

Taking up the plunge: life in a British boarding school

"Anna, a place has become available for a full scholarship, owing to a withdrawal of another student."

I couldn't believe that the e-mail I received on the 31st of July 2014 actually read this. Taking up the scholarship a mere month before departure actually did feel like a plunge: I was excited to throw myself into the water and discover what is out there, but at the same time, I was anxious and scared of drowning.

The first days of trying to swim in unknown waters were tough. Yes, I have experienced a culture shock (it came in the form of Yorkshire pudding and constant rain). But I have also experienced a much bigger shock: having lived in a big city for 16 years, I suddenly found myself in a small, girls only boarding school in a little town up North in Yorkshire. Despite the size of the school, I was permanently lost on the school grounds, didn't understand my teachers' accent and missed my home 1026 miles away.

However, I was slowly learning how to swim and it gradually improved. At first, happiness was finding the right room for my lesson. Then, it was getting the names of people in my form class right. Afterwards, it was getting my first A. Although it was not always straight As I was getting, I started enjoying school very much. I loved the individual way of teaching in small groups, as well as doing only five subjects. It couldn't have been more different from the teaching in my old school, where we had 13 subjects, mostly taught in classes of 32 pupils.

What I was really struggling with at the beginning was English Literature, as I was the only person in the class for whom English was not the mother tongue. I'm still finding it tough at times, but at the same time I feel like it is very useful and interesting. In my old school, literature meant memorizing a few authors and book titles from each historical era. We rarely actually read anything, and I had no clue how to write an essay. My astonishment in the English Literature class was twofold: firstly, we actually did read (a lot). Secondly, it wasn't rare to spend a whole 70-minute lesson discussing a single poem. Although I might probably never use my knowledge of World War One poetry again, my ability to read critically and analyze the texts from different perspectives will surely come in handy in the future.

In order not to have time to be homesick, I kept myself busy ever since the start of my year: I took an extra subject. I tried lacrosse for the first time and fell in love with it. I started playing the flute in a school ensemble. I joined the Fairtrade committee and helped out to run a Fairtrade tuckshop every week. I also became one of the leaders of the Social Enterprise Challenge, in which £1200 was raised for charity this year, and I became a house prefect. I joined the Youth Alpha course. I also tried fencing and managed to get a bronze award of the British Fencing Association.

Just as I started swimming with confidence and my fear of drowning disappeared, it occurred to me that it is nearly time to get out of the water for the summer holidays. I'm slowly realizing how much has taking the plunge taught me. If I should pick one lesson that I will remember from this year, it is not to be afraid to take risks, try out new things and make the most of every opportunity.

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