

overwhelmed

AN INTERNATIONAL GEORGIA TECH UNDERGRADUATE'S MEMOIR

chapter 1

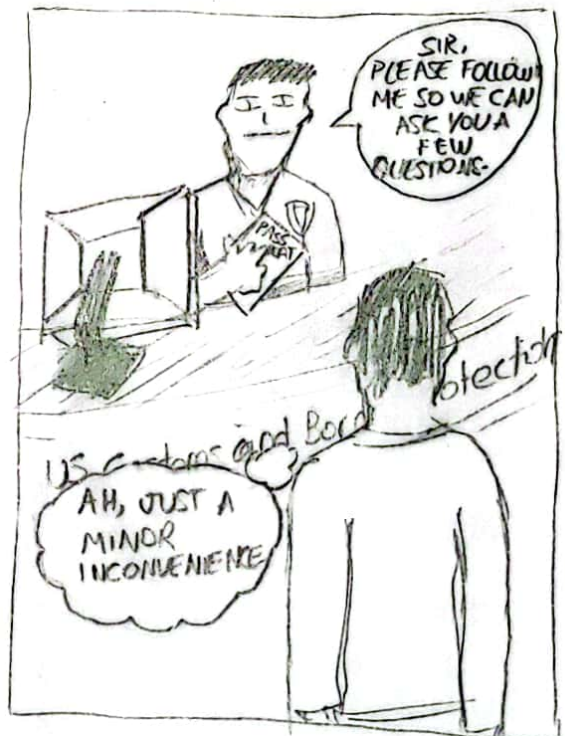
A DREAM COME TRUE

AUGUST 16, 2022. WHAT HAD SEEMED LIKE A DISTANT DREAM IN HIGH SCHOOL HAD JUST BECOME A REALITY: I WAS BEGINNING MY JOURNEY AS A COLLEGE STUDENT IN THE UNITED STATES.



TO SAY I WAS EXCITED WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT. INDEED, THE MEMORY OF THE MIND-NUMBING 15-HOUR FLIGHT THAT BROUGHT ME HERE HAD ALL BUT VANISHED..

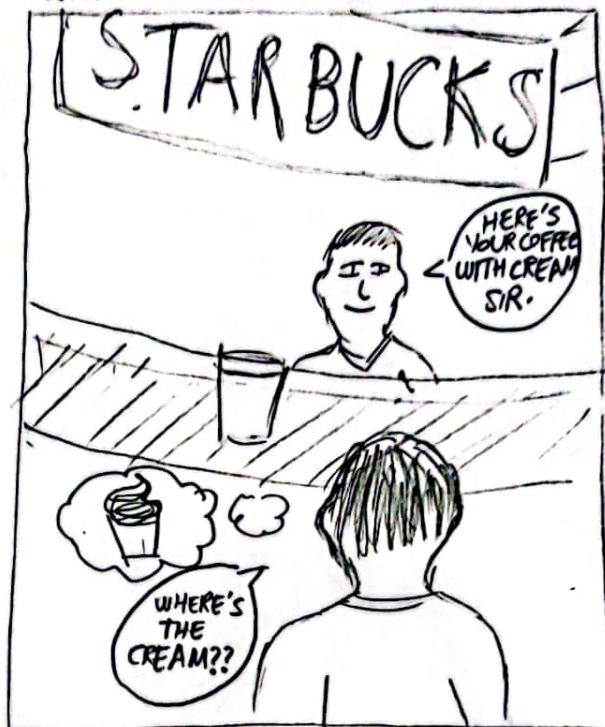
... AS HAD THE MEMORY OF BEING CALLED FOR EXTRA QUESTIONING AT THE AIRPORT.



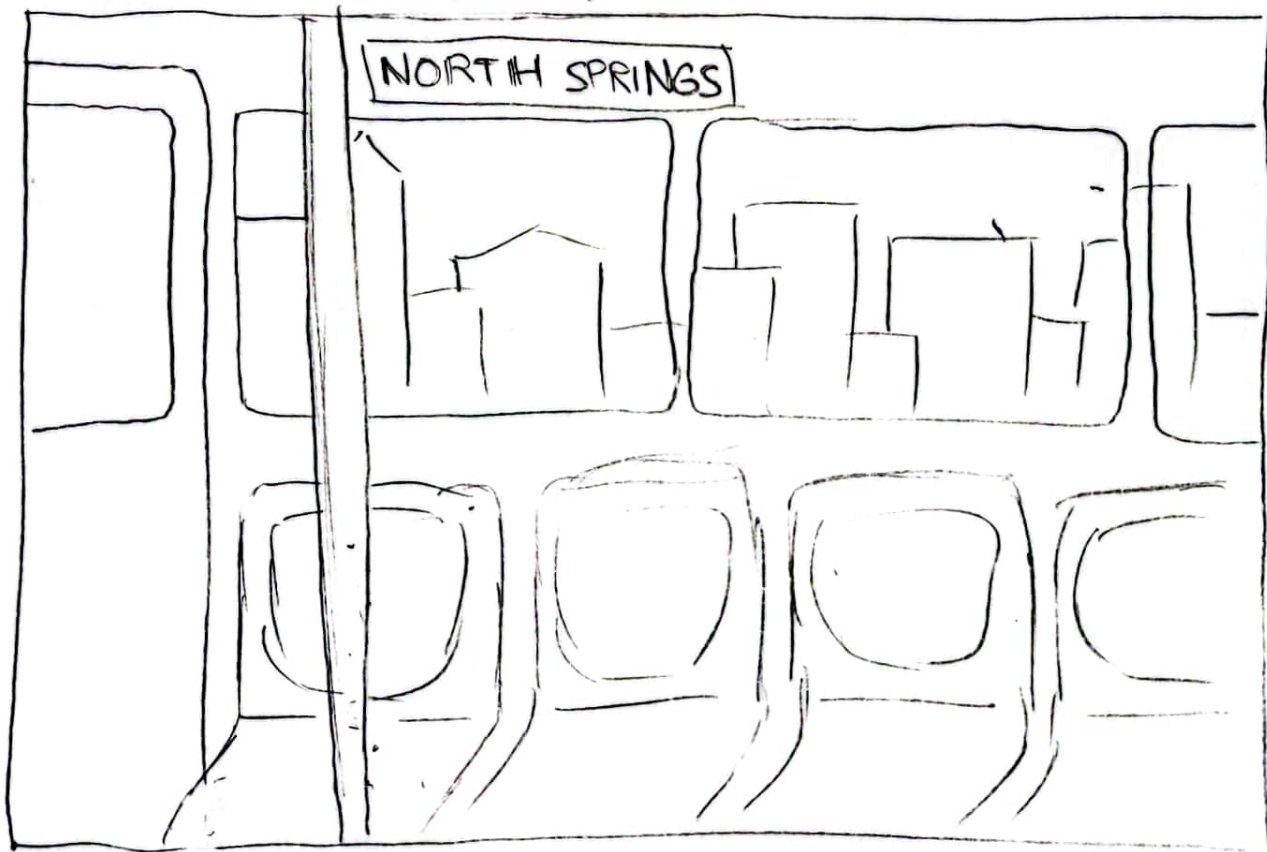
MY PARENTS HAD ACCOMPANIED ME TO ATLANTA TO HELP ME SETTLE IN AND ADJUST...



