Open-Minded

Curious

Persistent

Ingenuitious

Outline

1. Because I was lazy and procrastinated making summer plans, my mother got annoyed with me
2. Because my mother got annoyed, I looked into a summer camp at Oxford. NTS: I was interested in Oxford because I was a grammar snob in freshman and sophomore year.
3. Because I looked into a summer camp at Oxford, I found it offered a program in molecular medicine. NTS: I was interested in molecular biology following interest in chemistry and biology the previous two years, so I looked at Oxford to see if it offered courses in biology.
4. Because I found one that offered molecular medicine, I applied to Oxford summer camp. NTS: I was interested in the subject matter and thought going to England for a summer would be interesting I applied
5. Because I applied and got in (because almost everyone got in), I went to summer camp there. NTS: My parents dropped me off and I found my room
6. Because my parents dropped me off and I found my room, I was all by myself.
7. Because I was all by myself, I was terrified of meeting new people and making friends—something I had not had to do recently due to the relatively closed-off world of my PCDS bubble
8. Because I was terrified of meeting people and making friends, I texted my friend Gaige to complain.
9. Because I texted my friend Gaige, he told me to suck it up and just go out and talk to someone.
10. Because Gaige told me to suck it up and just go out and talk to someone, I went out looking for people to meet. NTS: There was a beautiful sunny sky out with everyone gathering in an incredibly beautiful grass quad beneath the towering dormitory building directly infront of me and the impressive Harry-Potter-Esque dining room to my left.
11. Because I went out looking for people to meet, I found a group of guys all standing around looking like they didn’t really know anyone. NTS: While looking around I was overcome with incredible and almost paralyzing anxiety that made it difficult for me to look at anything bu the ground. When I say I met them what really happened was I stayed near them long enough that one of them introduced himself to me. I was a little shaky (although I like ot think decent at hiding it) and my mind was racing and confused and afraid. But I finally gathered up the courage to introduce myself to them. They were nice enough but had that common alpha-male air about them as though they were all competing for dominance with me, who didn’t care so much, in last place and it was obvious they felt a general superiority towards me. At the time I was incredibly inexperienced with girls (I had never been on a date) and so I felt my own view of myself bcoming more negative as they discussed their conquests and I felt weird because I could not join in and I wondered if that meant something was wrong with the way I was living my life.
12. Because I found a group of guys all standing around looking like they didn’t really know anyone, I decided to join them. NTS: Figured I would fit in so I joined them awkwardly.
13. Because I joined them, I walked around with them for a day, but discovered I didn’t really like them. NTS: they all were talking about nothing but trying to get laid and as much as I enjoyed hearing them talk about their conquests and how skilled they were in the art of seduction, I felt out of place, but kept with them out of necessity and fear of loneliness, even though they didn’t really seem to like me that much.
14. Because I didn’t really like them, I accepted an invitation to lunch from Heidi. NTS: The first day of my minor I met a girl named Heidi Kovalevsky who invited me to lunch with her and her friends.
15. Because I went to lunch with with them, we became friends. NTS: I felt a bit awkward and afraid at first but gradually gained confidence and over the course of a month formed an incredibly strong bond of friendship, growing my confidence to go out and meet people. When the camp ended, we spent the last night together in the largest room between us, talking and hugging and crying (except for a Canadian named Liam, who did not cry) NTS2: over the next month we spent all of our time together. They never made me feel left out as we used our group text to ensure we never had to spend much time apart. Everyone got along well and we went everywhere together. We were the envy of the other friendgroups I am told, although I rarely engaged with them as building one group of friends was enough mental exercise for one month. Heidi and I especially spent time together, even when she was working we would go down to her classroom together and talk, or when everyone else wanted to see Macbeth we went to see inception. It was the closest group of friends I had ever experienced and changed my mind about how important social interaction was to me.
16. Because we became friends, when I returned to the US, I made a conscious effort to overcome my anxiety about meeting new people. NTS: They continue over the past year to encourage my confidence and make me feel better about myself.

[Middle]

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Panicked breaths, a racing heart, and trembling arms greeted the mere thought of opening the heavy wooden door. Even the light cheerfully streaming in through the room’s single large window seemed somehow threatening.

*I should go out and meet people. What’s the worst that could happen?* A step toward the door.

*They could all hate me.* A step back.

*That won’t happen.* A large, brave step forward.

*But what if it does?*

Having won the argument, anxiety led me to text a friend in the States. “I don’t know how to go out and introduce myself to people I don’t know anyone I’m terrified what do I do I guess I’ll just stay alone in my room and do nothing for the next month but work and go to class and watch Netflix.”

“Yeah, expensive summer camp in Oxford, England must be so hard,” came the response. I could practically see his eyes rolling. “I’m sorry life is being so unfair to you.”

That effectively cut my pity party short.

*Gaige is right, you’re lucky to be here. This is what you wanted: a summer outside of your usual bubble.* Hand on the doorknob.

*Here goes nothing.*  The door swung open and shaky legs carried me toward a beautiful grassy quad nestled among the university’s towering buildings.

A group of American teenagers stood chatting in that awkward way new acquaintances do. I sidled up to them, hoping they wouldn’t question my appearance.

“Liam, from Texas,” drawled the tall, square-jawed guy next to me.

