

New York- The City of Hope

When I was a little girl, my mother used to tell me the story about *The Frog in the well*. The story goes something like this: There was a Little Frog that lived at the bottom of a deep, dark well. The Little Frog had been living at the bottom of this old well since he was born. He has never been to the outside world. Whenever the birds flew by and stopped at the edge of the well, the Little Frog always looked up and bragged, "Hello! Why don't you come down here and play with me. It's so pleasant down here. Look, I have cool water to drink and countless insects to eat. Come down! At night I can watch the twinkling stars, and sometimes I can see the beautiful moon, too". Sometimes the birds would tell the Little Frog, "Hi, Little Frog! You see, the outside world is much bigger and nicer. It's many times more beautiful than your little well at the bottom". But the Little Frog would not believe them. "Don't lie to me, I don't believe there is any place that could be better than here".

Growing up in a small city in the North Vietnam, I sometimes could not help but think I was just like that Little Frog in that little dark well. I was constant wondering about the world outside. Even though I knew that I was not equipped with the best financial resources to travel, but back then I already planted a seed of hope in my heart. That one day I would be able to travel and to see the world. Time went by, that hope has grown up to a burning desire. I just knew that if I keep nourishing that dream and trusting the process, then one day a miracle would happen.

I still remember that day May 6th 2014 as it was yesterday. Right after I finished an exam for my master course in finance, exhausted as I was for not sleeping the night before, all I could think about was heading right back home and take a rest. While picking up my bicycle, I noticed a missed call from an unknown number.

- Hi, it is Sandra, who was calling?
- Hi Sandra, (speaking in Swedish) it is Anders from IAESTE Sweden.
- Yes?
- There is an internship spot available in New York; do you want to take it?
- What? What did you say? New York? Say it again? *I feel like I am about losing my breath*
- Yes, yes there is an internship position in New York, which matches with your profile, and I am just wondering if you are interested.
- Yes, I am but...but why me?

He laughed: why not?

And that was it for me. Four months later, I found myself in the middle of the night landed at John F. Kennedy international airport. It was the beginning of September and it seemed like the summer heat was not ready to leave the city. Even though it was pass midnight but the temperature was still around 80 Fahrenheit and cool wind is nowhere to be found. "I should not wear this thick jacket" was my first thought right after leaving the airplane.

This time was not my first time visiting New York, but like every other time, the beauty of this modern city overwhelmed me. I recalled my first initial view of the

city when the train coming in from the Williamsburg bridge, I looked straight ahead and saw the concrete jungle in front of me: The elegant sky scrapers sparkled with neon lights, the traffic and the amount of people everywhere. It was a picture of chaotic, but still nothing was out of the ordinary. I could not help but thinking to myself: So, here I am, in New York, the greatest city in the world. How the heck could I end up here? It must be a dream. I felt lucky and I felt small.

Working in New York was a life long dream of mine; the motivation is simply to challenge myself in a high paced environment where excellence is to be expected. Under my five months in New York, I certainly have learnt more things than I could ever do in school. The firm I came to work for is a boutique architectural company located in lower Manhattan. Truth be told, even after arriving to the city, I was not so sure about what exactly I would do for them. After several interviews, I was asked by the manager of the company to write a marketing plan and do a market analysis based on the company's current condition. More than four years at the university as a business student, I surely have grasped the concepts and methodologies used for successful business analysis. However, there is a major difference between doing a case study at university with your classmates and doing a business case alone without any guidance for a real company, knowing that the outcome of my work will immediately affect the company's operation. My supervisor and my teammates have design background so basically they cannot tell me how to derive a perfect marketing plan. They expected me to lead the team and to tell them what they need to do. For the first few weeks, I was intimidated by the huge responsibility.

Nonetheless, the lack of a rigid instruction also has its own advantages as well, the heaviness of always need to be correct replaced by the lightness of being a beginner, less sure about everything. Little did I know at that time, this internship turned out to be one the best learning opportunities for me; it gave me a deep insight about how it would be like to run a business. If someday I would start a company of my own, then I would know what to do.

At work, I was involved in many processes from designing a marketing plan to developing a new market, doing market research and also taking care of our customers. What excited me most was the way my manager and colleagues treated me: They did not treat me like an intern coming there to learn but rather more like an independent colleague, who they expected to make a positive impact for the company. In fact, sometimes I felt a little embarrassed by how much they actually cared about my opinions. I recalled one morning, my manager invited me to join a meeting he has with the firm's partner. I was introduced to a senior marketing manager who had more than 20 years experiences in marketing working for big firms like IBM. This partner showed my manager a new marketing plan, which he suggested us to follow. However, I did not agree with some part of this suggestion, knowing that they would actually not add any value to us. My managers quickly saw my confusion and asked me if something is wrong. I pointed out my thoughts and also made some other suggestions, which I believe would fit our firm better. Later, I found out that, my manager actually rejected the partner's plan and they decided to

proceed with my plan. This simple act of my company has strengthened my confidence. The lesson I learned here was that: always has faith in you.

Working in New York also allowed me to realize that the American business culture differs significant from its Scandinavian counterpart. In New York, I was expected to be available all the time for work. It was difficult to draw a clear line between private life and work. It seemed for me as if people is living for work and not work for living. However, the lack of a well-balanced work- life does not make New York less attractive in my eyes. What I love most about the city is that the Big Apple really has a slice for everyone; people come to New York for different reasons but they all stay for the same: The endless source of opportunities. Surely, New York is not always kind and sweet, but if you hang in there long enough good things always happen.

Until today, when I look back my time in New York, I think that I have done the right thing by going there. Yet, sometimes, there were moments I questioned my decision. After all, we all have that Little Frog in our hearts. Going alone to a place far away from home is scary, not to mention the emotional loss when you know you only have your own to rely on. We fear that if we do this or that we shall make a mistake, we fear that if we follow our hearts we shall fail. While weighting in all the benefits and costs related to the matter, our rational self has such great impact that we might never take the chance. The time spending in New York has helped me to understand that if we want to live a life that make our hearts sing, we must let go of our fears. Think about all the amazing moments in your life, all the people you interacted with, and all the situations you faced. They were there for one reason: To help you grow and develop into a better human being. Life will always be full of challenges and a layer of fear will always cover our hearts. We must never stop reminding ourselves that: sometimes it is good to not think too much and go where our hearts take us. Every time we step into the unknown and it means different things to each of us. More than ever, you know the moment you take that step and are ready to be challenged by the world, you are not the same person anymore. This belief has never let me down, and it made all the difference in my life.