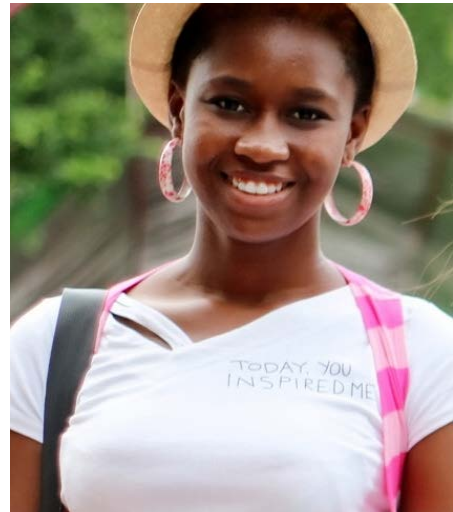


Take the plunge

By

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Changes. Adventures. First times. In the course of one life, we can have many of them and let them shape us or we can choose to close our door, stay at home and let life fly away. It is said that we can never regret what we have never experienced. However, it is also true that we are missing the best opportunities in our lives by taking no chances. Taking the plunge is often the right thing to do. Thus, I convinced myself that the best way for me to discover myself and find my way would be to get 15,000 kilometers away from everything and everyone I knew and loved. Was it scary? Terribly. After all, my family had always been my anchor and I knew I could turn to them whenever life became difficult. However, as my grandmother used to say, "Growing up is like learning to cross the streets yourself." It is unleashing the hands that held us and moving forward on our own. So I said goodbye to my loved ones on a sunny Wednesday morning, knowing that the next bed I would lie on would be somewhere in the dormitory of my new school, in a foreign country.

By the time I got on the plane, I had already stopped crying. Not because I was not sad, but simply because I had so many thoughts in my head, that my mind, shaken, somehow turned the standby mode. I went through these two days of travel as lost in the mist. What was waiting for me? Would I find my place? Who would I meet? I was scared, but I was curious, impatient, anxious, all at the same time.

Then appeared the grand entrance of the university, with the name written in big letters. My new home. Huge was the first word that came to my mind. Imposing was the second impression I got from visiting it the next day. It was like a small world and I began to wonder if I could ever find my bearings. Well, I did. Not immediately. It took me a while to stop feeling overwhelmed. It took even longer to really feel at home.

I had nothing to complain about. I had chosen to come to the National University of Chung Hsing because I knew it was the best place to study the disciplines related to agriculture. I knew that I would be offered both a broader vision and specific approaches on many topics of interest. And from there, my future would be full of possibilities, ways to engage. That is exactly what I found. Dedicated and brilliant teachers,

courses that allowed me to use critical thinking, field trips to interesting places. From my first semester, I had already had the opportunity to learn the basics of two languages and cultivate my very first plant. I was delighted to be stimulated intellectually.



It was also an open door to the world, a place where diversity was not only tolerated but encouraged. I could sit there, listen to Latin American students play guitar and sing beautiful Spanish songs. I could let my Taiwanese friend take me to eat stinky tofu, drink bubble tea. Soon enough, I would be impressed by the whole concept of night markets that the buddy program made me discover from the first week, I would try to use the few Chinese words I learned to order at school restaurant. When I decided to learn German, I met the classmate who would accompany me on a 22-day trip through Asia during my first winter vacation here. I would discover other cultures, foods, beliefs; attend an Indian festival, wear a beautiful Vietnamese dress. More unforgettable, I would go on stage, dressed in the traditional clothes of my country and dance my heart out without feeling a touch of embarrassment or timidity. These are good memories, frozen in time.





What is missing from all that? I would say real bonds, lasting friendships. These things that I have always craved for. Sometimes I would feel lonely and wonder, "Was I right to make that big jump?" "Does the possibility of an excellent university education compensate for my lost happiness?" The ideal would be to have everything: good education and the feeling of belonging, of being surrounded by friends who support me.

I cried on my birthday. I was in Taiwan for about two months and that day; I missed my family even more deeply. I had already given up hope to have a good day. However, it turned out that some of my elders, having found out that it was my birthday, decided to buy me a cake, and friends came to my room in the evening and kept me company for a while. Two of my Taiwanese friends brought me tiramisu cake. These small gestures meant the world to me. They made me realize that I had more what I thought I had. I had the most important things I dreamed of finding when I applied to NCHU.

Of course, there is the stress before each exam, the rush to submit homework on the school's online system (usually about two minutes before the deadline in my case). Some days, you wish your school life was already behind you. You spend the most time telling your friends how tired you are and they do the same. Clearly, my student life has nothing to do with the drinking and partying I saw in the movies. In fact, most of the time, it is quite demanding. But, humanly, I grew up a lot in a year here and when I'm asked, I call NCHU my home. I was able to create my own little family in NCHU and thanks to that, even the most complicated and tiring days are still worth it. When I wake up in the morning, I know that coming to NCHU was the best decision I could have made.

