At TASP, you will discuss texts and ideas in a college style seminar. You should feel comfortable thinking deeply about an issue, communicating a well‐reasoned stance, and genuinely engaging with others' positions. To that end, tell us about a time a discussion, piece of writing, movie, work of art, or other life experience changed your mind. What did you believe at first, and how were you persuaded to adopt your new viewpoint?

They say that everyone has a soulmate. They say that out there somewhere, is your other half, your one and only love, someone who matches you more perfectly than anyone else in the world. I used to believe it, but about cities rather than people. I believed that there is a perfect city for everyone, whether it’s the place they were born, or some place they discover later in life. I believed that once someone falls deeply and completely in love with a city or a place, that’s where they’ll be happiest, where their home will be for the rest of their life. For me, Vancouver, British Columbia, was the city of my dreams, my city equivalent of a soulmate. I did not think that I’d be truly content anywhere else. I believed that I was destined for Vancouver.

With that said, when I found out we were moving to Los Angeles in the summer of 2012, I was absolutely devastated. The last thing I wanted to do was leave behind the beautiful city that I’ve grown up in. I’ve been to L.A., and sure, it was a nice place to go for a vacation. It’s a nice place to go for a week and enjoy the Southern California sunshine, to obsessively scan the palm tree lined boulevards for potential celebrity sightings, but to live there indefinitely? I was deeply skeptical. What are palm trees compared to the tall and ancient maples and oaks we have in Canada? What place on earth could possibly be lovelier than Vancouver, where snowcapped mountains stand proudly in the distant horizon, where the air is always clean and fresh and filled with the smell of newly fallen rain and evergreen pines, where one can bike down to the beach and see migrating grey whales frolicking in the deep blue waters of English Bay. Los Angeles was home to many things: Hollywood, movie stars, Disneyland, but it wasn’t *my* home. Even the thought of “the happiest place on Earth” couldn’t lift my spirits. I knew in my heart that home was in Vancouver, not L.A.

Los Angeles and I, we hated each other at first sight. Within the first week of living here, I was already fed up with the city. The novelty of everything annoyed rather than delighted me. I was reluctant to adjust to new surroundings, to adapt to a new country, to meet new people. I had already been deeply integrated into my community in Vancouver. I knew where everything was, and I knew who everybody was. The idea of starting all over in a new place was extremely distasteful.

One of my most vivid memories of feeling homesick took place perhaps one or two days after initially arriving in L.A. We had run out of milk. Naturally, my mother and I got into the car and was about to set off on a quick trip to Safeway when we remembered. There were no Safeways in California. No. Safeways are Canadian, and they are thousands of kilometres away. Or should I say, thousands of *miles* away. After delving deep into Google Maps, we discovered that there was only one grocery store within a 3 mile radius of our house, and it was the Beverly Hills Whole Foods. Left with no other choice, we went to Whole Foods; we got our milk as well as various other food items. The whole affair did not take too long, but I remember being extraordinarily upset by the experience. Grocery stores are such a simple and taken-for-granted part of life that the simple fact that we didn’t even know where to find one made me feel even more alienated from a place that I had already been uncertain about. It hit me then that I truly had to start all over in terms of building a life. Knowing where the local grocery stores are is just one of the hundreds of little things that I had to learn and familiarize myself with. I was more homesick than ever and unwilling to take those steps necessary to become accustomed to L.A. life. In a city where everything was unfamiliar and everybody was a stranger, I was hesitant to dive into the unknown. I shut myself off, refusing to assimilate to life in the U.S. and trying desperately not to let go of Vancouver.

My hostility toward the city first began to wear off when school started. I discovered to my surprise that Harvard-Westlake was the refreshing change of pace that I never knew I needed. The classes were undoubtedly more difficult, but I didn’t feel like I was being challenged to an unreasonable extent; the school was a perfect Goldilocks fit. Furthermore, making friends was easier than I had expected, and these new friends were the first people who truly opened my eyes to the wonders and excitement that are unique to Los Angeles. The world around me was so much more face-paced and so much larger. I felt like the frog in a Chinese proverb that my mother once told me of. In the tale, a frog lived his entire life at the bottom of a well, believing that the little piece of sky that was visible to him was the entirety of the universe and that his well was the entire world. With much coaxing from his friends, the frog leaves his well one day to discover that the sky was in fact much larger than the little slice that he had seen at the bottom of the well and the world stretched far beyond the stone walls of his humble home. Vancouver was my well, and coming to Los Angeles was the eye-opening experience that I needed to realize the true scope of the world and how limiting and narrow my slice of this world had previously been. I was now a frog who has been exposed to the world past the city limits of Vancouver. I was now a frog who knew exactly where to find dozens of grocery stores in the L.A. country, even the ones that did not show up on Google Maps.

If familiarizing myself to my *physical* surroundings was hard, adjusting myself *culturally* was harder, and took much longer. When my biology teacher accused me of plagiarism on my lab report because I spelled the word “color” the canadian way (with a “u”), I was bitterly reminded of the cultural gap that still existed between me and my American peers. Other small habits included asking where the “washroom” was, which often resulted in looks of confusion as people attempted to figure out what I meant when I used the Canadian version of the word “restroom”. Though these exchanges were ostensibly small and insignificant, they constantly reminded me of my status as an outsider. However, at this point, I was not the same stubborn and inflexible girl that I was when I first moved to this country. No longer hostile to American society, I welcomed the chance to adapt new vocabulary and integrate myself even deeper into a community that I had now grown to accept as mine. Of course, I still preserved little pieces of my Canadian identity such as referring to the letter Z as “zed” instead of “zee”; and eventually, I learned how to incorporate American characteristics into my everyday speech and habits without having to discard the Canadian parts of me that will forever stay essential to the composition of my character and personality.

I used to long and ache for those few days of vacation when my mother and I would be able to go back to Canada. However, as time progressed, I found myself sorely missing L.A. during those weekends that we would fly back to visit Vancouver, eager to get back to the friends that I had made and the life that I had built in California. Loving a city doesn’t come automatically, it comes by being willing to embrace change and to maintain an open mind. The most important part about where you live is not its physical attractiveness but about the people there whom you come to know and love.

It wasn’t a singular event or a specific incident, but I believe that the overall experience of living in Los Angeles for the past few years has completely changed my opinion of the city as well as my general mindset toward accepting change and new things. When I look up at the sky, I no longer see the dusty and soulless grey expanse that I did before, the bleak and desolate stretch of industrial smog. Instead, I see planes heading for LAX, flying in from all over the world. I see the golden California sun proudly casting its radiant beams of light down upon the city of angels, the city in which all my friends whom I love so dearly live. I know that Los Angeles will not be my final destination in this lifetime, but I also know now that I’ll love wherever I am, as long as I am receptive to change and surrounded by people whom I love and who understand me. It’s the small steps along the way that slowly changed me from being close-minded and stubborn to being willing to accept the new and unexpected changes that are such an integral part of life.

I am no longer afraid of the unknown.