To Selia Wang and Jason Kok

For taking care of me while I was in Singapore.

For those who believe in the power of dream.

Preface

"You've got to be able to make those daring leaps or you're nowhere."

After four weeks traveling on the web of subway in Singapore, I have come to believe these words.

I packed my bags of books and said goodbye to my hometown on October 8th, 2006. I caught a plane to Singapore to take the SAT tests.

I am an 18-year-old Chinese girl born into a poor family in West China. Going abroad seems impossible to the residents here. But I did it. I lived in Singapore alone for one month to finish the two SAT tests.

Although in the end I didn't get a score as good as I had expected, I do value this experience. I think I have learned important lessons from this journey before I turn 18 today.

Once again, I believe what Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "You need chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star."

November 10th is my 18th birthday. I hereby give this real diary as a birthday gift to myself.

Wish myself a meaningful adulthood.

Sunday October 8th, 2006

Noon. Xichang. My home. Ugh. The last thing on earth I feel physically, emotionally or mentally equipped to do is shop around Dada Supermarket to get bunches of snacks for my trip. Actually, Dada Supermarket is not bad at all—at least the largest shopping mall in my hometown; but I just don't enjoy the feeling of carrying bags of snacks onto the train. Mom has asked me to go since this morning. This afternoon she approaches me via a cunningly circuitous route.

"Oh, hello, darling. I was just ringing to see what you wanted for your stay in Singapore."

"In Singapore?"

"Would you like a surprise, darling?"

"No!" I bellow. "Sorry, I mean…"

"I wondered if you'd like a set of wheels for your suitcase."

"But you haven't got a suitcase."

"Oh, you haven't?"

"Of course I haven't."

"Oh, my God! No, you haven't got one. That's true. But why don't I get you a little suitcase with wheels attached. You know, like air hostesses have."

"I've already got a big bag."

"Oh, darling, you can't go around with that tatty black canvas thing. You look like some sort of refugee. Just a little compact case with a pull-out handle. It's amazing how much you can get in. Do you want it in navy on red or red on navy?"

"Mom, it's one thirty in the afternoon. I'm just going to Singapore for one month, not for my next four years. My bag is heavy enough. I don't want an air-hostess case."

"Tracy's got one. She says she never uses anything else."

"Who's Tracy?"

"You know Tracy, darling! Our neighbor's daughter! The one that goes to a school in Malaysia…"

"Mom…"

"Always takes it on her trips…"

"I don't want a bag with wheels on."

"I'll tell you what. Why don't Aunt Jane, Daddy and I all club together and get you a proper new bag suitcase and a set of wheels?"

Exhausted, I hold the phone away from my ear, puzzling about where the missionary luggage zeal has stemmed from. When I put the phone back, Mom is saying, "…in actual fact, you can get them with a compartment with bottles for your bubble bath and things. The other thing I thought of was a shopping trolley."

"Is there anything you'd like for your trip back home?" I say desperately, blinking in the dazzling autumn sunlight.

"No, no," she says airily. "I've got everything I need. Now, darling, " she suddenly hisses, "you will be coming to Dada Supermarket to help me carry all the bags home, won't you?"

“Ah. Actually, I …” I panic wildly. What can I pretend to be doing? “…think I still have several toothbrushes to pack.”

“That doesn’t matter. You can come here after that. Oh, I believe it will at most five minutes to take those brushes from the washroom to your room. Then you’ll be here by two o’clock. I won’t go until three.”

Oh God. Not another strange creature jammed in between bags of food. “Mom, I’ve told you I don’t need that many snacks…”

“Now come along, darling. I buy you bunches of snacks before your every trip. Of course you’re going to come. See you later.”

7:45 p.m. Ugh. This trip is burdened with snacks as usual. I put away the Official SAT Study Guide, throw two large bags over my shoulder and set out for the train. The sky gets darker much faster than I anticipate.

My bed is in the first sleeping car, so Mom and I can swiftly handle our baggage. As soon as I feel stable on the train, I fish out a vocabulary book and begin to flip the pages. Read a dozen pages before my eyes water in the dim light coming from the bulbs. Mom meets her colleague on the train and goes to chat with him for a little while. Then I grab my diary and write several lines. I’m not a procrastinator but I spend a long time on these things.

Huh, I didn’t expect to visit Chengdu twice this year. Much less to expect the SAT tests…until I meet Yiming. I also talk to him this afternoon over MSN and feel inspired.

Wish myself a nice night. When I roll open my eyes tomorrow morning, I’ll see the foggy face of Chengdu.

Monday October 9th

6:30 a.m. Ugh. Mom and I arrived in Chengdu early in the morning. This city looked pretty attractive in fog. After checking out of the railway station, we found a bench and laid our belongings on it. I took out my book and read several pages until a number of beggars came to disturb me. I didn't quite understand how I appeared rich to them.

We had soy bean milk at a nearby restaurant as our first breakfast in Chengdu. Afterward we caught Bus 303 to Shuangliu International Airport. My flight would take off at 8 o'clock in the evening. Seemed we got there too early, but we had no place to go, or any other way to kill time, especially when we looked at the large heavy bags.

So Mom walked the whole afternoon around the airport while I spend the whole afternoon learning logic. It was pretty drowsy in the underground hall even if the air-conditioners were all on. I forced myself to read, read, and read.

On the one hand, both of us hoped the boarding time would approach quickly, since waiting was never pleasant; on the other hand, I was just afraid that it would come too soon. I couldn't face the thought of living one month abroad without Mom. Only thing whish made it tolerable was thought of realizing my dream there.

Finally both of us watched the electronic clock hanging from the ceiling of the hall turn 6:30. Check-in time came. I pushed my trolley to the Check and Quarantine Section when a girl came up and asked if I could carry a bag for her. I nodded and she immediately threw a heavy suitcase onto my trolley. Oh, I was afraid my trolley would break down anytime. Before I steppd into the Check and Quarantine Section, I looked back at my Mom for the last time. I was going to be away from her for totally one month. I'd never experience such a long separation before. How would I feel? I held back my tears with efforts and walked in.

That girl said her name wass Li Huiting. I carried a bag for her so her luggage wouldn't overweigh. To her, I did a big favor, so she and I became friends. We talked all the way to the Waiting Room. This was my first time to go abroad and I seemed somehow awkward handling the process. Well, never mind. Everyone has his firs time.

Li Huiting said she was in her sophomore year at Nanyang Polytechnic in Singapore. That was not a very good school, I knew. Just some sort of institution that trains students to take cheap jobs after graduations. Anyway, better than idling around.

Soon we were allowed to walk into the passage and the plane took off ten minutes later. It was totally dark outside. Where was Mom? Was she on her way to the railway station? She couldn't accompany me to Singapore because the fees associated were too high for my low-income family. Mom is very frugal she won't waste a cent. I did know that she wanted to come along and take good care of me, but she couldn't. She could only come thus far, just to the airport. Then we had to be separated.

I sent a SMS to Mom before turning off my mobile phone. Hoping she was all

right on her way back home.

Seafood noodles and drinks were served soon. I began to feel sick as soon as I smelt the lobsters and finally vomited. As I ran to the toilet, some people stretched out their hands and passed me airsick bags.

I closed door behind me in the toilet and almost had a hangover. My stomach and my lung started to sear. When I opened the door to step out, I was embarrassed to find out a line of people waiting for me. With my head dropped and my face squirming, I returned quietly to my seat and fell asleep. I wasted a nice supper.