... THOUGH IT SEEMED LIKE THEY WERE JUST AS UNFAMILIAR WITH THIS PLACE AS I WAS.



AS WE WHIZZED PAST THE CITY ON THE MARTA TRAIN, I FELT A WHIRLWIND OF EMOTIONS.



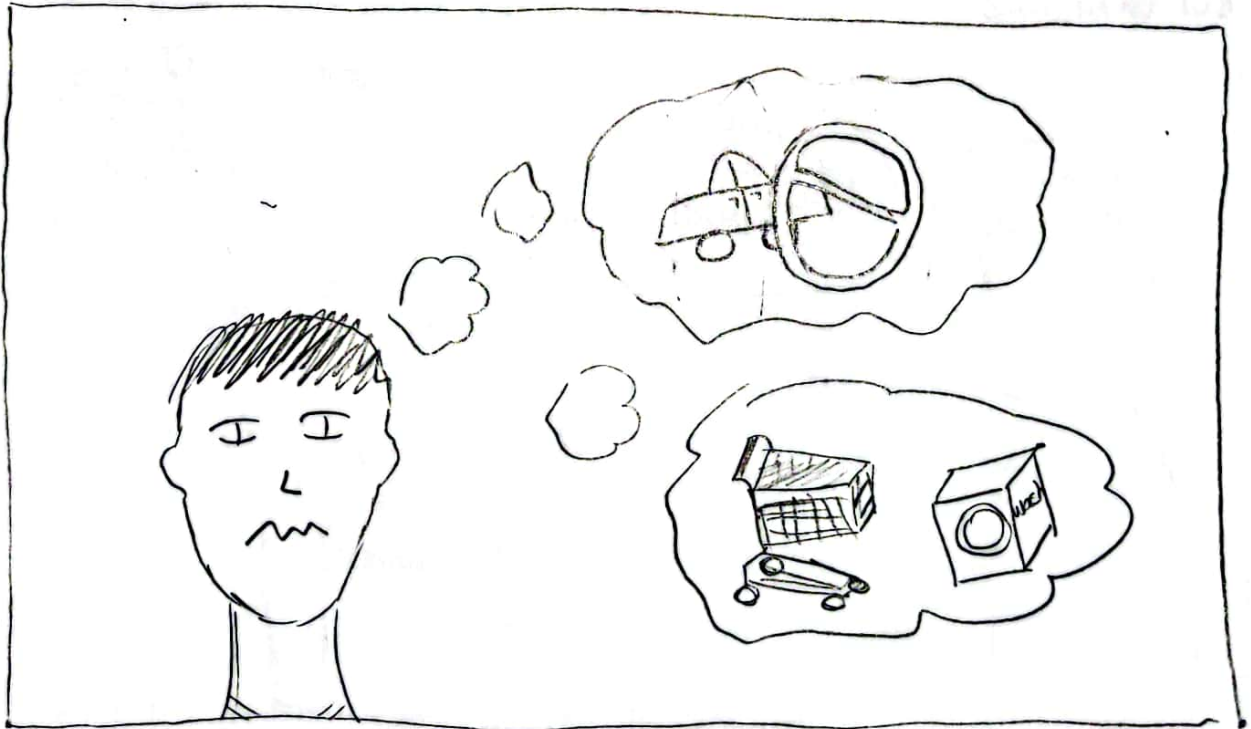
OF COURSE, I WAS EXCITED BY
WHAT I SAW.



