

LIVE AS WEEDS

by

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[Assignment: How do we learn the practical, necessary lessons of life? Develop a personal narrative in which you describe the process by which you learned a "life lesson."]

"Live as weeds," said my father to me before I left Japan for the United States last May. I have still not figured out what my father meant by the words nor have I discovered who I am. Striving to learn who I am, I have been harming people who had no intention to bother me and who even tried to encourage me. It's been only eight months since I came to Valparaíso; however, I would like to proclaim who I am from what I have learned through this period of time. Even today I continue to ask myself, "Am I living as weeds?"

On a sunny day of May, 1995, I arrived at the Valparaíso University campus. Looking up at a sapphire blue sky, I saw several jet streams cross each other. I perceived the white jet streams in the clear sky as a prospect of my future in Valparaíso where I would start a new life. I straightened up my back and inhaled the air of May which I noticed was different from a scent of May in the area of Japan where I had grown up. Fragrant olives around my house would exhilarate me and make me take light steps as if a ballerina, but a dusty blast blew my nostalgia away to the other side of the earth.

I was too excited about being in the United States to foresee what I would have to go through soon. During my study of English at Interlink Language Center on Valparaíso University campus from May to July, I was doing so well in English that I didn't even feel anxious about living in another culture. Besides, I had stayed in Canada for a while. I had no fear of making new friends with international students and Americans, ordering the extra value meal at McDonald's, or taking a bicycle around the town. I was confident enough to be convinced that I wouldn't have to confront many obstacles after I enrolled in Valparaíso University in September. I behaved as though the earth were revolving around me, being disrespectful to other students whose English had improved less than mine at that time, and I was ungrateful to the American culture that I was experiencing. I didn't even recognize my disgusting attitude that would cause me to struggle with the relationships with my friends afterwards.

At the end of August such a surprising change arrived on campus. Though I had seen a few American students on campus during the summer, it was amazing to view full parking lots and crowds of students scattering over campus like ants. I simmered with great numbers of incentives for my success. It was still hot like summer even though cool

breezes wafted my hair. I looked up at a sunny sky and witnessed jet streams which were disappearing.

Classes started. In every class I was one of a few international students or the only one. After a while I learned that my English wasn't proficient enough to understand academic courses well. I was very discouraged and my motivation was blown out as a candle flame by my relentless sighs. Since then I have felt terribly intimidated because everyone else in my classes seemed much smarter than me, and I lost confidence in my ability to continue with my studies. Moreover, being the only Asian in classes made me feel bad with who I was. Neither did I speak up for myself, nor I did ask any questions when I didn't understand lectures.

As leaves were turning yellow, orange and cinnabar red, everything looked and moved in a sepia color film as if I had been color-blinded. I gazed at a heavy, dim sky, and inside my heart was grey. There were moments that the sun in my heart gleamed; then mist and clouds screened it in a moment. I was extremely emotional so that I could laugh and burst into tears in a second. Since I didn't want to be drowned in loneliness, I started to get involved with so many activities on and off campus that I couldn't handle it. I broke promises, lied to excuse myself for not attending the activities, and procrastinated on assignments. I knew I was going out of my mind. I was habitually lying and sarcastically showing disrespect to my friends. I didn't even understand what I was pondering or demonstrating. I felt hopeless, discontented and sorry for myself. With autumn leaves falling, I was never certain that I would be able to overcome my desperate self.

All grasses died, and snow started to fall. I could glance at empty nests on frosted, bare trees. I always looked down and walked as if I were ashamed to look into a person's eyes. One cold day, a blast swayed meager trees and snowy breezes blew over my face so that I had to blink. When I was looking down on the ground trying to protect myself from an attack of freezing wind, I glimpsed a weed under the snow just ahead of my foot. I turned back and realized that I had stamped on weeds. They seemed to be still alive in the frozen soil, aside from the fact that they were stepped on and buried under the ground by my feet. "Live as weeds." The words suddenly hit me. I gradually lifted my head toward a low, gloomy sky, and I was determined that the gleam of the sun in my heart would never be screened.

Actually, nobody stepped on me but myself. I didn't love, forgive, or believe in me, who was actually as weak as others. Not only did I not accept who I was, but also I did not appreciate where I was from. At the same time I was degrading other cultures and criticizing people.

Now I have started to admit that I am imperfect, weak and selfish. There are many things that I can do no better than others can, as well as some things that I can do better than others can. I will reward the best that I can do. I may be stepped on, covered with soil or snow sometime. Even I may be seized out of the ground by a stream of rain like an unrooted weed, but I will continue living as weeds, rooting in the deep ground where I was brought up and looking up at the sky.