Slept for two hours. When I woke up, the plane was just starting to land. Disgust welled up again. I rushed to the toilet right away. Indeed a hangover cleared. I felt much better as I walked back to my seat.

Ten minutes later the plane landed safely. It had been flying for five hours. I was terribly exhausted and pale. However, still had to carry all my bags. Li Huiting patted me softly on the back.

Felt extremely dizzy at the exit. Spoke in disjointed and awkward English with the Indonesian lady at the Immigration Office and finally got my visa. Threw all my things on a trolley the moment my eyes caught one. Li Huiting and I said goodbye to each other. I kept looking for Selia, my classmate's elder sister as I walked out of the airport. There she shouted my name.

The moment I heard my name shouted, I felt a lot relieved. I met someone I knew in the end. I was not helpless any more. Selia was in a pleated white dress and looked gentle. Her Singaporean boyfriend, Jason, had also come to meet me. I thought he looked much fatter than in the photo. Huh ha, photography always works in mysterious ways.

The air in Singapore felt drowsy and heavier, much like that in Chengdu. Selia explained that air pollution had been blown here from Indonesia for a month and the sky had been dusty. I guessed it might have been the extent of a sandstorm.

Jason bought a mini-truck which had only two seats. So they occupied the seats and I was left in a dark corner at the back of his mini-truck, sandwiched between computers. Streetlights along the road emitted soft yellow light, giving out a warm ambience. I didn't notice anything Singaporean except the cleanness of the streets.

Tuesday October 10th

1:00 a.m. Selia, Jason and I took an elevator to the room they had helped me rent. Everyone in the house was sleeping, so we crept in. I saw the room in which I was going to live for one month no sooner than Jason turned on the light. This host room was no bigger than my own room, but nicer and quieter. After telling me all the details I should pay attention, they left silently.

Ugh. Back to my solitude again. It was not solitude this time but quietness and silence. Still felt sick from the flight so I took some pills. Hangover had passed away. But fatigue came up immediately and I fell asleep in a soft bed.

6:47 a.m. Thought I must be quite weary when awaking in the morning. But not quite so. Rolling my eyes, I got up and felt energized. The fan had been on for the night. Mom and Dad called several times but I didn't answer. International calls cost too much. And I had to keep my mobile phone work until the day I left.

After washing my face, I looked around the kitchen for boiled water but couldn't find any. Then I had to stand thirst and hunger for a whole morning until Selia called me.

Jason drove us a long way to a Hong Kong hotel named Longmen Restaurant. They ordered shrimps. (I almost fainted on hearing the name—still sick from the seafood last night.) Nonetheless, the seafood at this restaurant tasted much better. I also had a lot of drinks and jammed as much as possible into my stomach. Then I grew scared to read the menu: $ 15 per person. That would be RMB 75 yuan! Wow, no ordinary dinner in China would cost that much. I cringed at the price. Then Jason paid the bill and we got back on his mini-truck. I thought I was going to vomit again at the back of the mini-truck but the awful feeling ebbed away quickly. Huh, I had not eaten so full for a long time.

After about ten minutes, Jason parked his mini-truck in front of a large shopping mall names West Mall. He had a customer to meet on the third floor while Selia and I waited for him on the first floor. Tantalizing smells of chocolate was floating every nook and cranny.

When Jason had finished his business, he drove us to Bukit Batok Community Library. I bought a MRT card at the subway station which cost me $ 15. But it enabled me to take a subway to Jurong Regional Library with Selia.

The libraries in Singapore were all very large and equipped with advanced computers. There I found piles of books I needed for my SAT I test. So lucky! I didn't bring my books here; if I couldn't find one, I would be idling around for the remaining three days before the test. I borrowed four books with Selia's Green Card. Then we three went to a food stand where we had Malaysian chicken rice. It was a special kind of rice steamed with chicken and smelt of good chicken. Jason bought each of us an ice cream named Superman. It was indeed superbly delicious! I ate all of the food up. Jason later said he discovered this food bar when he escaped school to eat. Huh, he was once a naughty boy.

Afterward Jason showed me around Anglo Chinese Junior College where I was

going to take my two SAT tests. I thought every corner of Singapore looked the same although Jason kept explaining to me the differences. After parking his mini-truck, Jason and Selia took me to a fair near Clementi. Goods were sold for just a few Singapore dollars, but which would be a little too much if exchanged into RMB. Selia bought a pack of animal food for her rat while I shot videos around.

Darkness fell when they accompanied me back to my room. The landlord had come back, who turned out to be a young man from Shanghai. But he and his mother were indeed enthusiastic. They showed me all the utilities available for use in the house. So after Selia and Jason left, I had a long shower…Wow wow, so comfortable. My stomach was still too full to take in anything except a small amount of water. Before going to sleep, I called Mom. Everything was fine, for both her and me.

Well, Tuesday was totally over. Only three days left for SAT Reasoning Test. I had to hurry.

Wednesday October 11th

Slept at midnight and got up late. Felt tired and weak. After grabbing a bite, I took out Princeton Review which I borrowed from library yesterday and began to read. The more I studied the book, the more I found it good.

So I devoted the whole morning to reading and didn't want to go downstairs to have lunch, although elevators were quick enough to take me from the eleventh floor to the first. Actually I didn't feel any hungry at noon.

I stuck to books when felt like giving up. Sometimes I was too weary to go on. But I had no time to waste.

In the evening when Selia returned from work, we caught a bus to West Mall and Korean rice mixed with vegetables there. Well, the food was really nice, if not a bit too salty.

Then we waited for Jason while shopping around West Mall. At about ten o'clock, Jason came and drove us a long way to have barbecues. We ordered a roasted demo fish and I had a Sweden sundae. It was served in a big cup with a lot of chocolate. Wow, rather tasty! It disappeared into my mouth soon.

11:25 p.m. We returned to my room. Jason helped me set up Selia's laptop in my room so I could send e-mails to Mom.

October 12

3:00 a.m. Clicked on *Send*. My last e-mail to Mom was finally sent. Then I went to bed.

4:00 a.m. The door of my room was suddenly pushed open. The light was suddenly turned on. I sat up alert immediately. No, robbery couldn't happen in Singapore. I carefully got up and peeped out.

A yellow-haired head of a girl suddenly appeared from outside and shouted, "Hello, I'm back!"

I knew what happened.

My roommate got back just now. She was a 19-year-old girl from Shandong. She was currently a sophomore of Nyee Ann Polytechnic and her course wouldn't start until October 15th.

She saw me and apologized. I went back to bed again. Felt like the dead.

8:35 a.m. Woke up and felt weak. My head ached because I stayed up too late last night. Had some solutions at once to prevent a cold. When I was washing my face in the washroom, my roommate woke up and talked to me.

She said she took the SAT classes last year but gave up before the actual test because she thought it too hard. Soon she called her Singaporean friend over and they talked aloud in the room. I was a bit irritated.

11:00 a.m. Loud talks finally vanished. My roommate and her friend left. So I regained my solitude and peace. Kept on reading books about SAT. About two hours later, I felt too tired to go on and had a snap.

3:30 p.m. A ring woke me up all of a sudden. Selia was calling me to ask if I would love to have supper with them tonight. I said yes.

Some time later the landlord came to see me and asked some questions. He said he also took the SAT lessons in 2001 but gave up before the actual test. His expression told me he had been scared of the difficulty level. Well, I just felt a little…depressed. Two people had warned me of the difficulty of SAT today. However, in the end I had come to convince myself that I was not either of them and my result would only depend on my own efforts. Who knew if I would get the same result as them if I didn't even give a shot? Ugh, just taking their advice was enough.