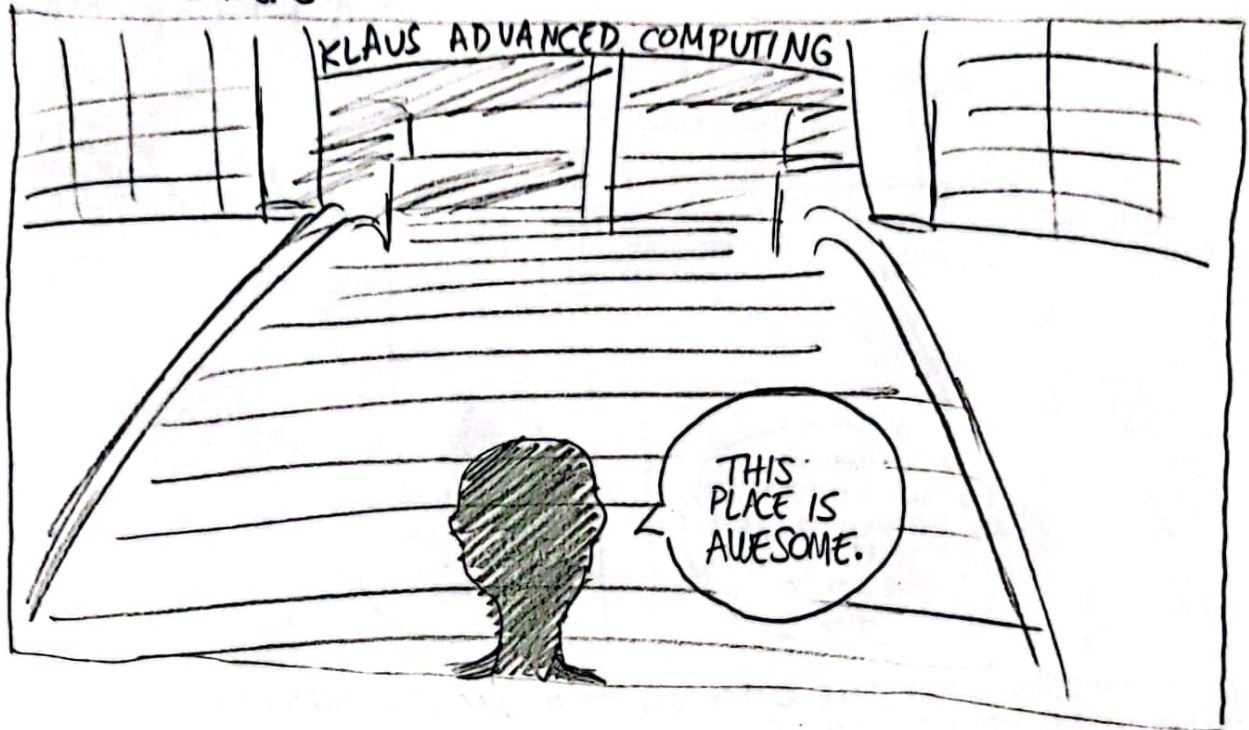
AND YET... I FELT... OVERWHELMED.



FOR A FLEETING MOMENT, I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER HOW I WAS
GOING TO NAVIGATE LIFE IN THIS SPRAWLING, UNFAMILIAR
MEGALOPOLIS ON MY OWN.



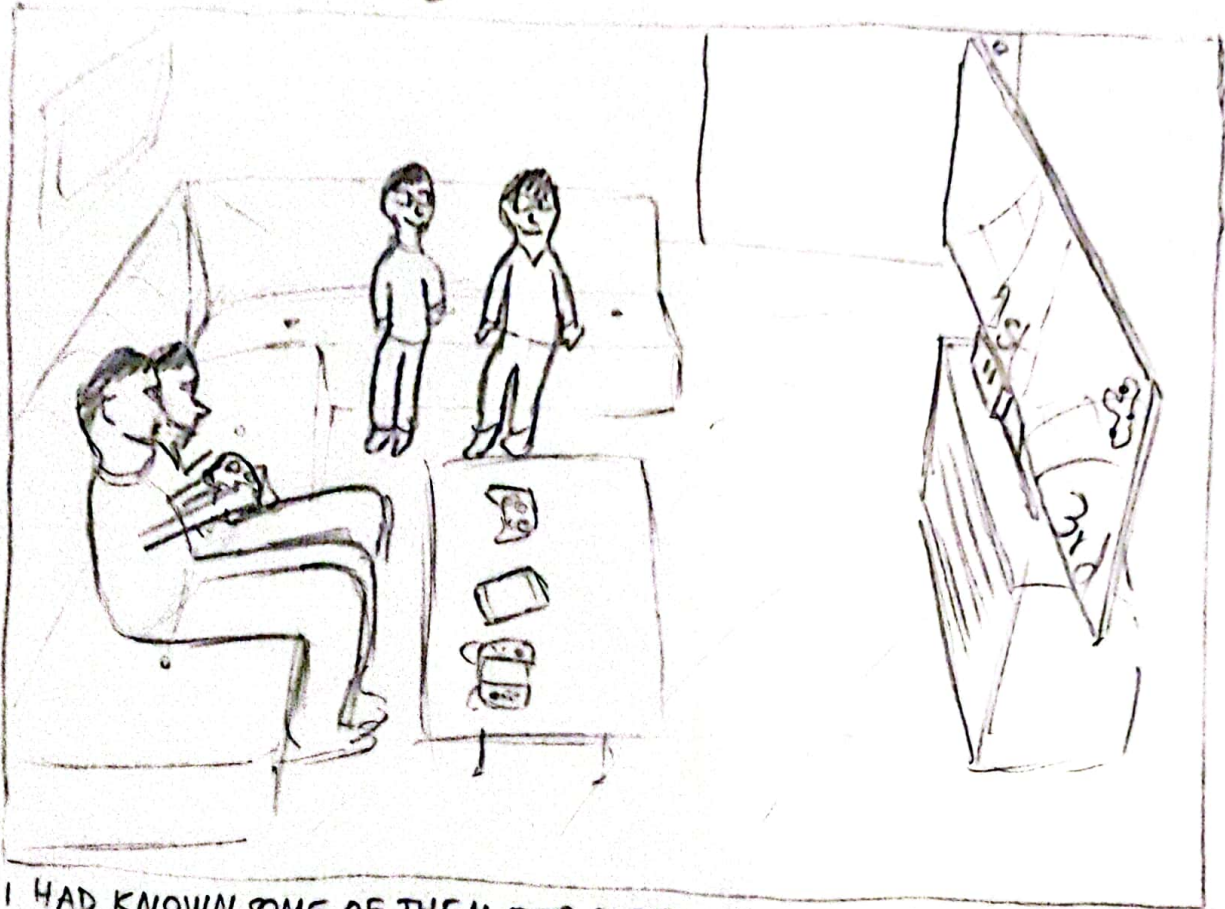
STILL, I COULDN'T STOP LOOKING FORWARD TO THE EXPERIENCES THAT WERE TO COME. AND SO, AS WE ENTERED GEORGIA TECH'S CAMPUS FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WAS TRANSFIXED BY THE THOUGHTS OF THE EXPERIENCES AND MEMORIES THAT I HOPED TO FORGE HERE.



chapter 2

EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY

THE NIGHT BEFORE I LEFT PAKISTAN TO COME TO THE US, MY FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL CAME OVER TO MY HOUSE TO HANG OUT AND SAY GOODBYE.



