

'Taking the plunge: life in a British boarding school'

Diana Shypovych, Ukraine, Harrogate Ladies' College

"How do I swim?"

"You kick your legs, move your arms and don't forget to breathe. Everything will be fine. Send us a message as soon as you arrive. Don't argue with your sister and support each other", - my dad patted me on the shoulder.

"What if I can't swim? Or what if I forget how to do it?" - I thought, looking at my parents before embarking on the plane. They smiled and waved, hugging each other.

I sat down on my seat near the window. The plane took off.

I stared at the seat in front of me.

"So, how do I swim?"

I did not have time to deal with this question when I got to the UK. There were other puzzles to solve and challenges to overcome.

How do I find my way in the maze of corridors? Remember all times of registration?

After reading the first act of 'Othello' during my Literature lesson, I started doubting whether I knew the English language after all. When a teacher started using technical vocabulary: stanza, iambic pentameter and onomatopoeia, it confirmed my deduction that 'I know that I know nothing'. Literally.

During History lessons I was puzzled listening about never-ending debates between Labour and the Conservative. Who is right and who is wrong? I was also busy crossing every article 'the' before 'Ukraine' in my textbook, wondering whom I should complain to about such disrespect.

There were also many pleasurable and exciting things to indulge in and think about. How to choose from a diversity of clubs? Could someone lend me a time turner, so I could attend them all?

Confused in a maze of corridors, I found the library. It was huge and majestic, but I was devastated - there were too many books - how could I read them all?

However, the main pearl that I discovered was Psychology. It became my favourite subject not only because I participate in studies where we taste chocolate and then measure the statistical significance of the difference in our preferences, but also because the teachers are extremely helpful and the material is so fascinating (but chocolate is an important factor, nevertheless).

However, when the war in Ukraine began, I started to sink in shock, doubts and fear.

I was shocked by people's indifference. I doubted what I should do. I feared being called a traitor. I wanted to contribute to the war effort. But what could I do? I found the answer in the school motto: 'I am me'.

I am a friend. Together with a group of friends we organised a fundraiser for Ukraine. We gathered 4,000 pounds by marching in the town, spreading leaflets, and selling cupcakes at school.

I am a writer. I described my experience in a piece of writing and it was featured by Harvard University.

I am Ukrainian. I spoke about the war in the Chapel and wrote a historical article for the school magazine, spreading awareness about my culture.

I am grateful to Harrogate Ladies' College for giving thousands of young women and me the opportunity to find ourselves in this world.

So, swimming in the school pool during the last sports lesson before Easter holidays, I realised that I learnt not only how to swim, but to sail, dive and finally how to conquer the waves of a life in a British boarding school. I took a plunge, and do not regret it. Storms make me stronger, sunshine and breezes are my rewards.

I declare that this essay is entirely my work,
Diana Shypovych