I tried to update the network of Selia's laptop vainly. Oops, I was never a genius in computers. On the contrary, I thought I was an IT idiot.

For the whole afternoon, I didn't eat anything until Selia and Jason took me out. We first went to a Japanese store where I got a large cup and a porcelain doll. Then I got a bag of chocolate bread and a box of guava in Best Supermarket. After that Jason took us to an Indian restaurant where we had Indian yellow rice. A big chicken leg was served on side with curry. I wasn't quite used to curry so I didn't

enjoy this dish very much. Actually the colorful rice tasted very good. My stomach almost exploded when I climbed into Jason's mini-truck.

11:48 p.m. We three people arrived at my room. I brought out Selia's laptop and asked Jason for help. He also failed to update but promised to try again tomorrow. As soon as they left, I rushed into the washroom and spent an hour or so in it. My stomach had revolted. Food was searing in the tiny space of my belly. Well, I felt so bad. I overate again tonight.

October 13

1:58 a.m. Went to bed. Dizzy.

4:00 a.m. Woke up by my awful stomach. Rushed to the washroom. I didn't have diarrhea but instead had regurgitation. I thought diarrhea might be much better than regurgitation. Didn't quite understand why I couldn't sleep until I remembered the can of coffee I took last night before having Indian food. Oops. I'd never thought caffeine would ever have such a big effect on me.

5:00 a.m. Crept out of the washroom and found my chair. Threw myself in it right away. Amusingly my mind was clearer now. Well, caffeine had caused insomnia to me but now it contributed to my awareness. But I still hated my stomach like I'd never done before.

5: 30 a.m. Finally pulled myself together and seated myself in front of a pile of books. Picked one and began to read although I still felt pale. It was not until that moment I'd come to believe in the old proverb, "To overeat is as evil as to starve." Would never do that silly thing again. Yet I'd endured both devils for a couple of days.

Luckily I caught the guava I bought yesterday. Suddenly recalled Selia said this kind of fruit helped digestion. Well, was it so magical? I immediately took some slices with plum powder. It wasn't bad, after all. But whether it would help my stomach was to be confirmed.

Huh, I swore I would never have coffee again, just as Bridget Jones said in her new year's resolutions.

7:00 a.m. Checked the calendar in my mobile phone. Got startled at once. Tomorrow was my test day! My big test day! I had only today left! Gee, what should I do? I quickly flipped thought Kaplan's SAT book and found some ways to reduce stress. I didn't think I should relieve stress but rather I should put more stress on myself. In fact I didn't felt pressured at all.

The whole morning was thus jammed with books. When I finished reading, I turned up Selia's laptop and sent some e-mails. Aftermath I wanted to visit my test center when Jason called me. I frankly told him my intention and he promised to take me there. Names of stops were not read on buses; I didn't know where to get off.

So I met Jason one hour later in the car park and we caught Bus 196. Jason kept reminding me to look around the bus stops carefully. About fifteen minutes later, we got off at Dover Close East. Jason led me across a street and then, Anglo Chinese Junior College hove in front of us. Playgrounds surrounded this small school. Jason tried to take me in and show me around the Sports Complex but was stopped by the guard. Visitors were not allowed to go inside on school days.

Then we caught Bus 196 back to Clementi. Jason drove me to have snacks

around Nyee Ann. I had a large cup of ice cream and a chocolate cake. They were really delicious. Jason had a lot more than I: spaghettis, western vegetable soup, ice cream and bread. As we walked out of the snack bar, he bought me a waffle. I eventually knew what a waffle was. I had only read its name in dictionaries before but today I grubbed it in my hand. It was a steamed green cake with a pleasant smell. Wow, I felt happy. I had tasted what I might never eat in China. Gratitude filled my heart.

3: 00 p.m. Jason and I left the snack bar for the National Archives of Singapore. We first bought two movie tickets and a documentary film stated half an hour later. When we hurried to the studio, most seats were occupied. We quickly got two seats in the first row and the film began soon. It told about the history of Malaya, which was the combination of Malaysia and Singapore. I felt indeed sad to see the local residents' home ruined by the invasion of the Japanese troops. Actually I didn't know Singapore had been invaded by Japan before; our Chinese history books didn't tell us that but just asked us to analyze why Singapore was the fastest growing country in Asia. Oops, I was a history dummy. Japanese troops were to blame but the sadness of the Japanese women over their dead husbands made my heart broken. No one hoped to witness such a catastrophe; it was even heartbreaking to recall that experience.

After approximately 50 minutes the film was over. When we left the studio, I was surprised to see a troop of soldiers there. A Singaporean general began to teach these soldiers lessons.

Jason then showed me around the Display Hall and I saw a lot of war relics. Admittedly it was an advanced hall, equipped with all kinds of electronic buttons—once I touched a place on a digital map, the screen at once began to tell the history of that place. Wow, it was amazingly wonderful! The museum, to my surprise, even sold Japanese bullets and pistols! I thought those stuffs were better to be brought back by Japanese to learn their lessons.

5:00 p.m. We got on Jason's mini-truck and drove back. Selia called to complain about her customers. What a poor girl.

I reached my room soon and washed my hair. Hoped my stomach wouldn't work against me tonight.

7:21 p.m. Selia called but I said I didn't want to go out tonight. I just needed time to review my lessons. Had several more slices of guava to make my stomach feel better. It actually worked!

8:36 p.m. Called Mom and told her everything was all right. Then started to read *Frankstain* (a SAT score-raiser) when I nearly fell asleep.

Then reviewed critical reading and writing.

10: 34 p.m. Ugh. Time to get a good rest. Wrote a few lines to encourage myself.

October 14th

6:47 a.m. My alarm rang. The music was one of my favorite songs. Had a yawn. Forcing myself to sleep was really a hard task but finally I succeeded. I convinced myself to sleep less than one hour after I went to bed. I would at times get insomnia before tests. But fortunately I didn't have any nightmare.

6:59 a.m. Washed my face. Oops, a little dizzy. Rushed to the fridge, grabbed my chocolate cake, and hurried to the elevator. As soon as the elevator reached the first floor, I ran out toward the bus stop. Jammed a handful of chocolate wafers into my mouth.

7:15 a.m. Bus 196 finally came. I got on at once. Amazed. I was the first passenger on the big bus. And perhaps the first of today.

I sat near the door and just below the television. Colorful ads were on. I looked up several times but finally fished out *Frankstain* to read. Some experts recommended read to get familiar with words before the tests. However, I couldn't get too absorbed in my novel. I must look around and be careful not to get off at the wrong bus stop. That would cost me too much to go back if I got off at a wrong place. Perhaps the whole day would be ruined.

7: 29 a.m. I got off at Anglo Chinese Junior College. When I arrived at the Sport Complex, it was just 7:30.

Read the directions on a board in front of the Sports Complex and checked my index number on the notice board. Wow, so many test takers today! Approximately 500 people for SAT I and 200 for SAT II! I waited in line to get registered and was assigned to the Multi Purpose Hall.

8: 10 a.m. I put my bag against the wall and sat down to read my novel. My index number was 134 and when we were allowed to enter the test room, I found my seat in the middle of the large room (Line F, Row 9). I noticed most test takers around me were Indians—they had dark skins but no thick lips as Africans. The first words that came into my mind were cultural diversity when the test booklets were handed out. I couldn't quite figure out why I thought of such a thing; it was a common topic of college essays.

