**COMMON APP ESSAY - MELISSA ANASTASIA TAMIN**

Prompt #5 - “Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.”

“Dude, why is there only 5 mil here, aren’t we supposed to have 7 mil? How are we supposed to pay for the rest?” Rachel exclaimed with a slight panic in her voice as we all stood around her. “I don’t know, have the Danish students paid already? They said they have paid their share.” Bryce replies. As we ended up completing the whole bill, I watched the other party in confusion, dazed by their indifference and lack of sensibility. Being a part of this student exchange program is great and all, yet it is now tinted with occurrences which make us question if we can really build a genuine relationship with those students. Since they came to Indonesia as a response to our previous visit to Denmark, conflicts between our groups had challenged the way we perceive their personalities. I remember instances where I felt left out, just like that one night when Erica, my host, invited me out to the lounge at their dorm. The foreign Danish sentences and loud Danish music did nothing other than make me feel out of place, as no one responded to my inquiries in English.

Although unexpectedly, it was understandable that at one point the Indonesians ended up making a dedicated chat room just to rant about these annoying episodes. However, it also became more apparent to me that this is going in the wrong direction. Throughout the exchange period, I learned to walk out of my comfort zones -- in and out of the classroom -- by asking questions, being receptive to new knowledge, exchanging opinions with people bringing different perspectives, and taking matters into my own hands. Particularly for the last point, maybe it is time to step up my game: from just my own laundry to the social situation I am currently in. I made up my mind and asked Erica if she wanted to go for a swim in my neighborhood pool so that we could relax and chat. I opened by telling her how the Indonesian students felt, how the indifferent actions of the Danish students made us feel ignored and rejected, almost.

Upon hearing this, Erica apologized for how the Danish students might have made us feel and said that it was absolutely not their intention. The next thing Erica told me actually shed some light to my understanding; she said that the Danish see everyone as equal, nobody is treated special, and therefore no one should be afraid to express what one is feeling. She also mentioned that some of the Danish students weren’t that fluent in English and their hesitation might come across as indifference. Hearing this, I understood that we are just having small miscommunications, resulting from our unfamiliarity with their rather individualistic culture.

After hearing Erica’s explanation, I was relieved. I told the other Indonesian students about what Erica said and it also helped to paint a better picture of the Danish hosts in their mind. Our group chat which used to be filled with complaints about the Danish students was now about how fun the student exchange is and the various activities we got to partake in. While this resolution was in no way perfect and some still failed to understand the Danish students’ actions, we all left the student exchange learning an important value, to not be afraid of addressing the problem regardless of the conflict it may cause.

Looking back at the experience, I now realize that the trip had changed me. I became a more open-minded and tolerant person, without compromising the values I hold as true. Now, whenever I encounter change, I think twice before rejecting it. At the end of the day, I can only be grateful for this wonderful opportunity that has changed me for the better.

The courage to reach out and ask has allowed all of us to see different perspectives and really get to know the wonderful Danish students.