

## Not better or worse, but different

(more probably better though)

Imagine a landscape. A huge Victorian building that gives you the feel of time-travelling. As if you find yourself in the middle of one of those period movies, surrounded by a misty forest and the loveliest scenery. It has almost been a year but I remember it all too well as if it was yesterday. The final few hours of the day. The colours of that sunset. The smell of new beginnings in the air and the quiet voice in my head that saying that I was starting a brand new life.

Now, let me tell you a secret, something very precious that I learned during my year. The most difficult part is not getting used to the culture or the education system, it is not even standing in front of the front door and realizing that you do not know any of these people. The most difficult part is dealing with the responsibility of having the freedom to decide for yourself what is right and what is wrong. It is about the ability to express your ideas and beliefs and standing up for what you know is right even when you are struggling to find the words. It is about the confidence that follows when the teachers trust the students and see them as brave, intelligent individuals, not a bunch of careless kids.

I did not know any of that until I left behind my whole life as I had known it before. I left behind my rather traditional school with the not so sensible rules and the teachers who did not love either their jobs, or their students. The timetable that eliminated every single creative subject because they do not make a living. The pieces of homework which made us cram all the useless information just to forget it the next day. The ridiculous belief in motivation through fear of being punished and getting screamed at.

I am now in such a special place. I just came back from today's morning talk, which takes place every Thursday. My school unlike most is not religious, so instead of going to chapel, all the students gather up in the theater. The headmaster talked about being brave about the opportunities that are put in front of us, being open to new things and giving people a chance to teach us something instead of putting them in boxes with different labels. And I felt so lucky to be among people who talk about those sorts of things.

I am not saying it is all moonlight and roses. From time to time it feels very difficult to live far from home. But I do not feel lonely. I feel very happy to live under one roof with people from all sorts of different backgrounds, who have had different experiences, seen places I have never heard of, lived lives that gave them explanations for things that I would never think of. I might not be lifelong friends with all of them but I know that they helped me discover pieces of myself, which without them would have gone unnoticed, and this was everything I could hope for.

I cannot help but think of these words by Edmund Morris as they describe the way I feel so perfectly:

"For once, he could look back at the past without regret, and at the future without bewilderment. Simply and touchingly, he wrote in his diary: "I have had so much happiness in my life so far that I feel, no matter what sorrows come, the joys will have overbalanced them."

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