

On the Horizon



Text by Shayna Walia

When we stand at the edge of a great journey, it seems that we often feel insignificant, daunted by the prospect of a long and arduous task ahead. But a year is a minor wrench in the great plan that many believe a Maker has set forth for them. Suddenly, we find ourselves on the tail end of the year we thought we had started just yesterday. Oftentimes I find myself thinking, "What is a plan if not for a surprise in the journey?". As a child I had often found unpredictability to be a welcome visitor, and now, in my youth, I find it more of a lukewarm friend. One thing I can say for certain, in my naive years away from home, is that life is so much more worth living when the plans come apart, and new, more exciting ones are made.

Recently, I came across an essay written by Colin and Yen Yen Goh titled "Paved with Good Intentions", written for the book *Singaporeans Exposed: Navigating the Ins and Outs of Globalisation*. Although this essay was published in 2001, the message still rings true today. As medical professionals, we get caught up with titles and canonised pathways to success, made real by the talented individuals who teach us. We forget that we too are people experiencing life for the first time. New opportunities excite us and taking on these responsibilities fulfils us. Staying in these responsibilities beyond our capacities, however, consumes us. We need to look beyond our circumstances, to the horizons beyond, as well as reconnect with

what makes us ourselves. Below, Rachelle kindly shares about what has kept her grounded this academic year.

Shayna is a Year 2 medical student at Cardiff University and the current Editor on the 30th Executive Committee of SMSUK.



Text and photo by Rachelle Lai

I remember my departing flight from Singapore just a little over half a year ago. The nauseating jostle of the plane's floor, the noisy rumbling of the engines, and the aggressive clacking of the tray tables were enough to set anyone on edge. Through the small window of the plane, I watched as the familiar city lights grew smaller and smaller, like grains of sand slipping beyond my reach, dancing beneath me in an agonising taunt. As I soared into the infinite embrace of the horizon, a faint sense of nostalgia tugged at my heartstrings, leaving behind an indiscernible yet profound ache. It was a feeling verging on the inexplicable – part longing, part anticipation, part fear. I was leaving behind the comforting routines I had grown accustomed to, knowing it would be a whole academic year before I set foot in Singapore once more.

Connections to home

Now, in the cold, mist-laden evenings of Glasgow, I find myself seeking out any form of connection to home. People here must think me mad, speaking to shadows in the twilight, wandering the streets in aimless glory. But not all who wander are lost, for these evening walks in solitude are what tethers me, anchoring me in a foreign land. For it is not truly evening; here, the sun surrenders at 4 pm, and I am not alone. I am accompanied by my best friend

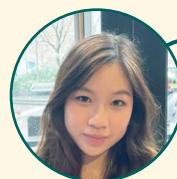
who awaits my call at 11 pm (SGT). We exchange the highlight of our days – the first time I picked up a scalpel, hand trembling as I carved the skin off the torso of a cadaver, my fear was soon replaced by horror when I was splashed in the face by adipocere while she shares about her first day as a teacher intern, red pen poised like a blade of her own, aggressively grading scripts. It is in these moments that distance dissolves. And in these moments, I am home.

My grandmother picks up soon after. A night owl by nature, she is like a sagely sentinel perched high with wisdom, regaling me with tales of her youth. There is something inexplicably enchanting about listening to the echoes of a bygone era – the power of stories, the way they offer coherence and closure, fulfilling that deeply human longing for an ending, a resolution. And in her stories, nestled beneath the many folds of time and memories, I find there lies a tinge of poignant nostalgia, for the only thing that has ever smothered a dream is to have it fulfilled. And in these moments, I wonder – how many of my experiences will stand the test of time? How much of this will be of some sort of significance in my life's journey, and what will I carry with me when I grow old? And when I take my place on the other side of the call, what stories will I leave behind?

Reflections from Glasgow

I believe that the beauty of the horizon lies in its dual embrace – it is the same orange hue that grazes my face the first thing in the morning and the last I see on my wandering walk home from lectures. And in the quiet rhythm of daylight's rise and fall, I find myself attached to the idea that certain things remain infinitely boundless while everything else shifts. There was a time when I believed Singapore was far too small, that I had exhausted all it had to offer, yearning to escape the city's relentless rhythm, to immerse myself in what Wordsworth termed "the bliss of solitude". Yet, it is in the solitude of these misty Glasgow evenings that I have come to understand the weight of belonging. Distance does not merely breed longing – it reveals its presence even in the farthest corners of the world. And perhaps, in knowing what it means to leave, I have also begun to understand what it means to return. ♦

Rachelle is a Year 1 medical student at the University of Glasgow.



An evening walk in Glasgow