

UVic Diversity Writing Contest 2012, First-Place Personal Narrative Winner (tied)

By Sepideh Heydari

Born 23-year-old

"Go find some friends Sepi. It's good for your mental health!" And who knows how I felt when these words were coming out of her mouth. What did I do in response? Nothing as I remember. What would I have done or said? She was right. I was a quiet, depressed, ignorant person in her and possibly some other people's eyes. That was the picture they had seen from me. From the very strong, mature, cheerful, and energetic me. I don't blame her. She wasn't there when I was chosen as the most hilarious, the most athletic, the most cheerful girl of the department in my graduation party. No one else here was. Yes, this isn't me. And I am blaming no one. Not even myself. How could I possibly be myself when everything else around me wasn't as before? Nothing belonged to me. These people, however nice and welcoming, this weather, however pleasant and delightful, even this very beautiful view of trees and the Pacific ocean from my window didn't seem to belong to me. Yes, the sunrise in the morning is mind-blowing. With that deep blue of the sea, dark orange above, then the yellow of the sun, over, a pale blue and beyond the infinite purple mixed with black at exactly 7:47 A.M. I could enjoy having even a hundredth of this joy if and only if I had my family next to me.

It all starts when you try to chase those little nameless shapes behind your closed eyes. And at last, tired of following and not reaching, you open your eyes. You look around and try to figure out where you are. You don't see your library with your precious books next to your bed and there is no Persian carpet on the ground. Your mom's and dad's picture isn't on your desk beside you. Sam's big first-year-old birthday photo isn't on your wall and there is no night table with your half-full orange juice and half-open "The Thorn Birds" on the top Welcome to Canada Sepi! You get up and walk in your room. Only two steps to reach your desk. You take a look at papers and books you have on the shelf. Nothing in particular. You couldn't expect yourself to bring all those books with you of course. How could you? Only one 23-kilogram luggage with a carry-on! Ok let's assume one extra luggage. You brought some Persian nuts. The perfume that your brother bought for you the last day before coming here, oh these things from your students, and those from sissy and all these things that mom bought. Oh! And who goes on such a long journey without these pictures from family? You only had 2 bags. How much of your life, love, family, country, friends, ... could you bring? I am happy you didn't bring your books Sepi. You have read them. You know them. You lived them. Now leave them. Just this one. Just this Hafiz poems. Take this. You know your soul needs it even if you don't! You packed your bags but you didn't know that no matter how much you take, there is a part of you that will always stay in your house. In your room, on the bed, next to your library. All bright pictures that you captured while living with your family. Maybe the picture of you lying on the bed holding a book waiting for dad to call for weekend's family lunch!

Of that very mature and friendly, outgoing and fun-to-be-with person, that energetic and studious student, that teacher!, a girl came to Canada. A girl who thought :

"Wherever I am, let me be!

The Sky is mine.

The windows, the mind, the air, love, earth, are all mine.

What does it matter

if mushrooms of nostalgia

grow from time to time?"

