

# The Year that Was

The changes that one year of college have brought about in me, are like none from ever before. I cannot claim that I have grown as a person, but one thing is certain-I now have a heightened sense of awareness about the ways of the world.

For a child who's spent nary a night away from his parents, there can be no experience more unnerving than that first night in your hostel room. It was a stroke of good luck, then, that I'd decided to venture out for some stationery that night. I chanced upon a fellow first year donning a shirt of my favourite band. That was my very first glimmer of hope that perhaps my prospects here would look up.



The typical milieu on campus during monsoon season. Credits: Manipal Blog

The days to come would teach me to break out of my shell and embrace my country's diverse culture. Having been predominantly around south Indians for a considerable part of my life, I was initially sheepish during my interactions with those hailing from other regions. My desire to establish companionship in this land far away from home, however, overpowered my diffidence and I began mingling with my classmates. It gave me the reassurance that no one regarded me

as any better or worse than himself or herself for being from another end of the country.

The days went by, and soon, the pieces slowly started to fall into place. Getting drenched in the rain on the way to class taught me never to leave my room without a checklist. It was no longer merely my backpack that I needed – I now had a wallet full of valuables to be heedful of. The newfound responsibility of checking my bank balance and typing in a PIN at cash registers instilled a sense of maturity within me.

After counting down each day from fifty at the back of my diary, the sessional examinations blew by and with them, brought a much-needed teaching break. There was a slight spring in my step as I strolled along, suitcase in tow, to the taxi that evening. I felt like I was beginning to learn the ropes of getting by in an engineering college. Lack of club recruitment meant that we had ample time after lectures to study and socialise.



Upon my arrival, my mother's cooking tasted more sumptuous than I had ever recalled in all my nineteen years. I was a child that had grown accustomed to having a steaming hot lunch

everyday. It was served to me at the time I felt convenient, under an invigorating breeze blowing out from the air conditioner over my dining table, whilst I watched television shows.

My first month in college elapsed in trudging up a hill at specified times for each meal. I soon grew wary of this and lived off whatever the campus grocery store could provide me for the rest of the year. This taught me to be grateful just for having my mother there to put food on my plate – the culmination of an entire day's effort gone by toiling away in the kitchen just to feed me.

Upon my return, the moment I had been so eagerly awaiting had arrived – club recruitment. At the outset, I was more concerned about which club would look better on my resume, rather than pursuing my interests. It was thus quite a tough decision to make when I was faced with attending the recruitment of a coding club or that of the college's official media body. There was nothing at all appealing to me about writing programs other than the chance to be hired by a lucrative IT company. Writing, on the other hand, has been my go-to avenue of expressing myself since I was a child.

That moment was perhaps the very first time in my life that I had followed my heart over mind, and it was the best choice I ever made. Having arrived from home merely hours earlier, I tackled the written round on an empty stomach, letting nothing but my experience guide me. I poured my heart out onto the paper, without even a passing thought that whoever corrected it could be a colleague in the future. In all candour, getting selected did not even seem a minute possibility to me.

It was nothing short of a surprise when I got the call to attend the interview round at the Quadrangle. This was only the second time I had ever been interviewed in my life, which is why my heart was quite understandably in my mouth. Knowing how imperative it was to make a good impression, I did all I

could to answer the questions posed at me with clarity and confidence. It seemed to do the trick, because when I opened my e-mail the next afternoon, my Acceptance Letter was waiting for me in all its splendour. Congratulations began to pour in from friends and family alike – and it will forever remain etched in my brain as one of my fondest memories.

Ever since then, there was no looking back. TechTatva was looming around the corner, and preparations to make the best daily newsletter the college had ever seen were in full swing. It was during one such night, when I was typing away at an album review I'd been working on for pleasure – that I was approached by a fellow writer. Over the course of our future conversations, we soon discovered that we had similarities in interests as well as our sentiments on a variety of things.

My budding friendship with him and his roommate whom I happened to share a class with, turned out to be the highlight of my second semester. Being introverted meant lacking a friends circle to be eager about returning to at the end of my first semester break. It was during the second semester, however, that this duo showed me how much more enjoyable college could be if I had people to share my days with.



Courtesy: The Astronomy Club,  
Manipal

I forged a bond with them as he introduced his roommate and I to the wonders of melancholic prog rock virtuosos, Porcupine Tree. Music has a way of bringing two souls together with a power unlike that of anything else. My plans for every evening had gone from lying in my room, to accompanying them to dinners or adventures that ended just in time for curfew. Perhaps the highlight of my entire year was going stargazing to Hiriadka one night with The Astronomy Club. That was the first time in my life I had gone camping. Sitting there huddled up with close friends learning about constellations and narrating scary stories to one another was an experience I will not soon forget. In all, my first year in college was a riveting rollercoaster ride from start to finish.