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A Window to the World

By Jacqueline Tao



Photo by Tao Family

Looking back, I have been incredibly fortunate to be a teen that has grown up and gone to school in the Lamorinda community. Yet at times the fact that it is so safe, so peaceful, and so sheltered really does justify its being compared to a "bubble." Being able to travel provides new perspectives on the world and exposes the traveler to the myriad of different things that lies outside our home. Through my travels I have had the privilege to experience the different cultures, histories, people, sceneries, and foods of the world. I think that travel is a great portal for enjoyment but also for openness and understanding of more people and things than we would otherwise be familiar with.

A recent trip to Tibet opened my eyes to the opulence we enjoy in Lamorinda and how we take so many conveniences for granted.

After a long drive in a rickety Jeep, my family and I arrived at the top of a mountain, admiring a beautiful yet desolate Tibetan landscape—distant snowy mountains, minimal vegetation, and long crisscrossed chains of Tibetan prayer flags. Unexpectedly, a group of Tibetan children came to us, fascinated by everything about us. Their animated joyfulness contrasted drastically from the wind-swept, barren landscape. In an effort to transcend the language and cultural

barrier, I opened a bag of pea-sized crackers to share with the kids. They swarmed excitedly, a hungry mob tantalized by this rare foreign treat.

Surrounded on all sides, I scattered the snacks. Even though these snacks fell in the dirt, the children devoured them, excited to taste something new. Big smiles filled their faces and their eyes danced with delight. Deprived of worldly possessions, living in a harsh natural environment, they had easily managed to find reasons for contentment and satisfaction in their simple, minimalistic lifestyle.

With their curiosity and gratefulness for our visit, the Tibetan children offered me a glimpse of how effortless it was for them to live with so little yet be so gleeful. As a Campo student, such a feat is not always easy. How often throughout my high school career stress consumed me. My friends and I regularly lamented the course work or our lack of something as we searched for anything better than what we had, although we had no idea what that "better" was.

It took a trip halfway across the globe, to a world very different from Moraga where I have lived for eighteen years, for me to realize an important counter perspective. Happiness does not depend on fancy clothes, cars, homes, or what school we attend. The gifts of gratitude and simplicity allow us to harness the sources of pleasure that we often overlook and take for granted. By appreciating everyday joys of life, letting go of worries and tensions, and welcoming foreigners as friends, we can't help but experience fulfillment.

As I leave to go to college, I want to encourage the youth of Lamorinda to enroll in programs that encourage international exchanges. There is no better classroom than traveling. Open the window to the world and take a trip to understanding.

Jacqueline Tao graduated from Campolindo High School in June and will attend Stanford University. Through her travels she has been able to get a taste of many different cultures and places.

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