8:20 a.m. The test began. The first ten minutes were spent on filling in information on the front of the answer sheet.

8:45 a.m. The real race started. As I turned to the first page of the test booklet, Writing Section appeared as I expected. I wouldn't know it would pop up first if I hadn't taken TOEFL last year. I was startled enough then. Well, no further thought. I read through the topic. It required me to write about deception, or pretending. Oops, I was not at all familiar with this kind of topic. But before long a sample

essay I read the other day reflected in my mind. I knew what to write! So I picked up my pencil and began to scribble on the answer sheet. I wrote more than the space provided and had to cut my essay down to fit into the lines. I wrote the two pages full. I'd never imagined I could write so much in such a short time.

Without a break I moved on to Critical Reading. I didn't encounter so many problems as I expected. The passages were all interesting.

After a five-minute break, I moved on to Mathematics. Then moved to Writing, back to Critical Reading. The routine seemed endless. Had I not jammed a bunch of chocolate, I would not sit up for so long. What indeed surprised me was the large quantity of Critical Reading questions. I remembered when I took the practice tests, there weren't so many passages as in the real test. Four Critical Reading Sections, four Mathematics Sections, and two Writing Sections. Huh, I'd come to realize that SAT wasn't just an academic test for college applicants, but a marathon to test the applicants' determination and strength. It required so much energy and so much concentration throughout. At times I felt like giving up, or just stopping in the middle. But I gritted my teeth and held on. Looking back on the way I'd come so far made me feel more encouraged.

1:10 p.m. The test supervisor finally called us to stop working. Huh, the last section was over. Finally it was over. But we were not dismissed until she finished reading some directions. Yes, something had to be read before I said goodbye to SAT I.

To me, the SAT I test was not as painful as TOEFL. I felt like giving up every minute during the TOEFL test and kept telling myself to cherish every moment of the dream-pursuing journey. In a measure I felt the SAT test was fun. Maybe I'd gotten used to long-hour tests.

1: 25 p.m. I walked out of the test room into the playground. Sunshine spilt over the uniformed students engaged in a volleyball game. Cultural diversity propped up in my mind again. As I walked out of the school, I wondered if my future life in America would be the same as I was watching. Then that would be great.

I didn't know when or how I'd become so fond of living among different groups of people. They were from diverse backgrounds and they were brought up in different environments, and their lifestyles of beliefs might conflict with those of mine, but I didn't mind. I felt living in such a colorful environment was just an unprecedented experience. I held discrimination against none of them, although Indians could only do dishwashing in Singapore. I took even more delight in meeting black people.

1:33 p.m. I got off Bus 196 and reached my room. Called Selia excitedly and sent e-mails to Mom and Yiming. About ten minutes later I went out with Selia and Jason.

We first drove to Suntec City Mall where we fed a lot of fishes. Wow, those fishes were really fat and lazy; some of them would just open their mouth and wait for visitors to throw in food. Then I was taken to Fortune Fountain. Folklore said that walking around the fountain with your right hand in the water would give you good luck. I did so with Selia and Jason; I prayed I could get admitted to Yale and go to America next fall. After that we went up to Jason's office on the 32nd floor in Suntec Tower Two. This area was said to be the most prosperous of Singapore. Then they showed me around Marina City Mall.

6: 30 p.m. We had beef ramen at a Japanese restaurant. I thought the Japanese beef tasted like mutton, at least it wasn't what I had had tasted in China. Anyway the ramen was delicious; I even drank up the soup. Well, vanilla coke helped my digestion. Jason suggested seeing a film tonight but we still had two hours to kill before the film began. So we had a walk outside the mall. They took me to a very big bookstore where I found shelves of SAT books. Oh God. Why didn't I find this bookstore earlier? There were all books I needed for SAT I. But it was too late. Oops. Didn't find anything for SAT II.

9:30 p.m. We ran to the cinema and Jason bought me a cup of cashew nuts, a cup of fried corns, and a bottle of vanilla coke. The first two snacks were made by Indians. Really nice. So we entered the cinema and found our seats.

Jason liked to see thrilling movies and we picked *Silk* tonight. It was a ghost movie (I should call it a horror movie because it didn't mean to scare audience) that told the story of an anti-gravity team that discovered the ghost of a dead boy. The little boy's ghost was preserved because he was buried at the center of a magnetic ground. A policeman named Ye Qidong was hired by the anti-gravity team to follow the ghost to find out the truth of his death. Ye Qidong finally found the boy was killed by his mother because she didn't want his son to bear any more insults and shame because of his disease. People who stared into the eyes of the ghost died immediately. I felt a little hallowed to see the boy's eyes without pupils. But Ye Qidong tried his best to protect the boy and received an innocent kiss from him. When the story seemed to end, Ye Qidong discovered the boy had a silk connected to his mother who was struggling for her last breath. When the woman died, her ghost came out from her torso looking for her son. She killed many people who stared at her eyes and nearly killed Ye Qidong on a subway when her son suddenly appeared. Ye Qidong survived. Then his own mother, whose disease couldn't be cured, also died. But before her ghost vanished into thin air, she walked into the kitchen and boiled an egg for Ye Qidong. This scene moved many audiences to tears. The mother thought nothing for herself even when she was going to die. Qidong cried too, saying this experience had taught him a significant lesson.

So that was the whole story. I dried my eyes as the lights were turned on. I even cried silently as I walked out of the cinema. I missed my Mom.

Jason recalled the ghost and frightened Selia all the way to Mr. Prata. It was an

Indian restaurant. They had yellow rice but I had nothing. I was still full and I hadn't yet acquired a taste for Indian flavors. But in my opinion Indians were honest and sincere.

11:57 p.m. Finally returned to my room. Turned on Selia's laptop and sent e-mails to Mom and Yiming.

It was indeed a meaningful day.

October 15th

2:00 a.m. Turned off the laptop and went to bed. Could eventually have a sound sleep.

10:00 a.m. Huh, got up pretty late. My roommate was in Morpheus' arms until noon. Singaporean life made people lazy. I wasn't quite used to it and I didn't think I was ever going to enjoy this lifestyle. It was too relaxing.

Ate nothing in the morning because my stomach wasn't empty. Luckily I didn't overeat last night.

1: 36 p.m. Went to have lunch with Selia and Jason. I paid SG $ 4 for my own Japanese noodles with fried fish. It was delicious. When I finished, Selia treated me to some honeydew and watermelon.

3: 14 p.m. Selia and I went to the National Library. I found many books in the Reference Library but could borrow none of them. Later we took an elevator down to the underground floor where the Central Lending Library was located. I got some books about college admissions.

Jason had gone to discuss business with his customers, so Selia and I walked around a nearby mall. Each of us had a chocolate ice cream with bread. It was really creative and tasty.

6:30 p.m. We went to find Jason in Four Square. When he had finished, we ate at a nearby Swedish restaurant. I ordered a chocolate &strawberry sundae. Wow, it couldn't taste nicer! I especially liked the crisp cake.

Then Jason drove us to Geylong where they pointed to me the Chinese prostitutes along the streets. I'd never come to know what shame was really like until then. But I felt a little sympathized. At times people can't choose to do what they like, but have to do what they hate to earn a living. It's a pity.

