will talk to my parents and ask, "May I invite my friends to my home to play?" They always smiled and agreed.

My friends and I started talking, singing, dancing, putting together Disney princess puzzles, and acting. I always like to play as The Little Mermaid, Ariel. Because that's my favorite princess. And also, we love playing our favorite game – hide and seek.

I don't like being the hider because I am struggling to find a place to hide. I wish those 10 seconds could slow down and I stand on tiptoe to avoid any sounds. When I settled down in the narrow space, the dust covered me, which made it hard to breathe. My chest felt stuffy and my teeth trembled slightly. Sweat soaked my cheeks and drenched my T-shirt. The smell of sweat permeated in the hot air.

"Oops...I'm found again." I said when my friend discovered me hiding.

Instead, I enjoyed “hunting” – When I unveiled the curtain; opened the door of the storeroom; and leaned under the bed...

"There you are."

I also love hunting as an adult, though it looks different nowadays. I love looking for and collecting novel things to include in my treasure collection – hand-written cards from others, limited-edition badges, and newfangled stories that nobody knows.

When I was in 4th grade, I took the princess-style mosquito net away and explored the new world it keeps me away from, like Rapunzel who sneaks out of the tower. I discovered that peasant girl Karen’s feet were chopped off to stop dancing; One Cinderella’s sister cut off her toes while the other cut off her heel to fit the slippers; my favorite princess, the Little Mermaid, had her tongue cut out and her tail broken off. Every step she took on land felt like dancing on the edge of a knife. Even in the end, she did not kill the prince with the dagger given by her sister in exchange for the life back to sea. She kept silent and turned into a cluster of foam.

This is the world outside the tower. Thanks to the remodification of Disney, children will not be exposed to these original dark versions of fairy tales and dreamed sweetly (I am an exception who was too curious). Curiosity killed the cat. These dark fairy tales became nightmares and excuses to sleep in my mom’ bedroom. I remembered my mom patted my shoulder and said,

“Don’t worry, honey. None of them are true.”

My mother's way of comfort may not be the best, but she was telling the truth – What really scares me must be the things that have happened in reality.

In my sweet childhood, the memory of that day is indelible no matter how heavy the rain was that washed everything away.

My friend and I stayed at my home for the whole day due to the heavy rain. When I suggested playing hide-and-seek, her eyes were wider. Then, she turned back over to look out of the window.

“Some things are never found again. ”

I looked at her confusedly. Her eyes are empty, reflecting the gray gloomy sky.

“Why, what's going on?”

She took a deep breath which turned into a heavy sigh.

"A girl at my class... jumped to her death...from the 4th floor of the building on campus."

A breathless silence fell between her and me. Time stopped for a long while. I was freezed, and couldn't utter anything in response.



Eventually, she broke the silence, with tears in her eyes,

“I knew her. Her parents were called to school for her inappropriate puppy love. From then on, she behaved weirdly. But, I never knew...she will...”

The world fell into silence again. The only sound lingered around my ears is the wind, crying out. In the evening of that day, my mother turned on the TV. The news was filled with robberies, fire in the factory, and disputes between couples ... Maybe it was because I was in no mood to watch TV with a fleeting glance and missed it, or maybe it was because the rain had washed the blood off my friend’s classmate, or maybe it was because the cordon kept us out, preventing us from hearing her silent scream as she fell.

There was no news about her the next day nor the day after tomorrow. Ironically, a few years later, I heard my neighbor next-door discussing moving to another community for a "good" school district which I have heard as a “suicide school.” Its prestigious reputation was acquired through forcing 'special students' to withdraw for keeping a high average Gaokao score.

I recalled the term "Survivorship bias" -
- When an individual only considers the surviving observation without considering those who didn't survive.

The dead don't talk, especially in a high context culture which values verbal indirectness ; especially in a restraint culture which suppresses gratification of needs with strict social norms; especially in a culture in which “puppy love” is connotated negatively as forbidden rather than children’s sincere emotions driven by hormones.