I HAD KNOWN SOME OF THEM FOR OVER A DECADE. SOME FOR UNDER A YEAR.

BUT WHAT DEFINED MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM WAS THAT I FELT COMFORTABLE AROUND THEM. LIKE I BELONGED.



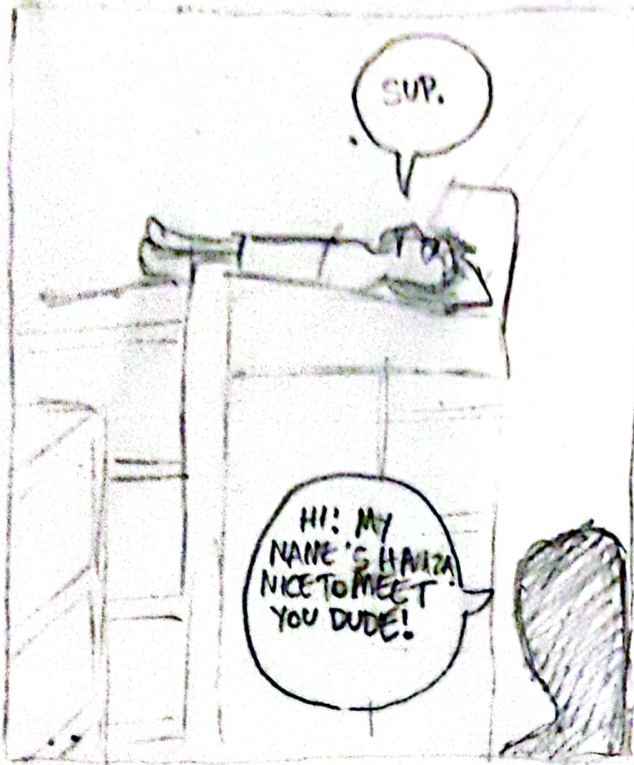
SITTING IN MY CAR ON THE WAY TO THE AIRPORT AFTER THEY LEFT, KNOWING THAT I WOULD NOT SEE THEM AGAIN FOR A LONG TIME BUT ALSO LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FRIENDS I WAS TO MAKE, I FELT AN EMOTION THAT I COULD ONLY DESCRIBE AS DEEPLY BITTER SWEET.



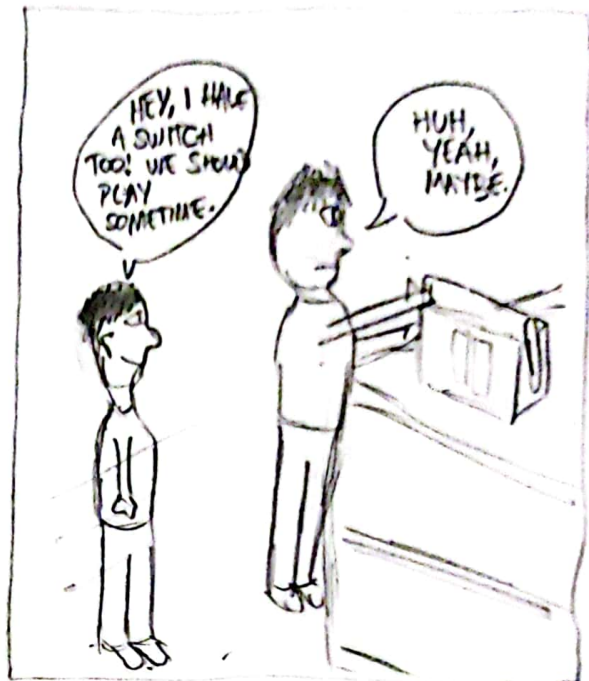
AS I WALKED WITH MY PARENTS TO MY RESIDENCE HALL FOR THE FIRST TIME, THOUGH, I WAS OVERWHELMED WITH EXCITEMENT. I WAS ABOUT TO MEET THE PEOPLE I'D BE SPENDING THE REST OF THE YEAR WITH - WHY WOULDN'T I BE EXCITED?



WELL... THAT CHANGED WHEN I MET MY ROOMMATE FOR THE FIRST TIME.



HE SEEMED RESERVED AND NOT PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN MEETING ME. I RESPECTED THIS, BUT IT WASN'T WHAT I EXPECTED.



ASSUMING THAT I WOULD EVENTUALLY GET TO KNOW HIM BETTER, I UNPACKED AND LEFT. OUTSIDE, I DECIDED TO JOIN A MEETUP WITH THE RESIDENT ASSISTANTS AND OTHER FLOORMATES IN THE LOUNGE.



AND... WELL, I DIDN'T FEEL PARTICULARLY WELCOME THERE EITHER.



THE THOUGHT THAT I WOULD SPEND EIGHT MONTHS LIVING IN THIS BUILDING LINGERED ABOVE ME LIKE A DARK CLOUD.