Jason bought me another ice cream sandwiched between two pieces of cakes. Gee, that was what I used to think of as a sandwich when I was a child. But they told me sandwiches were much like hamburgers, filled with lettuces, tomato sauce (I liked least), meat and cream. I guessed someday I would definitely have a taste of the sandwich of my dream. Anyhow, the ice cream in my hand was extremely good, although it was sold at a food stand. Well, good things don't necessarily have to be sold at splendid stores, isn't it? Sometimes, the simpler, the better.

9: 32 p.m. On our way back, we passed by a Malaysian street. The Malaysian new year was just around the corner and all the Malaysian people were shopping for their festival. I guesses it was as important as the Spring Festival in China.

9: 52 p.m. I got to my room. So early today. After a bath, I attempted to send e-mails. But the Internet couldn't be connected. My roommate said network was

always like this in this house.

11: 36 p.m. Ugh. Too tired to read any of the books I borrowed from library today.

The sky wasn't clear today. Hoped the air would be fresh tomorrow when I got up.

October 16th

9: 35 a.m. Got up so late. My roommate had rushed to her school in the early morning. Her course started today.

Could finally get connected to the Internet. Played music while sending e-mails.

Had some chocolate and coffee bread. Ate an egg brought from home. Guava had gone sour, oops.

Spent the noon and afternoon reading college admission essays. Copied some sample essays to my notebook.

5:00 p.m. Jason called me and we drove to Jurong West Community Library. I searched a long time for the test preparation books I needed. There were no books for SAT II, so I had to use some alternative books instead.

Then Jason took me to eat steamed rice with black beans and ribs. Really nice. Later he treated me to a large cup of honeydew juice. Very good!

When darkness fell, we drove to meet Selia at Clementi MRT station. She looked pale and all of us went back to rest. My network broke down again. So I could only grab some books to read.

As I was about to sleep, Selia called and I hurried downstairs to take the notebooks I'd asked her to find for me.

11: 23 p.m. I rushed back to my room and went to sleep.

A simple and hasty day.

October 17th

7: 23 a.m. Wow, got up much earlier!

Ate up the bread and biscuits left from yesterday's breakfast and logged onto the Internet. Network was always jammed in the evening so I must take advantage of the morning hour. Oops, no one sent me any e-mail. But I did send one to Yale Admission Office because Mom told me they sent a letter to say I had submitted an outdated application. I wasn't sure what on earth was outdated. I sent everything required.

Then I talked to Selia via MSN. She said her holiday schedule had come out: she would be off work from this Saturday to next Tuesday! Wow, could have a good rest! She'd got a considerate boss.

9: 30 a.m. Logged off the Internet. Suddenly recalled the nightmare I had last night. I dreamed I got a pretty low score for SAT II: Math IC 500, Math IIC 500, and Chemistry 400. That was nothing short of awful. I cried to tears in the dream but it wouldn't stop my grief. I was still afraid it would become a reality. Then I could hardly accept it. Well, still got plenty of time to prevent it from happening!

Studied sample essays until evening. Could not stand staying indoor any more and called Jason.

5: 00 p.m. I took a subway to the City Hall and went through the CityLink to Jason's office. I waited for him outside his building for more than one hour. I suddenly realized that best way to explore a city was to walk around the city oneself. No cars, no companies, just walk and seek.

7: 10 p.m. Selia arrived. We three drove to upper Geylong and have hot-pot there. I put a lot of noodles into the pot and ate them up. Then I bolted down a lot of pigskins, fish balls and watermelons. Hearing drinks were free, I took two cans of juice and poured it into my stomach. So full when I stood up.

Afterward we went to see a movie. Before entering the cinema, I rushed to the washroom and hangover welled up. My stomach was searing for a moment.

9: 35 p.m. The film started. It was about a car racer called Ricky Bobi. Although a comedy, it taught me the courage to face failure in life. I loved this kind of light-hearted movie and I even loved Ricky Bobi.

It was unusually cold in the cinema and I had to hold my arms throughout the movie. Well, perhaps it was due to the small number of audience. It wasn't a thriller so I didn't have to focus with all my heart, in that way I would easily notice the temperature.

11: 23 p.m. We walked out of the cinema. Jason parked his mini-truck in a gas station to get petroleum while he entered a nearby FairPrice store to get a pack of walnut cakes. Couldn't believe it when he said he was hungry again.

I was already half-asleep on the mini-truck. The moment I reached my room, I fell asleep at once.

October 18th

9: 01 a.m. Awoke a little late.

Had some sesame paste brought from home as breakfast. Then checked my e-mails. Cornell College asked me to join its Live Chat at 6: 30 p.m. Eastern Time (about 8: 30 a.m. this morning). So I hurried to log in vainly. Selia's laptop didn't support Java-enabled browser. Installing would require a lot of time. Thus I answered that e-mail saying sorry. The e-mail arrived yesterday but I couldn't read it because the network was down. Oops.

Called home and Mom told me several mails had arrived for me. so many colleges. I must hurry now. Jesus, bunches of essays to write before mailing my applications.

12: 03 a.m. Had sesame paste as lunch. Nice food. Didn't want to go downstairs. Paid my rental fees yesterday and got only SG $ 40 left. Yet 20 more days to live.

Felt bored to do the mechanical work of copying so I turned on the laptop and played music all the afternoon.

3: 36 p.m. Jammed all the biscuits and puddings into my stomach. Well, my snacks were all gone. Kept working.

8: 25 p.m. Went out with the laptop and asked Jason to help me update the network. He said he would need three days to repair. Oops, I would be off-hook for totally three days.

Then Selia came and we drove to a nearby market where we got bottles of soya milk and green beans. I'd been fascinated by green beans ever since I first went to the cinema. They were wonderful! Most importantly, they brought back the happy memory of my childhood.

I also wanna try a small bag of mixed party nuts but forgot to bring my money. Selia didn't seem happy to buy one for me. so I only picked my dear green beans. Frankly I smelt something wrong in our relationship recently. I just felt Selia had been less than sincere to me since yesterday. Maybe I depended too much on them—their money, to be more exact. I know numerous people are sensitive to money and few are happy if someone depends on their wages so often…except my Mom. Then and there, my dear green beans no longer taste as good. The ones Mom bought for me were the nicest in the world. Tears kept oozing out of my eyes. I'm a poor kid and I must resist the temptation of nice snacks. Remember I'd come to Singapore for my SAT tests, not for good tastes.

10: 04 p.m. Called my Mom. She said she went to fix her teeth this afternoon. Hoped everything was coming long her way.

Time was running out but I hadn't started to review for my test. Should study harder tomorrow.

The little stuffed bear I brought with me here reminded me once again of my dear Mom.

October 19th

8: 47 a.m. Got up. Opened the window to enjoy the sunshine while turning on the air-conditioner. I loved the way the room was cooled.

Read *Schaum's Elementary Mathematics* sthe whole morning. My sesame paste was all consumed. Sigh. I didn't like it at all when at home but I loved it so much here in Singapore.

The more I thought of Selia's insincerity, the more I missed my Mom. I couldn't help but cry. I did want to call Mom but didn't want her hear me crying over the phone.

Maybe time to depend on my own now. One week's financial dependence on other people had tortured them thoroughly. Then I could spend as much money as I wished and buy whatever I wanted. No need to look at other people's faces before deciding to do anything. In this world, Mom is wiling to give me anything she has. Only Mom loves me unconditionally.

4:37 p.m. Went downstairs finally. Looked for food around my neighborhood but only found Mr. Prata. I didn't like Indian food and went on searching. Covered a long way but in the end got two bags of biscuits at a food store near my house.

