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June Nelson Memorial Scholarship

1 April 2023

Advice of a Tree

The transition from high to college was a massive deal for me. As a first-generation college student, I didn't know how to prepare for it. From not knowing what I would need in my dorms, to what classes I should take in the fall. All of it was new to me, and honestly, it was scary. It was difficult to leave the place I called home for 14 years, it was scary to leave Alaska alone and venture into the bay area, and scary to leave my family. The advice I'm going to give you is the culmination of what I've learned in the past few months. And as a Stanford Tree, I have to give you a corny tree metaphor with it all.

First, find your roots. Find those who want to support you, your communities, and your academic mentors. When I was choosing my classes, they were imperative for me to be successful. They gave me hints that the school website didn't give me, and honestly, your academic advisors won't tell you. Finding your roots also means different things to different people too. Finding your roots could also be connecting to your ethnic community, being able to discuss your identities, and making your voice heard.

Second, find your trunk. Your trunk is the people or resources that keep you steady and straight. Whether you call your friends and family every other day, journal every day, or seek out counseling or therapy, find things that ground you. University is fast, especially at my school, and you will have disappointing times during your time. Finding this trunk will help you calm down and prepare for the next event

Finally, find your branches. Your branches could mean a lot of things, finding friends, finding your niches, and even clubs. Basically, branch out! College is a time of self-discovery and growth, joining clubs, finding niches, and making friends are the best way to do this. There is something about struggling through classes and staying up and studying with each other that creates memories. You'll forget the periodic table, but never forget the memories you make.

I will not lie to you, I was an overachiever in high school. I thought that I could do everything myself, and I never asked for help. For the most part, it worked in high school. I thought this was a sign of independence and being strong-willed. How I was wrong. When the quarter started, I was scrambling at the last minute to plan out my schedule, I felt rushed and anxious, and I felt like there were opportunities I was missing. I felt a significant imposter syndrome.

It wasn't until I found my roots, trunk, and branches that I felt belonged. In a sense, I finally became a Stanford tree. It felt relieving to figure out how to live my life, and how I managed to not only survive my first fall but to thrive. I was able to grow so much in this short amount of time, and not feel scared to ask questions and for help. I was able to discover my Filipino identity a lot more and create meaningful relationships within my communities.

But, I do want to say, although the advice I gave you was very significant in my life, everyone's experiences are different. Everyone navigates through University differently, and being able to choose how you experience it is the definition of self-discovery. You are allowed to choose your path. You are strong, independent, and smart, but don't forget you're able to ask for help. It's okay to struggle at times and you are not behind. Good luck next year and you are amazing.