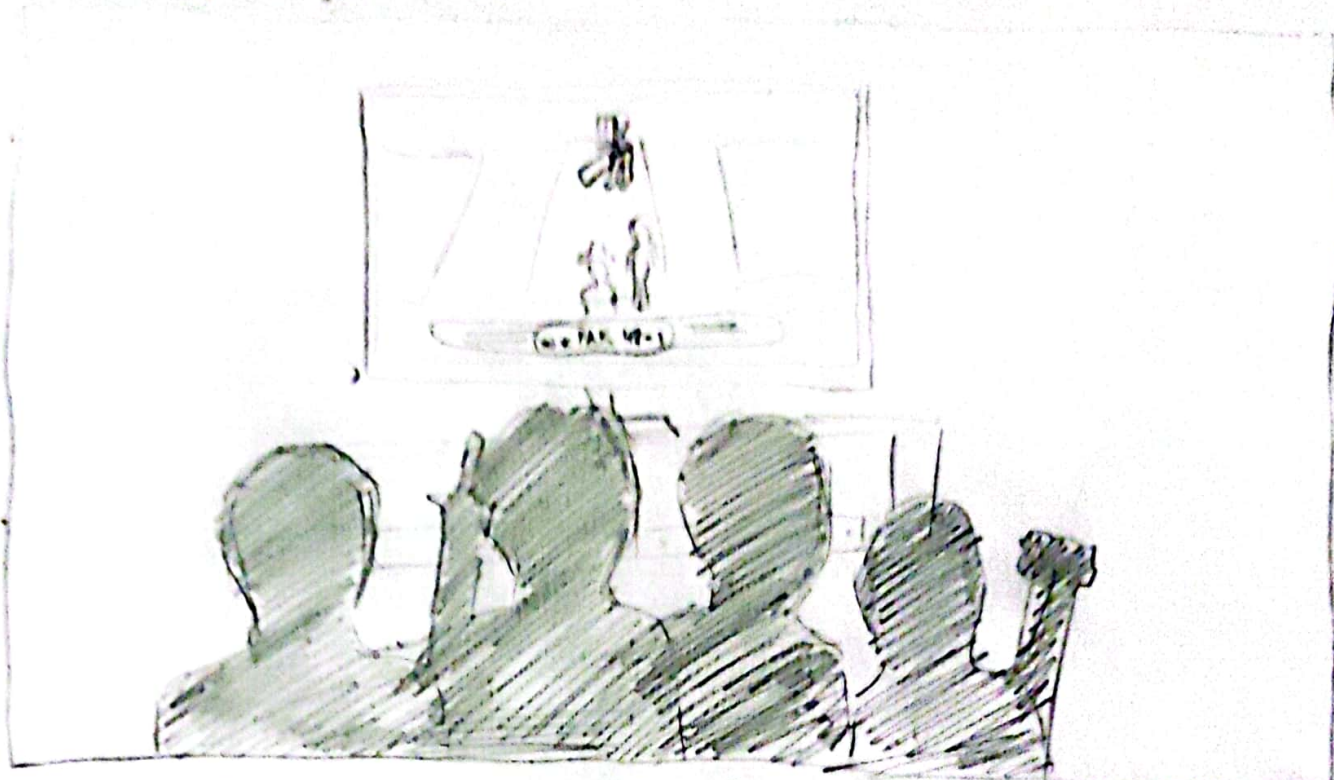
I RECALLED HOW I FELT WITH MY FRIENDS IN PAKISTAN. THIS WAS, UNEQUIVOCALLY, THE OPPOSITE FEELING. FOR THE FIRST TIME, SOMETHING FELT DEEPLY WRONG.



chapter 3

A NEW HOPE

WHILE I'M NOT A HUGE SPORTS FAN, CRICKET IS A SPORT THAT I, ALONG WITH WHAT SEEMS LIKE THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF PAKISTANIS, CANNOT RESIST WATCHING.

