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### *Change Is a Journey*

It is hard to believe how a huge change in my life all started with a passing comment by a friend. Before that moment my life had been the figment of routine, I had been at the same school day in day out for over 11 years, the majority of my lifetime and only averaging about 2 sick days per year. I had grown very used to every single in and out of my school life. I had been there for ups and downs, people coming and people leaving. All that started to change after my friend spoke to me though. It was nothing particularly special she said to me, nothing you would suspect could be life changing in and of itself, but it was the beginning. She told me that one of the highly regarded, educated and ranked teachers in the school would like to see me. This teacher was not a man to demand you see him but more saw everyone as his equal and treated you accordingly so would ask you to see him when you have time. I did have the quick mind flash that it could be over something bad, but I couldn't think of anything so was more interested as to what he would want to see me for, and why it would come from a friend to mention I need to see him, clearly it was nothing terrible or I would have been informed by a member of staff.

When I reached his office I was welcomed with a fairly unpredictable proposition. He told me that I had been nominated by my teachers along with two other students to have the opportunity to apply for a multi-thousand dollar scholarship program. Not just any scholarship program however, one that would have me leave home, leave my family, leave my school, leave Sydney, leave my state, leave Australia, leave the Southern Hemisphere all together and go to the other side of the world for a year to study in a leading private school in the USA.

I feel that to the average person the idea of leaving everything, everyone you know, and getting on a plane to the other side of the world to start a fresh would be scary. The thought that when you arrive in this new country you will know absolutely nobody; no one will recognize you or know your name. This thought to me was exciting. It was a chance to get away from all the buildup of frustration and pressures which everyday life had brought and just have a new beginning. There were many things I felt would be great to get away from and surprisingly one of them was my friends.

I had for a while not really felt like I fitted in at my school, I had plenty of friends and lots of people I would say I was very close to, but that doesn't mean you feel like you fit. At my school there are lots of very distinct groups who have their set members and who always hang out together. The average person is a member of 1 and maybe sometimes 2 groups. I was part of probably around 6 groups. I think the reason for this was that I befriended individuals and not necessarily the group they were in. There was always something about the group which made me feel uncomfortable from them openly despising me, to being seen as on a pedestal above them, to just generally feeling they weren't my kind of people. Because I was friends with so many people, I was regularly sought out over issues in the hope I could help fix them, or just being caught up the middle of them trying not to take sides.

After being at the same school for 12 years it had become pretty border line frustrating. Every day would become the same, same routine day in, day out, week in week out, year in year out. I had got to know the ins and outs of the school so well it was ridiculous. I wanted change. I wanted to break free of all the problems and difficulties such long and complicated friendships had brought about. I wanted to free myself of all the expectations and assumptions people had put on me over the years. People put expectations on people, to the way they appear, to the way they talk, to the way they behave and after a while I feel it starts to change that person into someone else. Someone everyone expects. When I was handed an opportunity to release myself from all the years of expectations and go and be free to be me, I embraced it with full force. I wanted to go and discover what sort of person I am; I wanted to be free to impress on people the sort of person I am not who they think I am.

Not of course it wasn't just as simple as saying yes I'll take it, I had to go through numerous stages of rigorous knock-outs as they tried to narrow down the 1500+ applicants into 120 accepted students. Eventually I heard back from them that I had been accepted, and not only accepted by chosen as 1 of 4 students who would receive a full scholarship paying for all my school expenses. I know I was supposed to really sit down and consider all ramifications of both sides before deciding to take it or not, I knew all along that I would accept, but took a few days to please my parents.

So I set off on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2009 on my new adventure, I find it strange that I wasn't scared or upset about leaving my family and friends, I felt at the time it must have just been adrenaline. Now looking back 8 months later I feel guilt over the fact I still don't strongly miss anyone. I think I have become so adapted to my new life that I have forgotten what I am missing back home. I have good new friends so I don't think of the old ones. I have found a new family inside my friends, I wake up surrounded by them, eat breakfast with them, after school I hang out with them, practice sports with them, then go to bed after seeing them again. I think that if you get yourself busy enough and adapt enough then you forget about home, you do not feel out of place, you feel at home so why would you think about home?

It's strange to think about how as little a time as 8 months, 2 thirds of a year, can change you. I feel more free, I do not feel like I have people who look down on my actions and say "that's not a James thing to do". I came to this new land with the intent of rediscovering the true me and I think I've found it. I feel a lot happier with myself and life in general.

I have been trying to teach myself out of instincts, everybody does things instinctually and it is often hard to override. Everyone has moments when they are about to do something but stop because they fear people would look badly upon them for it or people would not approve. It is those moments I try to eliminate; I want to be free to do as I wish without fear of people's judgments on me. It was for this very reason that I decided to dye my hair blue. I wanted to do something outrageous, something that would make me stand out from the average person and be seen. I hate to be seen as part of the crowd, classified as an average person. I wanted to go a little crazy and just enjoy life, I decided to veto my social objection and just do it. The day after I dyed it I was asked by countless people "Why did you dye your hair blue?" to which I responded to every single one "Why not?" I want to make the most of life and I don't want to be weighed down by

others opinions or remarks, what gives them the right to limit another person from behaving the way they want to? It is because of this I never feel like I'm have a bad day, I always find something good in my day to be grateful for. I think every day I feel great from when I wake up to when I go to sleep because I really am me, not what others want me to be, but who I truly deep down want to be. I really think that without this time abroad away from all the old havoc of my life I wouldn't have had the opportunity to let go of everything and really find a person I am happy to live the life of.