

Marie Hua

“I’m Nobody—Who Are You?”

Massachusetts is a bookish place. I grew up there with trees and college towns and coffee shops and some lovely, ingenious, cynical people. In thirteen years, I became well acquainted with them—as well as public libraries at every town green, summer air so thick it could get your socks wet, farm to table marijuana cookbooks, crumbling Hampton factories from the 18th century, and folks who said the Pledge of Allegiance to Tom Brady. It was paradise.

In other words, Milton would have seen it coming. It took seven days for one family, one moving truck, and five chickens to make their Exodus across the country, and in that time, my world was recreated. Instead of a marsh, the new house had a mountain behind it. Instead of corner side coffee places, there were places that sold soda cocktails and bad puns. And instead of acres of woods and an old stone grotto, the new school had a church building in its backyard. I quickly determined two things. First, I was a Stranger in a Strange Land. Second, that it would be in my best interest to, much like Odysseus, be a Nobody—to enter, outwit four cycloptic AP courses, leave with a diploma, then go on with the rest of my life.

Now, the school year is just about over. As far as being a Nobody goes, I failed miserably, but through no fault of my own. As far as a diploma goes? Let’s just say it might be a close call. But, somewhat to the surprise of my past self, failure and a diploma are not all that I will walk away with, no, I will also have a handful of memories and observations. These include:

1. Minor observations: The uniforms aren’t all that bad. Cross country running in high altitudes takes your breath away. If you miss even one day of school, Things Fall Apart. Ms. is not her real name. Along with the basic structures of life, Mrs. Slade will teach you about living- about getting married on Valentine’s Day, about heart-wrenching loss- about being the Designated Driver, and about airborne guinea pigs on the freeway. Math is not simple but Mr. Watabe will try to convince you it is, and it is genuinely difficult to tell who is more of a celebrity; Kim Kardashian, Uncle Iroh, or Brandon Sanderson.

2. Next observation: It is impossible to be a Nobody at Maeser. Mostly because it's too small. There is no Hiding Place for a new Red Cross-tie Girl when your Latin class is a total of five people. But it's also because people take the effort to notice you. Maeser values connection so much that teachers will literally line you up and tell you to stare into your classmates' eyes so you can understand the importance of good eye contact. Additionally, Maeser students chose to come here. What this means is, they show up every day intentionally- no matter how tired, stressed, or behind on Socratic reading they are. They are the types of people who do things just because they can. There's an essay cafe coming up? Ok, everyone bring cake. The weather is nice? Ok, let's have class outside. It is pointless to be a Nobody because coming to Maeser makes you a Somebody.
3. And of course: Maeser is a bookish place. In about four years give or take, you will become well acquainted with the likes of Richard Parker, Atticus, the pig Napoleon and Piggy the English schoolboy, Hamlet, Achilles, Brutus and Cassius, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, a guy named Guy, Capulets, Montagues, Joads, Mr.'s Rochester and Darcy, Hester Prynne, Huck Finn, Jim, Eliza, and Gatsby. And unlike some of the other familiar faces you see every day at Maeser, these will be able to stay with you for the rest of your life.

So, it really doesn't matter if you come for seven years or ten months. Maeser changes you, like any good story. It makes you Somebody, and it gives you somewhere to turn. You're struggling with a paper on Greco-Roman philosophy? Mr. Simmons and his pseudo-library of resource files is there. You need an informed opinion on the latest American politics? Shoot Dr. Barlow an email. Through the people you meet and the literature you read, Maeser makes its way into your habits, your mentalities, and your aspirations. When you are there, it is like a city of refuge. And when you leave? When you leave, it is a reminder to make life meaningful.