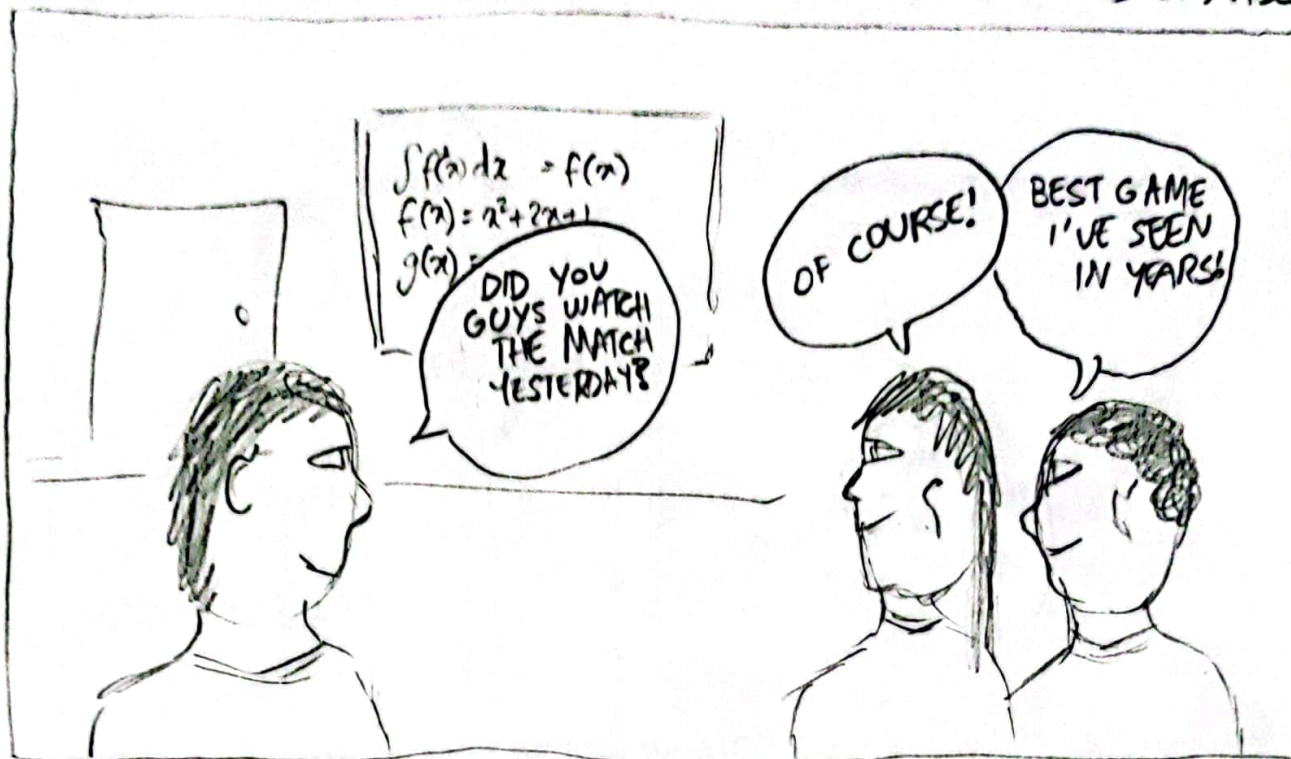


I HAVE COUNTLESS MEMORIES OF WATCHING, WITH MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY, THE MANY WINS OF THE PAKISTANI CRICKET TEAM...

...AND, OF COURSE, THE LOSSES.



WHAT MADE CRICKET SPECIAL WAS ITS ABILITY TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER. ALL OUR DIFFERENCES WOULD SEEMINGLY BE ERASED BY THE EXCITEMENT SURROUNDING A GAME. NEW FRIENDSHIPS WOULD BE MADE.

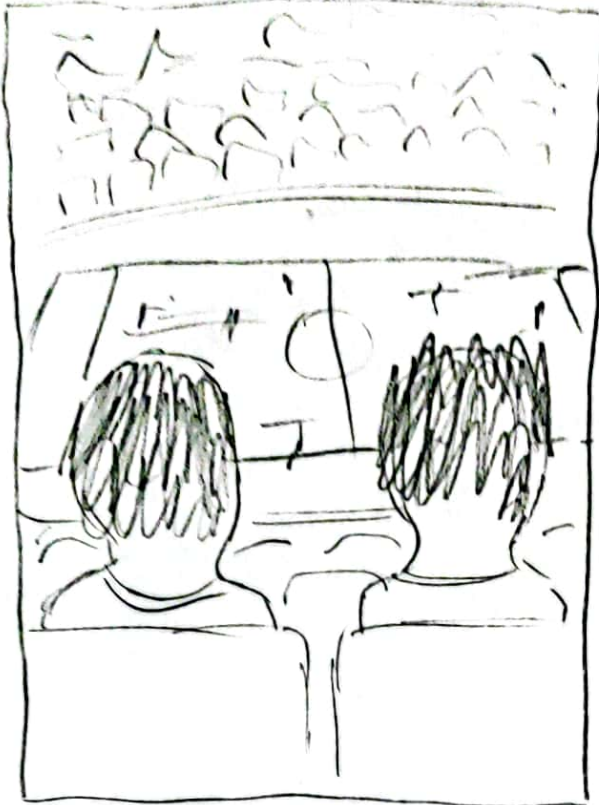


UPON MY ARRIVAL IN THE US, I QUICKLY LEARNED THAT FOOTBALL SEEMED TO BE THE EQUIVALENT GAME HERE, SO I GOT A TICKET FOR GEORGIA TECH'S UPCOMING HOME GAME...

... AND ASKED MY ROOMMATE TO COME ALONG TOO. MAYBE I'D BE ABLE TO GET TO KNOW HIM BETTER.



AT FIRST, THINGS WERE AWKWARD.



THAT WAS UNTIL I REALIZED HE WAS JUST AS UNFAMILIAR WITH THE GAME AS I WAS.



AND AS WE LEARNED THE WORKINGS OF THE GAME TOGETHER, I BEGAN TO LEARN A LOT MORE ABOUT HIM.



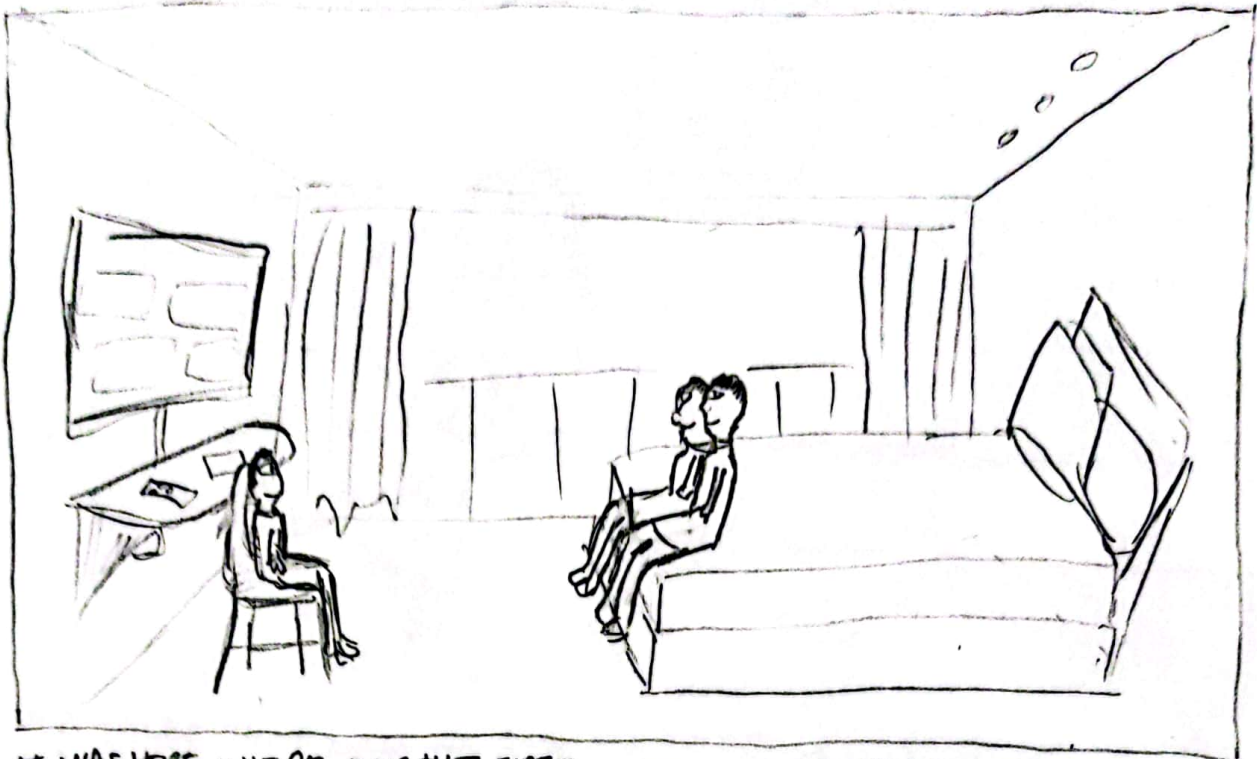
TECH LOST THE GAME, BUT I FELT LIKE I HAD MY FIRST PERSONAL VICTORY.