With an internal sigh of relief, I returned, “Max, from Arizona.”

Grateful not be alone, I tolerated their obnoxious behavior and comments, despite my increasing discomfort.

*Do we have to play the music this loudly?*

*What do you mean yellow pants look gay?*

*You did* ***what*** *with her?*

The atmosphere began to make me feel isolated and inferior.

*This is the group for me. As scary as it might be, I need to find new friends.*

Watching the other Social Psychology students file in for the first day of class, I began to despair. They were all girls—and nothing is scarier to a shy teenage boy than talking to unfamiliar girls.

And then in walked a guy. At last: Y chromosomes!

He sat right next to me. “Hi, I’m Andrew. And this is”—he gestured to the girl next to him—“Heidi.”

We hit it off immediately. And at the end of class, Heidi said, “Hey, Max, do you want to get lunch with us?”

I hesitated for a split second. *Do I really want to have to introduce myself to more people?* *Wouldn’t it be easier to just stick with the other guys?*

My anxiety lost the argument this time.

“Sure,” I said, “that sounds fun.”

It *was* fun. I met a group of nerdy, quirky, funny people who soon became close friends. Over the course of the next four weeks, we ate our meals together, discussed everything from movies to childhood traumas, strolled the streets of Oxford, attended camp-sponsored dance parties (in bright orange pants), and went ice skating.

It was hard to say goodbye. But when I returned to Phoenix, I made a conscious effort to be more open with my friends and to reach out to others.

I never looked back or spoke to Liam again. That lunch changed everything for me. I met a group of nerdy, quirky, and funny people like me and realized I did not need to settle for less. Over lunch we hit it off instantly and were inseparable. Before class we all met for breakfast and after for lunch, staying together for the remainder of the afternoon on our many adventures. On our final day we spent the night together, all ten of us huddled in a small room shoulder to shoulder talking for hours, crying, writing each other letters, and promising we would not let the friendship end the next day. Crying while hugging Heidi as she went to board her bus to the airport, I realized I had met We’ve since flown out to see each other a dozen times and had the greatest of times.

As much as I wanted to go, my first instinct was to decline.

Unfortunately, I had lunch plans with another group of friends, so I had to decline.

“Sure,” I said excitedly, “that sounds fun.”

But before I could do anything to stop myself I decided to risk abandoning the safety of the group I had just met for a chance at something better.

I hesitated for a split second, only because I had made plans with the other group.

even scarier than reaching out to other guys was the idea of talking to girls.

As it turned out none of my new friends were in my classes, forcing me once again to reach out. Fortunately, my Social Psychology minor had only one other guy, making introductions rather easy. From meeting him I met another friend of his named Heidi. She invited me to have lunch with her and her friends. Unfortunatley, I had lunch plans with another group of friends, so I had to decline.

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*You can do this.* A shaking teenager walks towards the beautiful grassy quad full of people placed beneath the towering down rooms and a magnificent dining room.

*Why is everyone already in groups?* I stand awkwardly next to a fellow late-comer.

After what felt like an eternity (about three seconds) of silence, he introduces himself as “Liam, from Texas.”

Fast forward one day to a ridiculous scene of a half dozen young guys strolling through the quaint, quiet streets of Oxford, boom box blasting music.

*Do we have to play the music this loud.*

Too scared to speak up and risk losing my new friends I didn’t say anything.

The discussion turned to our first-day outfits.

“Nice yellow pants,” quipped Liam, “but I want people to know I’m straight.”

*I wasn’t aware that yellow pants implied homosexuality, but all right.*

*“*Yeah, fair point,” I laughed.

His comment got to me more than I let on, and the atmosphere would only continue to make me feel even more isolated and inferior. After just one afternoon I had begun to realize this might not be the group for me.

*But what if it does? I’ll be all alone and friendless for a month.*

Having won the argument, my anxiety led me to text my friend Gaige back in the States. Surely he would help me overcome my nervousness and growing self-pity.

“They could all hate you,” my anxiety offered.

“That won’t happen.”

“But what if it does?”

Having won the argument, my anxiety led me to text my friend Gaige back in the states about my predicament. His response would give me the prod I needed to swallow my self pity:

“Yeah, expensive summer camp in Oxford, England must be so hard, I’m sorry life has been so unfair to you.”

Taking panicked breaths as my heart thrashed in its cage and my arms trembled at the mere thought of opening the heavy door to leave my small, undecorated room, I wallowed in self pity knowing I would most likely spend the month friendless and alone.

Dear Diary, today I learned that wearing yellow pants means that one is gay.

As we walked through the quaint and peaceful streets of Oxford, England blasting music from a speaker far too large, I couldn’t help but wonder, “maybe this is not the group for me.”

“Hey, Andrew, two to twenty-three isn’t a bad gender ratio when you think about it.”

“Hi, I’m Heidi,” said one of the twenty-three.

“Hi everyone, my name is Ken and I will be the instrument of torture for the molecular medicine class.”

[Beginning]

“How’s the summer planning going?” asked my mother.

“Great,” I lied.

“Well, this should be interesting,” I said to myself as my parents dropped me off in Oxford, England for a month-long summer camp, belying the fact that I had just realized I had no idea how to make friends.

“Look at them, chatting amongst themselves, smiling and laughing. They clearly hate you,” said my anxiety.