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Childhood Structure and American Change

Having a school uniform was always a comfort to me; growing up I went to an international school that required everyone to wear a school uniform. Much like the regimented nature of having a school uniform, my childhood, school or not, was very regimented. Every morning, without doubt, we would have school wide morning announcement. The morning announcements were always “Good morning students! [blah blah blah] and have a wonderful day!”

After that, I would continue on with my day, following my schedule. Mindlessly, mechanically, like a robot, I followed my class where I would be led into my class where I would stay for the next five periods. During those periods, I would be sitting in the classroom, switching from my English textbook to my math textbook to my science textbook and on and on until, it was PE class. Now, you might think that at least during PE class, there would be a break from the ridged structure of school, and they’d let the kids run around and do what kids do, but you’d be sorely mistaken. Even during PE class, there was an order to how things were to be done. Always group stretching under the blazing sun, where everyone would already be sweating before we’ve even done anything; then five laps around the field, where we’d be run ragged. But that wouldn’t be the end, the most strenuous part was just about to begin. I would then join everyone to play soccer once I finished my laps, where I was always the defender because I wasn’t fit enough to effectively play any other role, until the end of the period. After all this, it was finally lunch time.

Although lunch time didn’t have any real structure other than lining up at the end in classes to be dismissed back to class, I ended up with a self-imposed structure. I would always quickly eat my packed lunch, then go out into the field where I would play soccer with the other kids; I would always play the role of defender, just like during PE class, mostly because it was the only role I knew. After lunch, it was simply back to class for the final two classes which was much like all the other classes, excluding PE of course, after which I would get to finish the school day. Even after the school day was over, I wasn’t free from a ridged structure of school. When I got home, it was always immediately a quick shower then straight into my homework for the day. Although I never enjoyed it much, looking back at it now, it had taught me to always keep on top of my work and never let it overwhelm me.

All my days went by like this; I was content with this simple ordered existence. When I turned six, I started to listen to piano music, and over the course of a couple months I built up the courage to ask my grandma if I could learn piano. I intended for it to only be a hobby, but my grandma had other plans. Almost immediately after I asked, my grandma got a small electric keyboard and enrolled me for weekly tutoring sessions for piano. At first, I enjoyed it, I quickly picked up on all the basics; but soon I had to start practicing piano for an hour after I finished my homework. The piano that I wanted to learn and have as a hobby quickly became another chore that I had to complete, I quickly lost interest in this thing that I wanted to do for fun. I asked my grandma, “This isn’t fun anymore… can I stop playing now?” but she replied, “We already put this much money into it already, you will learn to love it again.” With piano now forced onto me, my daily practicing had clearly suffered, first with my repeating the same pieces over and over again, but slowly to the point where I would just spend an hour mashing one key waiting for the time to end. After a year of my constant badgering and clear decline in interest, my grandma finally allowed me to stop. After that, everything returned to normal; I was back to my old routine.

When I turned twelve, I was to return to America for schooling, the thought was scary in itself. After all so many years of living in one place, going to one school, having the same routine; I was going to move half-way across the world to continue my education, just because my school was moving and probably because the issues that caused my parents to send me to my grandma in the first place were resolved. My parents came over and after a short week of saying bye to my grandparents and their friends I was off to America. Multiple long connecting plane flights later I reach America with an aggressive amount of jetlag and about a month before school starts. Over the month I got accustomed to the existence of seasons and got clothing for the school year.

Once school started, things were mostly the same; I went about my day going from class to class, ignoring most of my peers… at least I tried to. I sat quietly in class trying to become invisible while thinking, “why is this stuff all so easy?” but wouldn’t you know it, being one of the few Asians in your grade tends to draw a lot of attention. During class, I could successfully avoid conversation with everyone due to the fact that everyone was supposed to be paying attention to the teacher, but lunch was a different story. I gave myself a routine during lunch, get lunch, eat lunch, wash hands, sit quietly… but the unrelenting extrovertedness of some Americans made some unexpectedly friendly delinquents try to befriend me. For a solid week, I sat there at the table trying to ignore them while also doing exactly nothing while they tried to talk to me, but they eventually broke me and became my first American friends. Through them I learned to loosen up and became quick friends with some of their friends. I started to hang out with them after-school. It was a new experience for me, I always had to go home and finish my homework and chores first before I could relax, but my dad was fine with whatever I did so long as I stayed safe and finished all my work. Loosening up taught me how to be friendlier and showed me that there are things that are important outside of school work.