

STORY OF A FROG

So...that is it.

I have sent the Oberlin college application package. The moment it was sealed by the post office officer, a heavy stone seemed to be lifted off my chest. Instead of feeling relieved, I was immediately empty, as if readily awaiting “post-application-posting” nervousness. Since I began my application, envisioning myself in a womb chair at the library, devouring some book for Cinema studies 101, or attending “Death and the art of dying” seminar always lifts my spirits, but at once suffocates me, the joy being so great it nearly explodes. I have never wanted something this badly.

It all started with a trip (and yes, “a trip abroad” it is, again). From elementary school, I always stood out from other students thanks to both good grades, a well-rounded social knowledge (I was the only one in the class who knew the name of the Minister of Education) and some small talents (my classmates admired me for my average violin playing as they could not play anything!). However, this confidence-which had somehow turned bigger than it should be-was absolutely crushed, treaded on and thrown away during the two-week summer scholarship in Auckland three years ago.

For the first time, I felt like a country elementary kid sneaking into a city senior high school, looking at all the senior students and teachers with my jaw constantly dropped. For the first

time, I learned about the concept of “Six hats thinking” and the mind mapping, about how creativity works and how we could actually be creative on our will, about leadership and community service-which I previously thought were natural abilities without any proper training. This unfamiliar kind of knowledge excited me, yet it seemed to laugh in my face: hey, I am not anything sublime, how could you have never heard of me?

For the first time, I saw teachers and students using PowerPoint-which I did not even know exist-for teaching and presenting, visited a museum and wrote down my observations about paintings, and lived among students who could play at least one instrument and could discuss topics ranging from Hollywood to Gulf War. Listening to their talks and watching them study, my confidence fell to sub-zero level-the knowledge I had been proud of was but that of an elementary kid compared to theirs.

Also for the first time, I witnessed actual cultural interaction, which I had thought I knew long ago (isn't it just people meeting people, asking the other about his/her cultures, being surprised at the difference...and the likes?), but it turned out that I did not. At dinner, I was, like a child who first visits a theme park, amazed at the wide array of expressions of only 30 people in the same dining room. The Japanese girls were cheerful but quiet, eating in small bits and drinking in small sips; the Chinese group calmly chatted, the Kiwi ate light and fast, and we Vietnamese were noisy and naughty. It was truly “seeing the world”.

There is a Vietnamese proverb that goes: *“The frog that sits at the bottom of a well thinks the sky is as big as the mouth of that well”*. In reality there was one such “frog”, but after jumping out of

the well she realized she had been the most ignorant frog in the world. Slowly picking up her self-confidence from the dustbin, she started reading twice the books and newspapers she used to read, meeting triple the people she knows to hear them talk about the other parts of the sky she is ignorant of, and preparing for a grand journey to see them for herself. Although she can never see all of the infinite sky, she hopes that if she tries one bit a day, at the end of her life (25600 days-wildest guess), maybe she will have seen 10%, or hopefully, 20% of it.

Because the sky is addictive. Once I have seen just one piece of it, I want more, much more, and can never go back to the well again. Ever.