

PERSONAL STATEMENT

An Asian friend once made a dare for me to do something that made me come to a realization – he dared me to eat the dreaded Philippine delicacy called ‘balut’. “Balut” is an 18-day old duck embryo boiled in some salt water. When my friend handed me what looked like a regular egg, I first thought that he had to be joking that the dare was only to eat what was inside the egg, so I agreed. When I began to peel the egg by tapping one of its ends and taking off the shell, a clear liquid dribbled out of the egg and inside it was the fully formed duck embryo curled around some yellow matter, complete with beak and black hair. I was disgusted but my friend taught me how to eat the delicacy. He told me to just close my eyes and down the entire embryo with my eyes closed. I did as he said, and surprisingly, what initially struck me as disgusting, was not too bad after all. In fact, I sort of liked it to a certain degree. While this might seem to be totally unrelated to myself, the experience actually taught me something important – that misconceptions can come from many things, and if we are readily influenced by these misconceptions, we often miss out on a lot of good things in life.

I am the kind of person who loves adventure. I want to travel and discover new things about the world around me. I want to meet new people and learn new cultures. My experience with ‘balut’ was for me, a more enriching experience than it was an unpleasant memory. I would probably not eat balut again, but the fact that I decided to forego the misconceptions allowed me to acquire a new and incomparable experience. Life is actually like the balut – outside it could seem plain and unremarkable, but when you begin to dig into the surface, it becomes frightening and challenging. Then, one is held at the crossroads of deciding whether to allow one’s fear to

be a dominating force or to conquer it and become a better person. Going beyond the fear spells all the difference for me because I always want to get the most out of life instead of run away from it. Many of my friends say that I am a go-getter and that I should slow down a bit lest I trip and fall along the way; to this, I always respond with a smile saying that if I do fall, I would readily nurse the bruises and go on my way again instead of stay down and wallow in my misery.

My passion for life and my love affair with discovery has led me to learn about the cultures of other people as well as their languages. I speak four languages fluently and have no plans of stopping at that. I want to learn more because I know that the mind has no limits. I lived in Switzerland for 2 years and while there I realized how colorful other cultures can be and how zealously people guard their heritage. Having a Mexican father and an American mother has only helped deepen my curiosity of other cultures. I would never look down on one culture and consider another better than the rest. Instead of looking at other cultures from the perspective of a scientist, the way they usually look at bacteria through a microscope, I would rather embrace these cultures; this way, I learn more and enjoy more out of what I can get and experience. So, my world is in fact similar to the Philippine “balut” – the lesser my fear and apprehension becomes of things, the more I am likely to learn and experience new and more exciting sensations. If only others would look at life the way I do, then perhaps, dinner tables would be filled with monkey brains from Iran, durian from Malaysia, sea urchin from Japan, and of course, balut from the Philippines. Our individual lives are meant to be set the way a multi-cultural and internationally diverse dinner table should be set because in our pursuit to become the best that we can be, we will always stumble upon something that will, at first, seem threatening and scary, but if we just come to appreciate diversity and multiplicity, we will all come to realize that in fact, everybody is the same in many ways, and often, it is this similarity

that makes each one of us unique and allows each of us to stand out and yet remain part of the colorful rainbow of culture and existence.