6: 02 p.m. Back to my room. Had a shower and felt fatigued. Called Mom and chatted a great deal. I guessed neither Jason nor Selia would take me out tonight so I ate up my biscuits. They were indeed delicious.

In fact neither of them called me. Selia complained how tired she felt. I said something flattering and hung on.

I began to miss my Mom again.

Went to sleep early.

October 20th

7: 00 a.m. Got up early. I was awoken by my rude roommate several times last night. Had already thought her awful and irritating.

Hustled to Study Room as soon as I had milk and biscuits. Nobody was there, but I didn't know how to turn on the air-conditioner. So I had to open all the windows. Grew hotter as time went by. Finally I couldn't stand heat any more and quickly reviewed two more chapters of chemistry before left.

9:30 a.m. Back to my room. Borrowed a pen from my roommate (Selia was not glad finding one for me) and then took a subway to Jurong Regional Library. All the stores had not been open yet. But already many readers were inside the library. The room temperature was fine at first but grew colder and colder later on. I was rather glad and surprised to pick up an AP Chemistry from the shelf and copied some contents from it. Three hours later I began to read college admission essays.

3:30 p.m. I could no long stand the low temperature in the library and hurried out. Much warmer outside. Bought myself a bag of Swedish chocolate vanilla twisters and two bags of potato chips. Wanted ice cream but couldn't afford. A poor kid.

Tried to add SG $ 2 to my Ez-link Card but a young man pointed to me the minimum was SG $ 10. So I gave up and thought how I could get back. Nobody was there to help me. Jason wouldn't answer my call. Finally I got on a subway and rode to Bukit Batok. I hoped to get back to Clementi but got the wrong direction. I thought Bukit Batok was quite near Clementi but which proved false. They were far apart. When I got off at Bukit Batok, I knew where I was at once. I was there standing in front of West Mall. A lot of cheap clothes were currently on sale and I walked in to have a look. I picked a T-shirt, a vase, a belt and a wrist-chain. The latter two were gifts for my Mom. Then answered Selia's call and she would meet me at West Mall after work. Then I stayed in Bukit Batok Library searching for the books I needed.

8:30 p.m. Selia finally arrived and borrowed two books for me. she kept grunting how weary she felt. She'd never know how impatient and fatigued I'd been waiting for her. After she withdrew some money, we ate at a restaurant nearby the MRT station. She treated me to Mo Mo Cha Cha, a kind of ice cream mixed with sweet potatoes. Seemed she'd behaved in such a generous and noble way.

Since she was unwilling to walk around with me, so we went back. She asked me to add SG $ 10 to my Ez-link Card but I refused. What if I couldn't use all the money? I was already short of food these days, and I didn't want to waste any money. Then she pretended to find a coin for me in her purse. I myself picked one from my bag and got on the bus. S

On the bus, she kept talking about how happy she felt in her senior high school but I was too tired to react. It wasn't that I didn't like her, but the insincere way

she'd been behaving made me feel disgusted. Admittedly I'm not her sister by blood, but I didn't think there was any need to pretend in front of me, a naïve and poor kid. I especially disliked the way she behaved when Jason was present.

Fortunately we reached Clementi soon and departed at the elevators. I picked up the phone and called Mom as soon as I got into my room. I'd neglected a good woman to wait for a silly woman! God, how awful I was today!

Talked a lot to Mom. Tears kept falling down but I disguised them straight away with laughter. I'd got her to worry about me enough. No one was ever needed.

Then I washed my clothes. Still missed my Mom badly. As she said, I also hoped the SAT II test would approach soon so that we could return to her warm hugs.

I'd rather be left alone tomorrow.

October 21st

8:36 a.m. Got up. Had milk and biscuits as breakfast, the same as yesterday. Then started studying Mathematics. Today was a Indian holiday for Singapore. Perhaps Kwanzaa? Everyone was off work.

Selia sent a SMS asking me if I would like to go out for fun with them. I politely refused, saying I had to review my lessons. So they left.

1:30 p.m. Called mom. Went out for lunch near MRT station. Found spring rolls interesting and got two. But they tasted so bad. Before returning I ordered a glass of barley juice.

3:00 p.m. Returned to my room and went on studying mathematics.

5:20 p.m. My roommate, that stupid girl, began to talk loudly over QQ. I could hardly bear the noise and went downstairs. Forgot Study Room would be closed on weekends. So I could only sit down in front of the Rest Room and got stings from mosquitoes. I hated this environment and missed my Mom badly.

Couldn't go back because of that awful noise. Wandered around for a place to study in vain.

7: 01 p.m. Went back to my room and put down my heavy books. Then went downstairs again to have a good look at Clementi. I visited many places around my neighborhood and didn't return until dark. Yepp, found two other good places to eat! I wanted to walk further but was afraid of getting lost.

8: 35 p.m. Back to my room and went on to study math. Called Mom again. She said she would give me a big birthday cake and nice chicken soup the day I returned home. I felt so hungry at this moment.

11: 04 p.m. Called Jason. He said he was in a bar and couldn't return early. I knew I should never have expected too much from him.

Hung up and went to bed. Missed my Mom badly.

October 22nd

Only 15 days to remain in Singapore.

Had breakfast quickly and borrowed my roommate's laptop. I guesses Jason would not repair the laptop for me until next month.

Oops. The network was down again. So I just played some soft music.

Noon. Called Mom.

2:30 p.m. It rained heavily. I stood against the window and looked into the distant. When it rains in Singapore, it pours.

Selia said this morning she would take me to the library but didn't call me until late in the afternoon. Then we caught Bus 105 to Jurong East Library. I got four books though still didn't find anything particularly useful for SAT II. Afterward we took a subway to meet Jason at the Suntec City Mall. There we played PC games for a little while before grabbing a bite. Jason once again treated me to pork &mushroom rice noodles. A bowl of chicken soup was served along. I bolted my food down because I hadn't had any meat for days. Actually the noodles didn't taste very good. Anyhow, some was always better than nothing.

In the evening, we saw a Japanese film, *Death Note*. It had a very old plot and everything was not out of expectation. I wasn't quite interested. But admittedly it had a thoughtful ending.

11:57 p.m. Drove back when passing by a 24-hour food store. They bought some snacks because Jason felt hungry. God, he had a lot of curry rice this evening. I was generously given a box of soya milk. Wow, pretty nice! It had 330 ml but I felt it had only 200 ml.

All the people had gone to bed when I reached my room. After drinking some wheat tea, I also went to sleep.

Oops. Forgot to call Mom this evening.

October 23rd

8:10 a.m. Got up soon after my roommate went to school. Oh, a new Monday.

Turned on my roommate's computer and sent piles of pictures to my Mom while drinking milk.

Wishing to be financial independent on my own, I walked to the kitchen. Oops, I didn't know how to use the stove and gases seemed to come out. I hurried back to my room and waited for Jason to take me out.

Finally Jason met me nearby his mini-truck. We three drove to have vegetarian food at Nyee Ann. I hated curry but Jason loved it very much.

In the afternoon we visited Singapore Botany Garden. I paid SG $ 5 for my own ticket. Well, I actually didn't have much money left for dinners.

I kept taking pictures of the splendid green garden. Later I found I'd shot hundreds of pictures! Then Jason drove us to his office because he'd got some business.

6:51 p.m. Back to my room and fell to my bed. Dead asleep.

