

2021 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

Bon Voyage

(Original)

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Nineteen years ago, I got on a train. “Bon voyage,” I was only told, as I received my ticket. I could not find the destination on it. I could only see the starting point: Birth.

My seat was by the window. Looking out, that was how I saw the meadows of Childhood go by, where the sweet fragrance of daisies wafted through the carriage and dandelions gently hugged the train tracks. Peering out, that was how I later passed the plains of School, where the rugged, dry soil under the wheels occasionally cracked, but the sun still came up every morning to cast a pale yellow glow on the grass. But it was a train that only went forward. Turning my head backwards, I would catch a glimpse of the flowers and the sun behind. Yet despite changing seats, or running towards the very end of the train, I could only watch the light and fragrance fade into the distance, finally disappearing as the train rounded a corner. I was told these were called Memories, and I was always encouraged to lift my eyes to the hills ahead instead. Because that, the Future, was where I was going.

Sometimes, I could see the Future clearly. On those days, I would run to the frontmost carriage, gazing in awe at the land that soared to great heights ahead. The grassy peak that gleamed in the sun was Graduation, I knew. The distant, snowy summit that seemed to touch the edge of the sky was Employment, I thought. But more often, it would rain. As the droplets crashed down from a pitch-black sky, the world in front would blur, leaving me huddled at the very end of the train, trying in vain to look ahead through the darkness. And from time to time, the train would pull into a station. I always had the chance to board a train headed in another direction, to change the landscape ahead. Would I bravely pick the more perilous yet rewarding mountains of Studying Overseas? Or would I continue along the quiet, safe hills of my Comfort Zone?

I wasn't the only one on the train. Most of the time, there were passengers. I remember the

witty friend in the adjacent seat, who shared her laughter with me for fifteen years. I still recall the thoughtful soul with the piano and medicine books, who was there to hold my hand as I wandered through every train station. Yet these People never remained forever on my train. The friend made her last pun before changing trains for the steppes of University. The soul let my hand go as I decided to board another train towards the unknown highlands of A New City. But then, new passengers would come in to fill the space. The boy with the passion for banking. The girl with the fake smile. People who all still look ahead, change stations, and are borne ceaselessly into the Future. Voyagers like myself.

It has been nineteen years of this voyage, where the train is always going forward, the view is always evolving, and different passengers are always walking in and out. For years, I sought to find a guiding beacon amidst this change and uncertainty along the way. How was I to travel, in order to have a 'bon voyage'?

Over the years, I have come to realise that perhaps change is the only constant to be found in this Life, with uncertainty the only clarity. Therefore, helpless as we are in the face of these powerful forces, there are only three things to do to have a 'good journey', as a fellow passenger once taught me. Be brave, so you can keep your head up during the rain and still look ahead. Be kind, because other voyagers are as helpless as you are, so love is the only way to support each other. Be fun, so you can still enjoy the fragrance of daisies or the beauty of the morning sun, despite knowing about the darkness ahead.

So, be brave, be kind, be fun. This is how to climb mountains and brave the rain. This is how to have a 'bon voyage'.