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The Big Transfer

"Learn by Doing, Learn by Caring". When I first stepped foot into The Nueva School, I couldn't contain my smile. The natural light let in by the giant glass panes in the foyer brought life to the artwork sprawling across the multicolored walls. Beyond the suspiciously well-maintained field, the tour guide led us to the vast gymnasium where, as students, we would engage in fulfilling, team-building sports like dodgeball and badminton. As we walked back to the main building, the blend of brutalist and modernist influences caught my eye. The teachers gave us the rundown of what we would learn and the education style of the school. When I went home that day, I already knew that this was going to be the perfect environment for me to learn, socialize, and enrich myself in.

I didn’t get in.

I thought this supposed to be was the school meant for me. Unfortunately, Nueva did not feel the same way. When I went to talk to a friend of mine who did get into Nueva, he told me: “You should've taken that test more seriously.” I couldn’t protest. I hadn’t really given it my all. And besides, how much did I really want to go there anyways? The next few months went by quickly and I still hadn’t fully internalized their rejection. I began at Sequoia High School, a public school like any other. Nothing wrong with that, right? Just a normal high schooler. Nothing wrong with just staying on the path that was decided for me. After all, it was easier to just do what everyone else told me to do.

Those dusty old Indian Red facades were my real welcome to school each morning. I was one of only two people from my middle school attending. In this sea of about two thousand others, there was nobody I could call a "friend". As I looked around me during break and lunch, it dawned on me that the social groups formed in previous schools had already cauterized into impenetrable cliques. I was alone and there was no real outlet of people for me to break into.

One remarkably unremarkable day, my mother asked that I take public transport back home. As I absentmindedly hopped on the bus, I thought about class and school in general. Today had been a day like any other at school, learning next to nothing, talking to nearly nobody, and unhappily sitting alone at break and lunch. Class was also boring and slow as usual. It felt like we could only move as fast as the slowest person. As the bus crossed the bridge to the light-blue Oracle towers, I agonized over what felt like a wasted high school life. But just then, I happened to spot a girl in a Design Tech High School hoodie getting on.

I mustered my courage, “Hey, you go to d.tech, right? Can you tell me about the school?” She looked up. “It’s very self-directed. If you wanted to get ahead in class, there’s nothing stopping you from doing so.” I had to know more. I called one of my friends who went to d.tech and explained my predicament at Sequoia. “It’s more than just self-paced learning,” my friend told me. “You get a lot of freedom to choose what you want to do if you’ve finished your work for class. We even have a machine shop that some people visit during class time!” I was intrigued. Was this going to be my ticket out of a generic high school experience? I decided to see for myself, and emailed the office of admissions to set up a day for a shadow and interview.

The scent of burnt chocolate wafted into the auto body shop of the wacky and uncharacteristic "Design Tech High School". It was a scrappy school, nowhere near as immaculate as the elite Nueva school, yet it had its charm. Chairs and tables made out of various materials and formed into odd shapes were scattered around the building seemingly with no relation to each other. There was no sunlight inside the building but it was clear to see that even the furniture would not conform to a specific theme.

After experiencing what the school was like, I walked into the office for the interview. What kinds of questions was I going to be asked? Was I the right fit for the school? I remembered the final interview at The Nueva School. Would they say that they didn’t want to accept me? The admissions officer asked me about my thoughts about the school. I was eager to answer, “I really like the concept of self-paced learning, and just in general I really want to go to school here.” This time was going to be different than Nueva. I wanted this for myself. It wasn’t my mother or friends pressuring me into going to school here. Now it was just on d.tech to see if they would let me in. Surprisingly, they answered on the spot: “Great! We’ll see you in January!” Just like that, the interview was over.

A month later, it was once again my first day of school. That is, my first day of school at d.tech. Getting on the train, I was uncertain about exactly what I was walking in to. Were social groups going to be as impenetrable as they were at Sequoia? Was I going to be the alienated transfer student amongst the masses? Even with these doubts in my head, I was still excited. Today was the day I would finally see where my choice had lead me, and no matter what happened, I was determined to see it through to the end.