8: 10 p.m. Woke up in soft yellow light. It was so late and I'd been sleeping for so long. Selia sent me a SMS asking if I would love to play karaoke with them tonight. I had to share SG $ 20 for my own. I called her saying I was too tired to go out. In fact I didn't have that much money for fun. My family couldn't affor it. Then I called my Mom. She said dozens of mails had arrived for me.

After chatting a lot with my roommate, I went to bed early. I missed my Mom.

October 24th

9: 15 p.m. Got up. Thought I would wake up earlier since I went to bed so early last night. Gee, didn't wanna become a sleep worm.

Dad sent a SMS telling me five mails arrived with a parcel. Well, when I was in Xichang, nobody sent me anything. But once I was away, an avalanche of mails hit my house. Then Dad said he'd taken photos of those mails and e-mailed them to me. So I turned on my roommate's laptop and tried to read them vainly. The Internet was connected but I couldn't log in! Oops. Today was the Malaysian new year, so I supposed a lot of people jammed online to send greetings and wishes.

12: 52 a.m. Asked the way to FairPrice supermarket and finally got there. Bought a lot of bread, cake, oatmeal, pears and longans. They cost me SG $ 8.75. well, all for my remaining days in Singapore.

It was fairly hot. So I quickly went back and had a bath. Then I had some bread, cake and chicken tuna (brought from home). It was until now I began to realize Mom was right to take bags of food here. I should have taken more.

4: 32 p.m. Sat down in front of my desk and began reviewing chemistry. Too hard. I regretted not choosing literature or history. I couldn't understand a word now.

Well, couldn't change it now. I couldn't afford to pay the extra US $ 20.50 for changing subjects. Just struggle on.

8: 30 p.m. Asked Jason and Selia to take me to Bukit Batok Library only to find it closed. I forgot it was public holiday.

Oops. Then we drove to a small store where Jason looked for his pepper sauce vainly. Selia generously bought me a chocolate ice cream. Well, I loved that flavor very much! My dear chocolate cracker!

9: 10 p.m. Back. Checked e-mails and found pictures of my mails. I forwarded the financial aid applications forms to Yale Office at once. They said I submitted an outdated one.

Then my young landlord asked me to help him borrow some books tomorrow. Then he handed me his IC card. Wow, what good luck! I tried to borrow him card yesterday and he handed it to me today! Just so coincidental!

Superb! I made a fast call to Mom and went to bed at midnight.

October 25th

Only 12 more days to stay in Singapore. Still so many days to wait. I missed my Mom and missed my home.

8: 03 a.m. Got up and had milk and Panland Caiffin cake. Pretty tasty. Then began to study chemistry from the simplest facts. Picked up confidence little by little.

12: 05 a.m. Had a lot of oatmeal and a chicken tuna. Then borrowed two pens from my roommate and caught Bus 105 to Jurong Regional Library. Found the Thai books my landlord needed and began searching for my own books. Great! Found a good book for math and a good book for chemistry!

Then found a seat and read through the math book in the library. Later read some college admission books.

6: 21 p.m. Finished taking notes. The heavy rain had stopped. I checked out with three Thai books and a chemistry book.

Afterward I got a standard ticket and caught a subway to Bukit Batok Library. Looked a long time for SAT Math in vain. Catalogs on computers indicated they were here but I just couldn't find any. Sigh. Then Selia came and we checked out with three chemistry books. Later each of us had Hong Kong rice with fried pork and cucumbers in West Mall. A little salty but nice on the whole. Selia mentioned the bill several times deliberately but I didn't react, as if it were none of my business. So she paid the total of SG $ 6.

After supper we walked around West Mall and returned soon. Mom sent me a SMS and I called her as soon as I reached my room. I especially missed Mom when I felt hungry.

Only 8 days left for SAT II. But still piles of books to read. I must set up my mind and work hard from tomorrow on. Couldn't play for fun any more. I'd come to Singapore to pursue my dream, NOT to have fun.

11: 23 p.m. Too late to work any longer. Went to sleep after a bath.

November 2nd

9:00 a.m. Finished breakfast and climbed to Study Room. I loved fresh air so I opened all the windows.

9:26 a.m. A woman came up and asked me in strange English if I minded turning on the air-conditioner. I was perplexed. Then she repeated but it was all Greek to me. Finally she had to explain in Cantonese. I closed all the windows while she turned on the air-conditioner.

11: 23 a.m. The woman was about to leave. She came up to me and asked if she should turn off the air-conditioner. I said no, I could do it myself.

"Are you Chinese?" She smiled.

I nodded. Never before had I been asked about my nationality. Then I said I'd come to Singapore alone to take the SAT tests.

"I wish you all the best," she said in Singlish and waved goodbye to me. It wasn't until a moment after she left that I began to feel touched.

I felt indeed blessed. I believed I would have a good day tomorrow.

The afternoon went the same as yesterday.

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Friday November 3rd

Hadn't done anything interesting for more than a week. I was looking for a pen to write with anxiously.

Borrowed a laptop from the boy opposite my room and checked my SAT I score. Scared and excited, waiting for the page to open. Then, all of a sudden, I became disappointed. I got an awful score, 2000 in total.

Not glad at all. Critical Reading scored 640, Mathematics scored 730, and Writing scored merely 630. I was so frustrated to read these figures. What the hell went wrong? I thought I had an excellent performance on the test and I'd been expecting a full mark. Perhaps, and probably, I was too proud. I had overestimated myself. In fact I was not that good at all.

I could hardly take in that my Mathematics scored only 730! It was pretty poor for a Chinese student. I didn't think I'd made any mistakes but…All magic had worked against me. I was totally lost and defeated.

I couldn't figure out what all this meant to me, but my heart ached badly. I didn't believe I performed so poorly.

The section I had most faith in scored the lowest. Now, every word of SAT turned out a nightmare for me.

I kicked, I screamed, I shouted and I cried. I didn't want to tell anyone or say anything. I was beleaguered by grief.

Pulling myself together, I walked out to have Islamic dish. It was called Nasi Lemak, consisted of a bowl of rice, two chicken legs, and a fried fish. It should have been tasted nice but to me, today it had no flavor. I felt rather sorrowful for my Mom who spent half of her annual income sending me here. And I did so bad.

Upon returning, I called Mom straight away. Too sad to express myself clearly. She said 2000 was OK, even full mark had been refused. That was just what I said to her, but now she quoted my words to comfort me.

Hanging up, I cried for another moment. I was indeed heartbroken. My "excellent" performance let me down. It was not like when I took TOEFL.

Time was tough, but I had to carry on.

Tomorrow is another battle.

Saturday November 4th

Falling asleep was a quite challenging job last night. I attempted so vainly.

6:47 a.m. Got up as my alarm went off.

7:00 a.m. Left my room for the elevator. Grabbed a bag of cake bread and some chocolate wafers.

Missed a bus when I arrived at the bus stop. My hands were full of bread, and eating is allowed on buses in Singapore. So I waited another fifteen minutes for the next bus.

Then it came. I threw in 90 cents into the iron box as I got on and the driver looked at with suspicion. Gee, I wasn't going to cheat on that cheap stuff!

Forced myself to review a few chemistry problems on bus but could barely concentrate. Finally totally gave up. My mind went a little unclear.

7:43 a.m. Reached the Sports Complex. Fewer students here than on October 14th. I checked my index number on the notice board and found only 89 students took SAT II today. A tall girl came up asking me where to get registered. I didn't know either, so we sought together. She was a Philippine girl studying in Singapore as well as a SAT II test taker today. She said she was going to take Math IC, Math IIC, and literature today. Then I was told I could change subjects as I liked during the test! What a fact! Why didn't someone tell me earlier? God. I'd undergone such a torture to prepare for chemistry only to be told I could change it.

