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When I first chose to do community service at the Singapore Botanic Gardens over a period of about 6 months in 2002, I felt like I was making the best choice out of the worst possible options which my teachers were presenting to me. I had no interest in plants whatsoever at that point in time. By the end of that stint with the Botanic Gardens, however, I found myself having a change of heart.

During my time there, my primary task was to develop a publicity brochure for the Ginger Garden. However, I also had the privilege of visiting the National Orchid Garden, where the beauty and diversity of the flowers simply dazzled me. Another memorable experience involved the planting of ginger plants. Despite the fact that my friends and I were complete amateurs at the job, we thoroughly enjoyed the activity. (However, I must confess that I would not be surprised to find out if the plants that we had so painstakingly planted had to be replanted after we left.)

That volunteer program was probably among the first few things that sparked off an appreciation for greenery within me. A few years later, as I was exploring the possible career and scholarship options, a scholarship talk by the Director of Resource Management, Mr Felix Loh, served to further fuel my interest in parks and the outdoors, thus moulding the course of my career path. About four months after that talk, I found myself flying to Cornell University to study horticulture on an NParks Scholarship.

During my first semester in Cornell, I took introductory botany and horticulture courses, both of which I ended up enjoying more than I initially expected to. When the horticulture course first started, I felt somewhat lost as the professor's teaching style was different from what I had been accustomed to. However, by the end of that course, not only had I gained an excellent overview of the numerous aspects of horticulture, but I had also managed to polish up my meagre knowledge of plants. As part of one of the laboratory sessions, I even

had the opportunity of grafting my very own hibiscus plant, which is now proudly displayed in my dorm. As for botany, the course completely changed my mind about botany being a boring field of study. The professor did a marvellous job at making the subject come alive.

My adjustment to the new environment at Cornell was an unexpectedly smooth and quick one, something which I thank God for. Before I left for Cornell, my director, Mr Loh, also an alumnus of the university, predicted that it wouldn't be a problem spotting fellow Singaporeans in a dining hall – simply pick out the table from which the familiar 'lah's and 'lor's are coming from. Boy, was he right! The Singaporean community here in Cornell is a tight-knit one; the Singaporean freshmen, for instance, have dinner together every single night. This particular community was a place I felt almost immediately comfortable in, and it greatly aided my transition to this foreign environment. Getting to know the Americans has been a slightly more challenging process, but exciting nevertheless. This I have had the opportunity of doing through various classes and extra-curricular activities.

Growing up in Singapore where greenery almost always surrounded me, I assumed that every other city in the world would be equally green. Visits to a couple of grey, drab cities in the US, however, have proved me wrong, and at the same time increased my appreciation for the abundance of flora back home. So while I am enjoying every moment of my experience here, I definitely look forward to returning to where home is, and contributing to our Garden City.