Open-Minded

Curious

Persistent

Ingenuitious

The story of a summer at camp in Oxford, England resulted in a shy young man’s learning to overcome his anxiety about meeting new people.

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.

1. 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

1. 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.

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?*

*This is not 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, to my happy small-school bubble, I made a conscious effort to be more open with my friends and to reach out to others.

One month later I step foot on a more familiar campus. Though I know most people there, my closest friends are nowhere to be found. My hands begin to shake and I feel the all too familiar urge to walk away.

*I can do this.*

My hands steady.

*They’re your friends*.

“Hey guys what’s up?”