

I AM A TREE !

When I was small my mom called me a little seed because of how tiny I looked. As time elapses, "little seed" grows up and she dreams of one day when she can be the highest, the greenest, the liveliest, and the most gorgeous tree in the world - the tree that never falls.

Who am I? Sometimes I asked myself after some students at my school asked me: "Are you Becky (my American name), the super smart foreign student, and the girl who knows all?" Am I just a normal girl or a girl who can always make change like my mom told me? I do not know but for sure I love to make change. A fruit of a perfect combination between a committed physics teacher and an accomplished scientist, I am proud to have my parents' smartness, good nature and love of challenges. I hate, however, to hear that I'm who I am all because "her mom is the vice headmaster of a middle school", or "her dad is the president of a technology institution". I want affirmation of who I really am, who have strived nonstop since I was born, making a big leap from a humble primary school to the best middle school in her district and making another leap to the most gifted high school in Vietnam. And now I am preparing for the biggest leap of my life: One of the top 100 schools in America.

This time last year, I was still dreaming about America and ardently striving for support from my family and even from my cousin in California:

- Are you aware how hard it is to study in America, how overwhelmingly competitive this place is? Sure you want to go?

- Yes, the most challenging place – that’s where I am going.

- But you are too young...

- The younger I am, the more zealously I am going to explore the world.

- But scholarships are extremely hard to get. They pick only one in hundreds.

- If it’s not that hard, it’s not worth for me to go.

- But.....

And I left behind all the “but’s” my cousin as well as many of my friends, my relatives, even somehow my parents questioned me. I am here in America on a student exchange program and I never regret the decision I made. There are uncountable “but’s” others would raise every time I want to do anything, but I overcome them all.

Does anyone think that I have a magical stick like a witch and can easily change whatever I want in just a millisecond? No, I’m the one who follows all the steps of tears, of bad grades, of discrimination, and of burden. When I first came to my Math-specialized class in middle school, a bunch of staring eyes glanced at me with so much aloofness, so much arrogance because of either my ordinary look or my ordinary former school. I came home crying but I did swear....of a day when something had to change. I challenged all the bad rumor and all the initial terrible grades. In only two months, the humble duck came to be a respectable swan, which could get the highest score in almost every subject, especially in Math and

sciences. It was me who spent many study halls teaching my new method of solving difficult problems to those who used to be overly vain. Things became challenging again when I entered the top high school for science students with three-fourths boys each with half inch glasses. The two-month strategy still proved effective, but my achievements extended beyond academics. I nurtured the idea to relieve my class's grave studying atmosphere charged with exam stress to a pool of both intellectual and fun adventures. By hosting many extra-curricular festivals, I stretched my peers' solemn faces: I made them laugh. My effort paid off. But the story has not even started...

In America without my beloved mom to support me, my little sister to give me the most beautiful smiles in the world, I know that all the "but's" have activated. Time-consuming college research, pressing standardized tests, piles of essays and books to read and write inundate my head. I have watched with yearning eyes many fun activities at school that I cannot afford the time to join. When my friends asked: "do you miss home?" I smiled honestly: "If a day has 12 more hours, maybe I have time to be homesick". Living with my host family in the country with no Internet for 4 months, I suffered from staying behind my friends in the competitive race of standardized tests and application process. But whenever I looked at the phrase I printed consciously on my school bag: "Never be outdone by difficulties", I know what to do: I extracted every minute before and after school in the lab and walked extra 1.5 miles every day to use my neighbor's Internet. One day, I came home to find out that my host dad had installed Internet in my computer. He said to me, "It is true that Internet over the country is almost too expensive for us to afford, but we cannot be callous to your admirable studying..." I cried in happiness and poignancy.

For 17 years, I have continuously surprised the world around me, why not in the rest of my life, why not this time, why not at the college of my dream? Is the life not harsh environment that storms, that snows, that sometimes goes up to 150 F degree, and other times freezes everything? Am I not a miraculous seed that grows unfailingly despite severe weather? Yes, I am a seed that never gives up growing. There would be a day when the seed breaks out of her cover and matures into a 1000-foot high and hundreds-of-hand-hold wide tree that is unshakable. There would be a day when the sun is shining so resplendently and the whole tree is glowing so beautifully ... Mom, I am no longer a little seed.