Everyone is the little mermaid, forced to cut off tongues and remain silent even when they encounter grievances.

The girl jumped and turned into bloody foam, as a way to say “please help me.”

My hands-on ability is poor. But when I was sent to boarding school, I had to take care of myself. The multi-purpose Mazda with 7 seats was crammed with my luggage, including quilts, clothes, a socket, a toolkit, a sewing kit (even though my memories of sewing during childhood were hazy, my mother always carried it), and my treasure collection. The most precious thing among all treasures is my diary with the pink cover. It is my history and carries the weight of time since I started to write in 3rd grade. And I kept writing it.

However, once I got to boarding school, it was stolen by someone I wrote about.



To be exact, it was me, who did not know how to name my feelings, told my feelings to the person I “liked” secretly.

“I guess I like you because everyday when I write down memories we hold together, I feel it’s my most precious treasure.”

All I got back was a look of horror.

The diary became the proof of my “guilt” and was forced to send to my poor “victim’s” mom.

"Distorted sexual orientation." Her mom accused me in front of my parents, the school principal, and me. She shouted hysterically, like the thunder splitting my ears while I was a teetering tree.

I was warned. Rumors fluttered around about how close I was being asked to drop out of school without her pleading on my behalf, and how deviant I was for liking someone of the same sex as me.

I was 14, confused about the ways different love for different people could look. Instead of asking me, the adults in the principal's office projected their own fears onto the words I had written in my diary— The meals we had together, the days I visited her dorm, and the days we talked, all became the proof of my guilt because I wrote, *"I think I might like her."*

The diary was returned to me eventually.

At that moment, I grasped it tightly and ran to the bathroom. I bowed my head to avoid any peculiar gazes.

In this dim room without lights, I gazed at it. Even without opening it, I could recall everything....

"Her favorite type of drink is Thai tea with Boba, 70% sugar, no ice. I should learn how to make it and surprise her!"

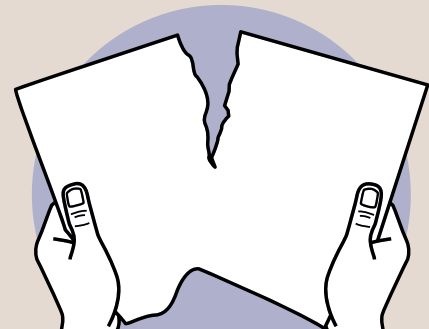
"I'm glad I can help her with English! When she thanked me, her eyes were like a crescent moon. I want to see her smile more!"

"Hopefully I can help her more in future, and I have to keep making progress."

It was unbearable and made me sick -- the garish pink cover, my childish sentences, and the penalty laid upon me...

I tore every page to pieces, using every ounce of my strength, and throwing them in the bathroom bin. My private history was erased in an instant, secretly and in shame.

Salty sweat mixed with tears sting my eyes and blurred my vision. After exhausting all my strength, I was gradually swallowed by the damp chill of the bathroom. As if I was playing hide-and-seek years ago, my chest was tight, my stomach was churning, and my head was about to explode. And my heart was falling.



Before losing my consciousness, the last thing that appeared in my mind was the girl who jumped and the story of the little mermaid. For that moment, I resonated with them.

I wished I could hide here forever, crying silently in this corner... Otherwise, I'd rather disappear and turn into foam. My tears would be blended with the sea.

Because of rumors, my sweet life is gone. Rather, it's a Gothic dark fairy tale.

There were holes in my heart; the way I filled these holes up was through cutting out my tongue, keeping silent, and hiding that past "abnormal me" in the corner that nobody knows, in order to present myself as a normal person who fits the social norms.

However, out of others' sights, I felt pins and needles all over my body. I was tired. A surge of nausea burst and I began to vomit again because -- What I lost this time was not only a sweet life like a fairytale, but also my voice, and part of myself, or a combination of both --

"My right to speak as a whole, authentic me."