Despite my ignorance, I had to stick to chemistry because I didn't prepare for any other subject.

Waited in line to get registered. Chatted a lot with that Philippine girl.

8: 30 a.m. We were allowed to enter the test room when I jammed three chocolate wafers into my mouth. Each of us was assigned a thick booklet that contained all the subject tests. Indeed I could change anyone I liked. But it was too late now. Spent the next twenty minutes filling in personal information.

8:55 a.m. The real race started out. I chose chemistry first. Oops. It was really hard. I got stuck on the first question and didn't want to carry on. Gritting my teeth, I looked at other questions. so many difficult questions on electron configuration. Fortunately I spent a lot of time on it yesterday but still had to do a lot of brainstorming since the questions were a different type. I made many guesses. I knew a quarter point would be taken off for the wrong answer, but I still wanted to have a try. I didn't want to leave my answer sheet blank.

Time was running out much faster than I expected. I paced myself again and again, yet unable to do well. Then one hour had gone.

A five-minute was given before the second subject test began. Some students left. That Philippine girl chatted a lot with me. Yeah, we both needed relaxation.

In the second test, I chose Math Level 1 (I should have chosen Math Level 2 which was much harder). It was a lot easier than chemistry but I at times fell into traps. I paced and paced and could only finish my second check.

Then we had a one-minute break. Some more students left. When the last subject test began, there were only one third students left. Students who chose to take three subject tests in a day must have great endurance.

I felt vague soon after the last test began but tried hard to concentrate. More and more problems popped up. I almost left half of my answer sheet empty. I really didn't know how to solve those strange questions. Even thought more time was assigned, I might not work them out either. Then on second check, I filled in the ovals one by one based on my guesses.

When the test supervisor called us to stop working, my mind went totally blank. I quickly put away my things and left the test room with that Philippine girl. Looked like she'd done a good job.

On my way out of Anglo Chinese Junior College, I didn't even look back. It had never crossed my mind that I might never again visit here. It was where my dream fell and broke.

That Philippine girl and I became good friends. We kept chatting until we departed at the bus station.

Then I thought I was lost. I didn't know how to catch a bus back. I didn't know what the hell was wrong with me. I just knew I had to go through another heartbreaking day when the SAT II score came out.

Finally found my bus and rode back. I cried on the bus. I had been too proud. But now I was a loser. I lost in such an important game whose rules I didn't know until it was over.

The moment I reached my room, I picked up the telephone and called Mom. I felt so bad. After all, I felt glad it was finally over.

Then I turned on TV and congratulated myself on surviving such a significant marathon.

2:30 p.m. I went out with Jason and Selia. Too depressed to find interest in anything. What had I come to Singapore for? I lost my goal and messed up my dream.

Borrowed some books from Central Lending Library. Enjoy Eat-All-You-Can dinners at Wah! Restaurant. I had a lot of Yong Chou fried rice, ducks, chickens, and cream.

Then we went to E-Max to play video games.

9:30 p.m. We saw an American movie about wizardry. I nearly lost my mobile phone. Indeed I had lost everything today.

11: 47 p.m. Got back to my room. Didn't want to sleep. Didn't want to do anything except cry. I felt so sorry for my Mom.

Sunday November 5th

8: 25 a.m. Got up lazily. Still regret my poor performance.
Read a lot on writing skills.
Too sad to go out.

Monday November 6th

Finally would be flying back to China the day after tomorrow.
Felt a little better today. I'd been away from Mom for so long.
Indeed homesick.
No money to eat today. Hence starved all day.
I was lonely. Longing to go home early.

November 7th

10: 10 a.m. Got up so late. Had oatmeal and began to watch TV. Everything I did would be the last in Singapore.

The thought of going home tomorrow morning excited me a lot. I had suffered enough from this miserable life abroad.

Packed up my belongings fast.

Wanna make myself read some lines but too excited to focus. Not a day for reading, obviously.

Didn't know what to do to kill the following several hours. No mood to do anything. TV programs were boring.

So I wasted the whole day. Did nothing meaningful. I was too anxious to sit still in sofa.

Looking back on the 28 days in Singapore, I was at a loss of words. It was miserable, but I had apparently learned precious lessons from it. I realized how much my Mom had been loving me.

7: 34 p.m. Mom sent me a SMS telling me she had gotten on the train to Chengdu.

9:00 p.m. One last hour to say in my room. Frankly I wished to leave this place as soon as possible. I did love my own home and love my own Mom. She said I should go to the airport early.

9: 24 p.m. Called Jason. He cautioned me to take good care of my belongings in the airport. No one was ever sure what kind of people would show up there.

10:00 p.m. Selia called me at last and my landlord helped me carry all my things downstairs. Then Selia got me two bottles of water and saw me off at the MRT station. I was alone in my journey.

10: 59 p.m. Got off at Tannah Merah Interchange and got on the subway to Changi Airport. I saw an American woman also hustling there so I followed her.

11: 16 p.m. Checked out at the destination and asked the way to Terminal One. Had to take the Skytrain there. Later picked up a newspaper and read the Skytrain won a Japanese award.

11: 23 p.m. Finally reached the airport. Checked my gate and found a seat. Called Selia telling her I had reached the airport safely and then sent a SMS to Mom. Then my long wait began.

I pulled out my bear and made it a pillow. But I couldn't get to sleep. The chairs made my back hurt. I pushed my trolley around the airport.

November 8th

1: 10 a.m. Too tired to walk around any more. Returned to my seat and fell asleep for ten minutes. The temperature grew lower and lower inside the airport, and I had to put on all my T-shirt. But that didn't work. Finally I could no longer stand the cold and went out.

Huh, it was pretty warm outside. A light was twinkling on a tower. Taxis kept coming and leaving. It was indeed a quiet road.

2:46 a.m. Found a place to sit outside the airport and waited there. Watched passengers coming and leaving. I came to think of America. Didn't know why.

3:30 a.m. Walked around the airport with my awkward trolley. The policemen might think I was mad.

5: 10 a.m. Still walking. I'd been walking for two hours. Didn't feel like sleeping any more.

5: 17 a.m. Saw a line of passengers waiting at Gate 10. I hustled in quickly and waited after them. I got checked in half an hour later.

6:16 a.m. Got to the boarding gate without problem. Met a lot of Sichuanese.

6:45 a.m. Dragged my bags onto the plane and found my seat. Lifted all my bags onto the shelves with every bit of strength. Then sat down and fastened my seatbelt. Asked the airhostess for airsick pills.

7:20 a.m. The plane took off. I saw sunshine. The last time I could see the sunshine of Singapore.

8:49 a.m. Woke up from heavy sleep. Well, I didn't feel airsick again, that was good. Beef noodles and peanuts were served. I ate all of them up and asked for two cups of juices. Then fell asleep again.

11:45 a.m. The airhostess said the plane would be landing ten minutes later.

12:00 a.m. Dragged my things off the place. Filled a lot of forms before finally checking out.

12: 23 a.m. I searched the crowd for my Mom's warm face. And finally I found it. I rushed into her arms. Then I put on thick clothes because it was already winter in China. Mom brought me bunches of my favorite food and I ate them up immediately.

7: 17 p.m. We arrived at the railway station and caught a train back to Xichang.

My journey was totally over.