海洋科普實驗室

看漫畫學海洋

Learning Oceanography by cartoons

About the Author: How I Got Into Oceanography

I really like this credit card commercial. A grandma is holding a credit card and she says, "I want to study abroad!" She puts it well! A lot of opportunities are not always available. When the opportunity presents itself, one must jump to obtain it, be bold and willing to give it a go! Grandpas, grandmas, dads, and moms who want to study abroad should go themselves and should not tell others to go.

My grandfather gave me my name. If you Google my Chinese name 東垣, you will not only find 何東垣 but also 李東垣, who was a famous doctor in the past. You have guessed right. My grandfather originally hoped that I would become a famous doctor. Additionally, the original definition of 垣 means city wall. My hometown is located at 苑東 Village of Yuanli (苑裡) Township, and it also holds a sense of safeguarding the home. My name was chosen in quite a scholarly manner. However, I gradually came to find that this 垣 character is a bit too erudite. Very few people know the correct pronunciation and strokes. A large number of people read it as huan2 桓 or heng2 恒. Some people even think they are quite clever and think I wrote one extra stroke. When they return my letter, they actually change it to 何東坦 Tung-Tan Ho! For a while, I complained about Taiwan's Chinese teachers.

As a student, my preferred way to introduce myself was to use phrases like 垣 in 北斗星垣 or in 省垣, which both use my character. Yet, people who knew what I was talking about were still few; later, I finally had to use the phrase 恆 but say to change the left side of the character from "heart" to the character for "earth." And tell them to pronounce it like the word for 圓. This kind of introduction is pretty tedious. In middle school, my older sister wanted to help me. She said 垣 is just a combination of one 一 earth 土 day 旦. Sometimes I borrow this comical way to introduce myself. It isn't easy having this name! In high school, I chose the field of medicine and agriculture, but even though my name is Tung-Yuan, my college entrance exam score was not high enough to enter medical school. At the time, if you didn't get into medical school, the next option in my category was agriculture, fisheries, or animal husbandry. I still remember that summer 30 years ago. Right after the college entrance exam and with nothing left to do, I went to a choir practice with the Chinyun Chorus. I heard that there were many pretty girls there; you must know what 18 year old boys daydream about. I really did encounter a pretty older girl with a pleasant disposition. At the time, I had not filled in my preferences for my college major, and I asked for her opinion. I also told her about my problem. I didn't know which direction to go. Agriculture? Oceans? Or Animal Husbandry? You know what? Her advice really influenced my decision. She said, "The oceans are vast and wide, fitting for a boy like you…" So that was that. I selected the oceans related departments on my form and started down the path towards oceanography. I would say this was the beginning of my career.

However, the careers available to oceans related graduates are limited. In my senior year of college, I began to feel the vastness of what the future held. Almost all of my classmates made career changes after graduation. Those who stayed in the research field were mainly in the biological sciences departments. Looking back, why did I still stay in the oceanography field? I slowly realized there was an even deeper reason. It is because when I was young, I had many wonderful experiences with the ocean! I was born in Yuanli and lived there until I was seven. There is a small harbor in my hometown. The traditional market is only 50 meters away from my home. Every morning it was full of all kinds of freshly caught seafood. I used to go with my grandpa or grandma to buy groceries; up until now, I still enjoy chatting with the vendors who sell produce and fish in traditional markets. Moreover, my aunt lived in the adjacent township Tongxiao, which used to have a big beautiful beach. When I was little, I often went there to play in the sand, in the water, catch hermit crabs…I also spent my four years of college in the beautiful Sizihwan Bay and after graduation was assigned to Penghu for my two year military service. I greatly enjoyed the fantastic ocean views in Penghu. When I looked back upon these unique and wonderful experiences, I then realized that I have been near the sea since childhood and filled with curiosity for the ocean, yet did not know it before.

Regardless of whether or not she had the insight, I must thank the pretty older girl. After I took the college entrance exam, I really did not know which direction to go. Even though I did not succeed at becoming a doctor, I have become a happy oceanographer! As an adult I've also realized, riding a bicycle and driving a car have their own sceneries to enjoy. A car can drive fast to see far away landscapes, while riding a bike allows one to have a clear view of roadside scenes. Often eating gourmet foods of course cause envy from others, but then you do not experience the great enjoyment of eating gourmet foods gained from eating it only once in a while. The delights of social interactions at traditional markets also cannot be replaced by the comfort of air conditioning at supermarkets. Life is short and opportunities are limited. Try to understand yourself and your individual niche. Then pursue it with courage. Then you are able to take responsibility for yourself and confidently face the consequences. You ought to succeed, but if unsuccessful, it is still worthwhile, as you will have no regrets in life. And you can always start the journey anew. How can grandpa, grandma, dad, and mom not be touched by such a conscientious child? And how can they not give their full support?

-Tung-Yuan Ho

Translator: Claudia Chern and Tung-Yuan Ho