**Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.**

**Garlic (Draft 4) - 19/10/22 - Current word count is 645**

Whenever I stood by my father’s side as he cooked, he would give me cooking advice despite the fact that I was eleven years old and incapable of cooking. “Garlic is the most important part here,” he would say as he added minced garlic into the wok, creating a pleasant roar as the pieces met the oil. “It gives the food life.” As I watched the garlic pieces skitter across the hot oil’s surface, reminiscent of a sporadic tap dance, I wondered why they behave that way. When I asked my father the question that every parent dreads—*why?*—he merely shrugged and told me that was just how it worked.

This dismissive shrug was the bane of my existence. Whenever I encountered a question, I loved digging my fingers deep into its roots and pulling out a single, seeded answer with *why*’s. From garlic to the existence of the universe, I naively thought it was stupid that some things are just unknown, when the answer should be right in front of us. Why did the garlic pieces dance? Maybe they simply hated fire. But *why*? How could humans have lived for eons and not identified a simple answer to why these pieces of garlic dance the way they do?

I approached every phenomenon that couldn’t be explained with a simple “oh, *actually*” with the same discontent. But as years passed, the roots of these questions became sturdier and the dirt became harder to dig through; the questions were no longer so surface-level. Garlic quickly turned into my experience at my parents’ bakery, facing the mystery of why hard work and quality didn’t automatically generate billions of dollars.

Every Monday afterschool, I used to help in the kitchen making pastries, surrounded by the smell of burnt cheesecakes and the sound of my Chinese mother correcting people for pronouncing *choux* with a hard “*k”* instead of the French way. With my parents’ promise that every strain of my muscle meant at least one dollar for us, I was satisfied that the *why* to my muscles’ aches was answered. With a clearer justification in my head, I knew what to do.

When they all inevitably went to waste—the hard work, the unpurchased cakes, the spoiled *choux*—again and again, it only led to more questions. Why did nothing I do help the slightest bit? Why even *try*? As when I had questioned the garlic, my father’s dismissive shrug confronted me in my questioning.

Frustration is a feeling I had grown accustomed to since I was young and curious. But when I kept screaming *why*’s into the void and only hearing them echo back with no real answers, I knew something needed to change. There were pieces of knowledge missing in the back of my brain; I needed them filled before I could even start on the *why*’s.

So I read and read, took apart the nuances of problems and broke them into little pieces, inspected their reflection in all angles. While I was researching the reasons why, exactly, the cakes would even spoil in the first place, I came across the Maillard reaction: the one responsible for making the garlic dance years ago, when I was just eleven years old. The *why* of a phenomenon that had lingered in the back of my mind for nearly half a decade finally settled with this discovery, along with the realization that it wasn’t just the heat, but so much more that was involved in the choreography.

I’ve learned over the years that there was no use in trying to solve a problem without understanding its nuances first. These *why*’s, although frustrating, have eventually molded me into the person I am today: someone who analyzes before taking action, undertakes opportunities to learn with an open heart, and chases after their curiosity like light at the end of the tunnel.