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**The photograph was taken in a bay tree at Point Reyes National Seashore, California, USA.**

The alarm tells me that it is 7.30 in the morning. I crawl out of bed and look out the window towards the horizon, past the Golden Gate Bridge, as it is gradually illuminated by the rising sun. It is a spectacle of unparalleled beauty that I fear I may have started taking for granted. There is just enough time for me to get changed, grab breakfast from the fruit basket and head out to the first lesson of the day.

Walking past the oak grove on my way to class, I catch a whiff of freshly-brewed coffee. It is a chilly 4 degrees Celsius this morning, but the tree-sitters are already up having their first cup. They have been sitting in the trees for a month and a half now, protesting the university's decision to cut them down and build an athletic facility on the plot. The movement has had much success, winning a court injunction that prohibits the removal of the trees until another environmental impact assessment is made. What inspires me, however, is not that the protest, which has often been caricatured by the press as just another hippie love-fest, has managed to gain legitimacy in the court of law. It is, instead, the passion with which the residents and students have involved themselves. Why was I not surprised when my professors started speaking in public about the ecological and historical significance of this tiny oak grove?

After the morning's biology lecture, I meet up with friends from the hiking club. We had climbed up Mount Diablo the previous weekend, during the tarantula mating season. The ground had been littered with the carcasses of dead but satisfied males, while the females sunbathed on the rocks next to their deceased lovers' severed limbs. This weekend, we will be cycling up Grizzly Peak to survey our field research site, where we intend to investigate the allelopathic effects of the non-native eucalyptus trees on local flora.

The most valuable experiences I have had so far stem from the independence that comes with university education. My course involves me in every aspect of research, from literature review to writing a scientific paper – all in my first year. It can be exciting to begin with and soon gets a little frustrating, yet it will be entirely rewarding at the end. An illustrative example of this was when I spent two days in the library digging up information on the Eureka Valley in central California. I eventually found the information I needed in a master's thesis written in 1935.

By mid-afternoon, the sun has warmed the air enough and I decide to go on a run. The trail takes me through the hills and ends up right behind Lawrence labs. It was here almost 70 years ago that Ernest O. Lawrence separated the isotopes of Uranium for use in the atom bomb. It was in the very same place that Glenn T. Seaborg discovered the elements Californium and Berkelium. On the way back, I run past the Memorial Stadium, which sits right on top of the Hayward fault. The bracketed columns betray signs of stress, where the Pacific plate inches painfully past the North American plate. It is long overdue for a major earthquake, the last one having taken place as recently as 1889.

Thanks to its unique geography and history, the Bay Area has built up a rich heritage within a span of 200 years. Singapore is not much younger, yet we continually agonise about whether younger generations have a sense of belonging. To me, the one environmental constant in our ever-changing city is our natural space. Buildings may fall to the winds of progress, only to be replaced by even taller ones. Streets may change their courses like meandering rivers. That little dirt track that once wound its way from one kampong to another is now paved asphalt which runs right through. Our greenery, however, has become an integral, immutable part of our identity. Perhaps the most important thing I can do is to help preserve our natural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

Checking my email late at night, I receive an invitation from my Graduate Student Instructor to assist her in a field project in San Diego over the spring break. She had taken the class on a field trip to the Mojave desert once before, where it rains on only 4 days a year. We had the good fortune to run into a hailstorm.

Sometimes, the unexpected happens. For example, you may be offered a scholarship by a statutory board. At this point in time, it is important to ask yourself, "Can I see myself doing this over the next ten years?" I made my decision, and now it is your turn to make yours. I reply to the email, shut the computer and dive under the covers, wondering if the opportunities will run out by the time I graduate in 2010.

It is just another day in the life of a forestry student at the University of California, Berkeley.