chapter 4

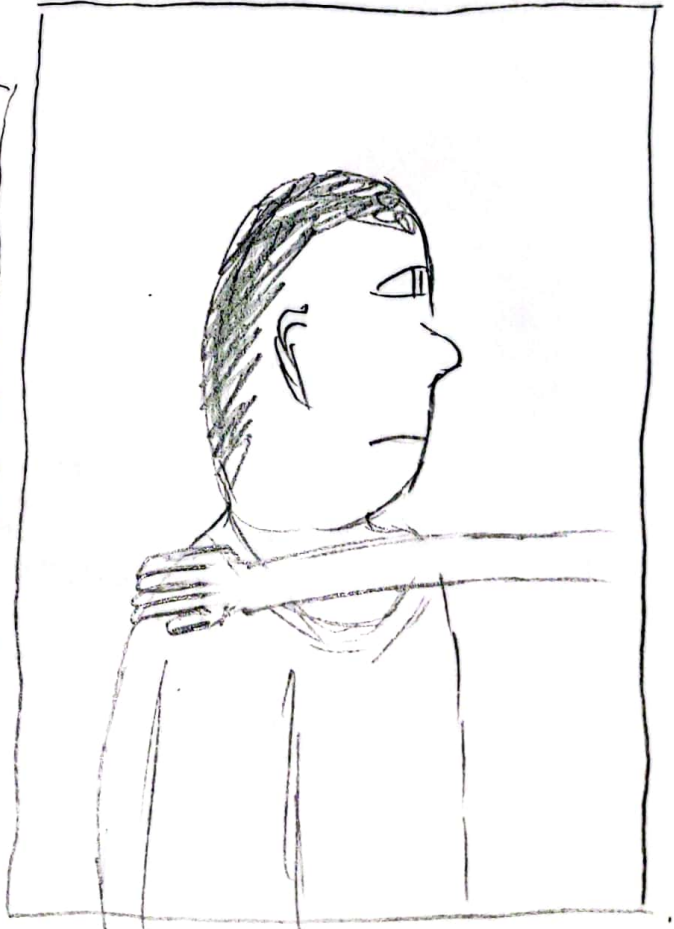
PARTING ADVICE

MY PARENTS STAYED IN ATLANTA FOR AROUND TEN DAYS, UNTIL JUST AFTER CLASSES BEGAN. THE NIGHT AFTER MY FIRST DAY OF CLASSES, I STAYED WITH THEM AT THEIR HOTEL.



IT WAS HERE WHERE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, I OPENED UP TO THEM ABOUT SOME OF MY STRUGGLES AT TECH.

OF COURSE, THEY WERE SUPPORTIVE.



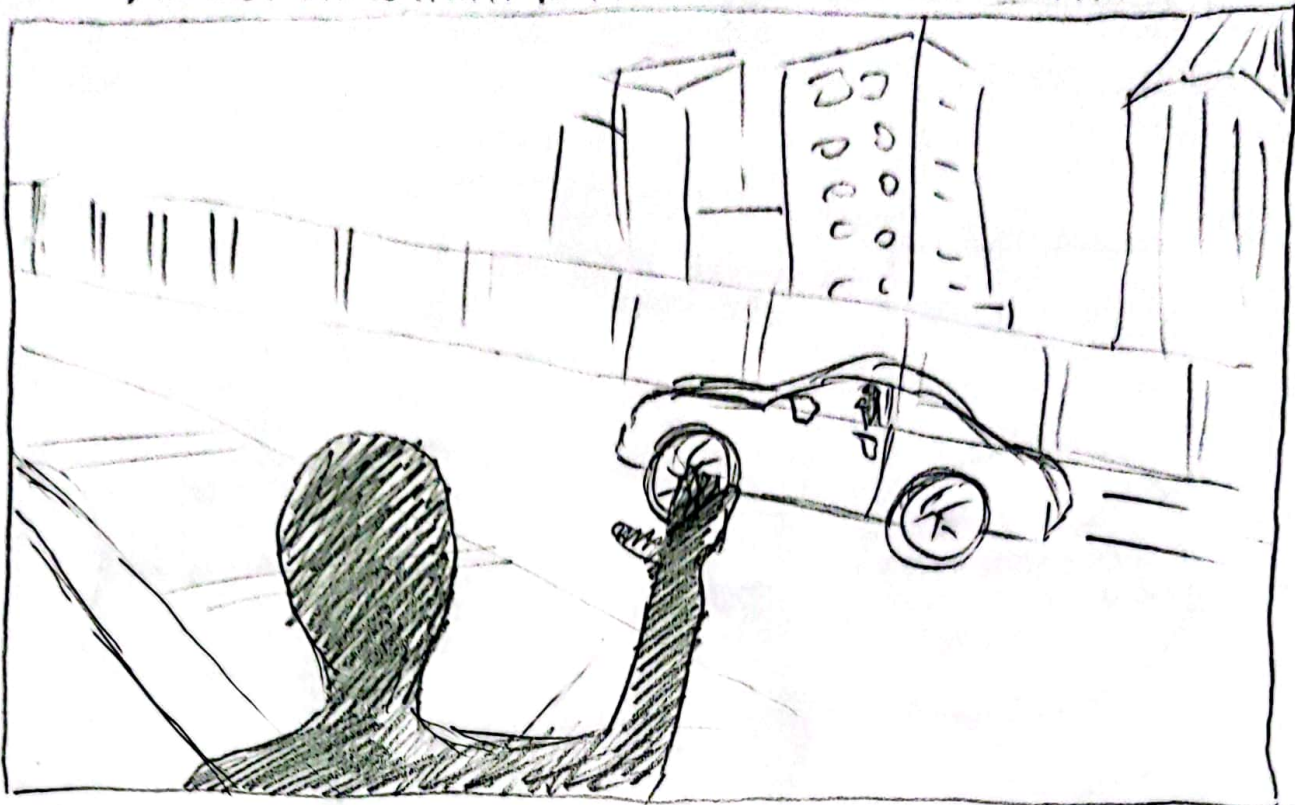
TO MY SURPRISE, THOUGH, THEY HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES TO SHARE AS WELL.