But this girl didn't know and in not a tiny moment of her dreams she could imagine that it matters! Nostalgia is all that matters. She didn't think of that. She thought if she was strong enough before, if she was previously known to be a role model for those even older than her, if she was thought to be nice and mature, friendly and supportive, she can remain the same. She didn't know how every day of living on her own, without the support of family and friends, without knowing anyone who can make her feel better when thinking of, can look like. She didn't know what being alone in a crowded room means. Yes she had read a lot. But now she knows every day of living with nostalgia is "a hundred years of solitude". At first you do well in finding friends. They are all nice and kind. You talk, you laugh, you hang out, you sometimes think about the culture shock that everyone talks about. But everything is fine and you think you have found "The Mystery of Solitaire!". As time passes you become more aware of the deep diversity between you and others. Now you are you and everyone else is others. You want to make sure that every attachment and friendship you have is because you like it to be that way. Not that you need it to be the way it is. Because any needed thing can be thrown away when the necessity is obviated. All of a sudden you feel like detaching every tie you had and begin everything from the scratch. You want to lock all doors to yourself to see who bothers himself finding a key to your life. You become tired of being strong. You are sick of fake smiles you wear in front of others. You are sick of dealing with problems but dancing when Skyping with parents. You are tired of trying and yet getting more distant from friends. You realize the differences. They don't ask you out as often as before because you don't share common interests. You don't go to bars. They don't know the crazy girl inside you because the only crazy thing they know to do is drinking and clubing and you don't drink. You feel lonelier when your hi's and bye's aren't answered. Everything gets worse when the residence office announces that you need to vacate your room during holidays! At the time that people are with their families you should be thinking of where to live and what to eat. Because your room doesn't have kitchen. You thought you were mature that you were studying and teaching at the same time for 4 years. You thought you are strong and knowledgeable that could be admitted to UVic and go through all the difficulties that you went through. How wrong you were. Yes, that was maturity and that was strength but in a different context. You had your beloved family to whom you were insanely attached and with whom you shared all good moments of life. Maturity had a different meaning there. Here, among these people you are not you. You feel weak. You cry just like "when Nietzsche wept"! You think of going back, because in the harsh time of life, in the middle of night, when wind whistles blatantly and trees move violently, when rain hits your window arbitrarily, at the new year's eve, you think of yourself as a piece of dry wood "gone with the wind". You stare at the rain-drops hitting the window. Tears in your eyes and you murmur to yourself: "daddy... daddy?... DADDY?". He used to answer "daddy's here sweetie" every time you called! He is not there. No one else is. You look around. When there is nothing left but God, then for the first time you know God is enough. It was "Siddhartha" who started the journey alone and became the Buddha. You made some mistakes. You sometimes became weak. You assumed wrong people as friends. But that is fine. You got A+ in all your courses! You were just waiting for your "Narcissus" to come and preach. You have come a long way here. If you take pride in what you achieve then go ahead and compensate for every moment that you sidestepped from your path. "The Alchemist" said when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you achieve it. My "Narcissus" came. God sent him for me. HE says he has sent signs in sky and Earth for those who think. I saw His signs in Natasha's laughter after her sorrow. When she came to my room crying and left

laughing. I see it in Caitlyn's eyes when she invites me for tea. I see it in sun when it lightens my room before anything else in Victoria. I see it in that leaf of tree that landed on my right shoulder when rain was hiding my tears. I see it in that woman's smile who tries to teach me how to use something I haven't used before. The sign was when I danced again. When I played tennis again. And that's how I started to live the life again. That's how I was born.

These days I am more myself. I see beauties of this city and its people. I have grown up. Grown up enough to release the child inside me. Grown up to see how generously people share smiles. I am the cheerful and the hilarious one again. That's right! Strangers still think I am quiet. But closer people know the crazy Sepi. After all, you are "Funny in Farsi!". People come to me when they have problems. They come to me when they want support. How ungrateful I was when I was complaining about these. I should have been more thankful as the saying says: " Thank God I have problems from time to time, because I can know that I don't have problems at other times. Thank God I become sick sometimes, because then I know I am healthy most of the times. Thank God people come to me only when they have problems. This shows that they consider me as a candle that enlightens their way in darkness".

It is not your fault Sepi if someone thinks you need to be friends with those you don't like to improve your mental health. They think differently. You don't have to be accepted and loved by all. This is what you can learn and who knows the cost of this lesson better than you. You learned that being your true self is the easiest and yet the hardest thing you can do. If your friends leave you when they know you, let them leave. Embrace loneliness cause then you know that those who come close like you the way you are. And this is life. Life is listening to people, hearing them, accepting their beliefs and thoughts, culture and background, even if not agreeing with them. You are here to achieve a goal, to make a change and make this world a better place to live in. Start with yourself. You should be the change you want to see in world.