I became the little mermaid, concealing my past carefully and painfully like walking on the tip of the knife. But, I didn't have a choice...

When I read those dark fairy tales for the first time, I felt nauseous. When I grew up, what made me sick was reading 1984, seeing how the Ministry of Truth deleted its history to elucidate "War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength".

I felt sick because it was not only a novel, but also reality -- many countries rewrite historical documents, newspapers, and literary works in the name of truth, to embellish themselves into a brand new look. Simultaneously, they put 1984 in a must read list.

"It's ironic, isn't it?" My mom sneered, "The way countries sanction each other for trifling matters, like kids' fight. They have long forgotten their original intention as governments."

"Whoever battles monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster himself." I shook my head and sighed, "It's stupid. I feel like they're not even as good as our ancestors. Most of the former leaders probably did a better job than now, but they only live in history."

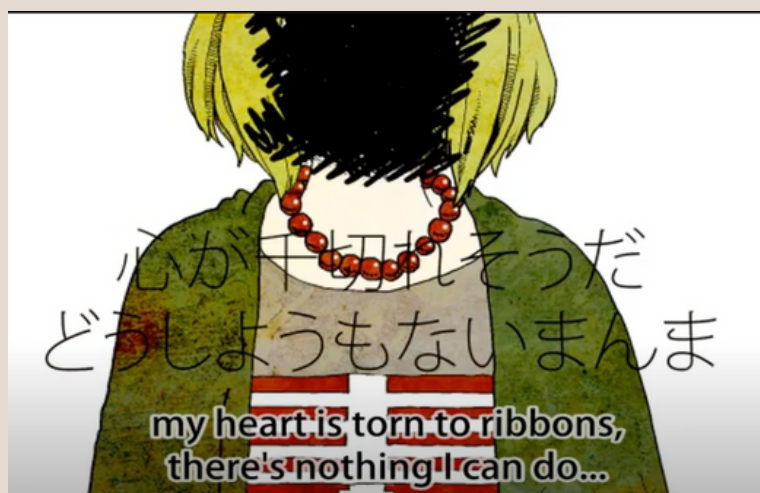
My mother patted me and said, "Be aware of survivorship bias, be aware of the inability to speak as dead people. Nobody wants to hear about the stories of losers, right? So, our history is filled with these great people, who may contribute an invention or the discovery of some new matters. Thus, this illusion makes us mistakenly think that we can also be as great as them."



I wondered, is there really no chance to tell our stories? Or we just chose not to say anything ourselves.

Not knowing the answer, I kept my silence while my radio sang.

“The hole opened up in my chest, now it’s the only thing that proves you. And yet I’m still so empty, my heart is torn to ribbons, there’s nothing I can do.”—
Donut Hole



Hearing the familiar lyrics, I suddenly realized even though I have tried for so long to let myself go along with the suppression that the restraint culture values, my heart is still so empty. and the trauma I have suffered in the past have left a scar on my heart.

Just like the history that is being deleted artificially, just because we can't read them in the history textbooks doesn't mean it didn't happen.

Just because the little mermaid’s voice was taken away, we always know that she is the one who saved the prince. Fairytales are not true. But there are too many little mermaids in reality who keep silent.

Such days should be history, rather than present.

It's time for me to let them go, along with my traumas. It's time for me to write the new pages. It's time for me to be the whole, authentic me rather than hidlers, nor little mermaids.

I took out my sewing box once again to make up. This time, I will not cut anything nor sew it silently. Rather, I will sing, and my voice will go far away; I will write, and my voice will go far away.

Just like now.



Thank you
FOR READING

I WISH YOU THE BEST IN YOU COLLEGE.

SURVIVE & THRIVE!



TIAN DING

You might feel stressed, overwhelmed, or lonely and so much more. All of the emotions you're feeling right now are normal. Let's embrace them and reconcile with them.