EXPERIENCES THAT MADE ME REALIZE THAT MY FEELINGS WERE VALID AND IN FACT SHARED BY OTHERS.



AND SO, AS THEY DROVE AWAY TO THE AIRPORT THE NEXT DAY...

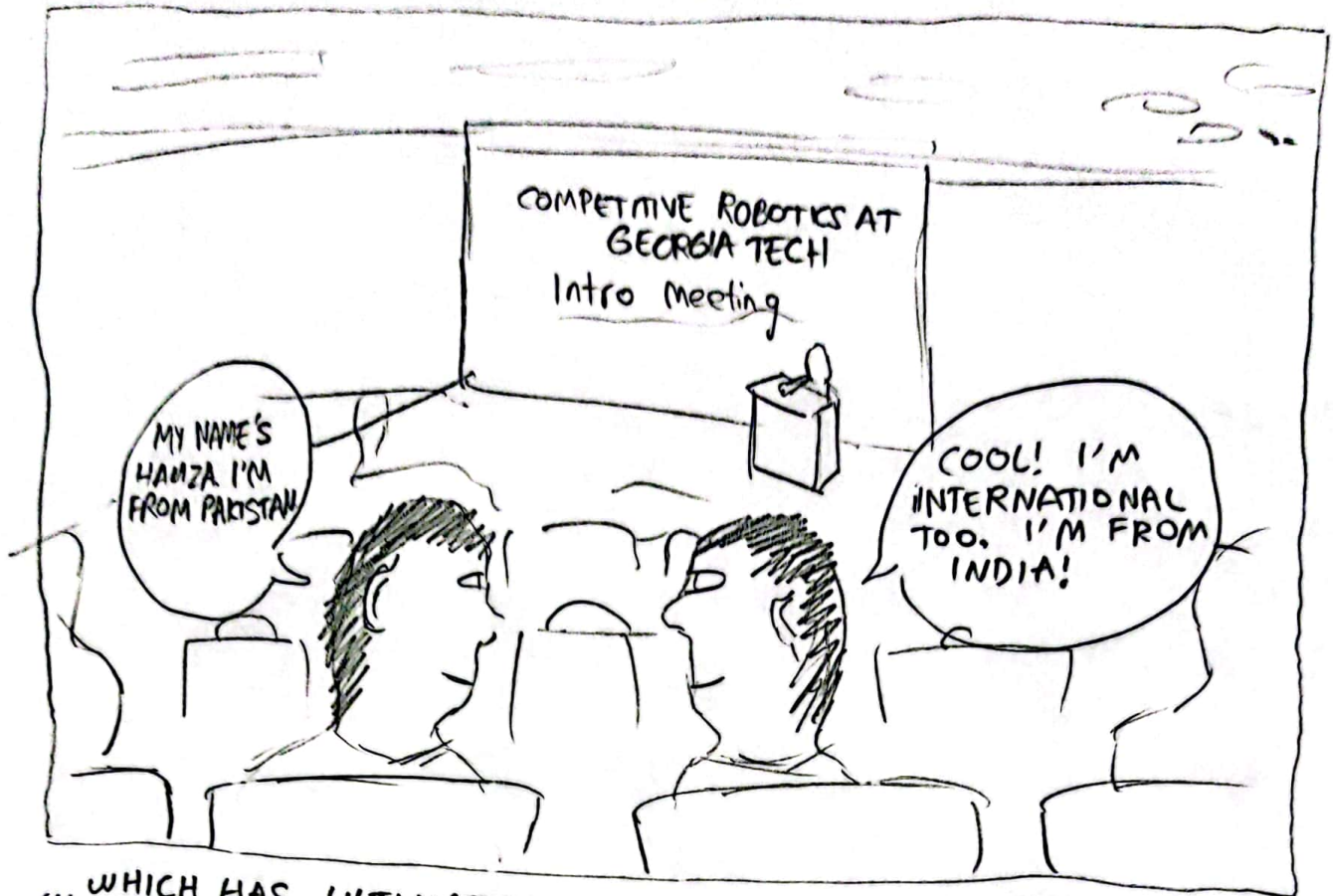


I, OF COURSE, FELT ALONE. BUT I ALSO REALIZED THAT I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE FEELING THAT WAY.

AND, IN A WAY, THAT MADE ME FEEL LESS ALONE.



IT MADE ME MORE WILLING TO REACH OUT TO PEOPLE THROUGH CLASSES, CLUBS, AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES...



... WHICH HAS, ULTIMATELY, MADE ME FEEL LIKE I BELONG HERE.

