

Long day by Ji-Hye, Kim

I usually wake up at 6am pretty easily, but on the first day of school I found myself struggling to get up. I think the reason was because I had to go to school. I wasn't just going to high school or ELTI (English Language Training Institute), it was college. I was really excited about starting my college career, but felt nervous at the same time.

As I left my house and drove on the highway, I found that it was crowded and busy with lots of cars. It was my first time driving to campus, so it was difficult to find a parking spot. After parking my car, I tried to find my first classroom. Suddenly, everything on campus seemed unfamiliar to me, such as looking for my classes, meeting new people, and even walking on campus. I found this strange because I had already been attending this school for a year while learning English.

First, I arrived at my English 1101 class. There were about ten people in the class, all of whom were American. I didn't want to be intimidated by the situation. Actually, I don't speak English very well, but I tried to be bold and take pride in my speaking skills. When I entered the classroom, that mindset suddenly disappeared. I felt like I was all alone. When the professor entered the room, she gave me the impression of my sweet grandmother. She started to introduce the English syllabus with her good wit as everybody chuckled at her funny jokes. I could not understand her jokes but I smiled anyway, imitating the other students. Although I was smiling on the outside, I felt something empty inside of me.

I realized that the teaching methods in Korea and America were totally different. In Korea, students would just sit quietly and listen to the teacher's lecture. But in America, the teacher encourages the students to express their thoughts and opinions. I sometimes even saw a

student argue with their professor if they had conflicting views on a certain topic. All of this was very unfamiliar to me.

When I saw native students, I was envious of their confidence and their ability to speak English with such fluency. They were all able to ask the professors questions and talk in front of the other students so easily. I had the desire to act like they did, but I was limited by my lack of confidence.

On the second day of English class, I was slightly intimidated to go to class. There were a few classmates who were joking around with each other, but I could not join them. The professor lightly walked in to the classroom and it was time for class to start. I took a seat in the front row, because I wanted to show her that I was an attentive listener and good student. I tried to focus on what she was saying. Suddenly, she began asking the class questions from the homework assignment. As my turn to answer a question approached, my heart beat started racing. When she finally asked me the question, I couldn't understand it. The class was silent for about thirty seconds and I broke into a cold sweat because of my embarrassment. Everyone in the class, including other international students, answered that question. After class ended, I was tired and so many questions were racing through my head. I started to question myself asking, "Why am I here? Can I handle college in America? Can I?" I obviously must have had some sort of passion or reason for coming to America for college.

When I was in Korea, I majored in vocal music. Music has been such a big part of my life ever since I was young and I feel like I cannot live without music. However, I eventually had to give up my dreams of being a singer because of a problem with my jaw. My doctor strongly suggested that I give up singing. I wasn't shocked when he told me, and I thought that I would be okay even though I couldn't sing. But as time went on, I began to feel emptiness. Not being able

to sing affected me more than I thought it would. That is why I decided to come to America. Before I left Korea, I pledged to myself that I was going to succeed and not let things like weakness, laziness, and carelessness impact the decisions that I make or the person that I will become. However, I have realized through my experiences living in America that overcoming these things are very difficult and takes a lot of time and patience. I felt like I was losing my mind, and I was extremely overwhelmed by college.

A few days ago, we had an oral presentation, but half of the students were absent. When I was in front of my classmates and teacher, I was afraid, but I trusted myself and believed that I could do it, because I had prepared a lot. I spoke up, and I introduced my topic, explained some information, and gave my opinion. I received applause from my professor and my classmates. From a third person's perspective, it would seem like nothing special but after my presentation, I felt so proud of myself and happy the whole day. That experience really helped boost my self confidence.

It has been almost two months since I started attending college. Sometimes I feel extremely frustrated, nervous, afraid, or even lonely. But I have learned a lot about American culture, how to speak in front of people, and especially how to endure hard times. Everyone can fall down in a hard situation. However, the important thing is finding a way to always stand back up. No matter what happens in our lives, I strongly believe that any experience, good or bad, teaches us an important lesson in our lives.