Letter to a Future IYFDer

Dear friend,

My advice could go on forever, and it is usually best given over a cup of coffee or a beer. Although a letter is the next best thing.

I call you friend because this journey you are starting will establish a link between us. We will have a connection, a commonality of experience. If we meet down the road, regardless of our specific experiences, this is something that will bring us together. There will be a mutual understanding, a thing that I have found is truly rare.

I suppose now is the time that I give you some advice before you start this journey.

The first thing may be the most important. I beg you to find the humor in every situation. Your journey will be hard. You will find yourself in the most unbelievable situations. You will be lost and confused. Baffled by the culture and people surrounding you. Years from now you’ll be able to look back and smile because you made it through and that was real life. Try to find a way to laugh in the moment as well. It will make it a little less traumatic. Whether it is untimely and necessary bodily functions or finding yourself in tears as you slaughter dozens of chickens for a community event. Fake it ‘til you make it and laugh through the pain. We’ve all been there, and you can share your own story with us when you get home.

My second piece of advice is a little more serious, but the first still applies. You will be confronted with some really hard realities. Your world view will expand, and then you will probably experience some cognitive dissonance. Your own demons will surface in a new way. First of all, do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. This job will take so much out of you every day; you won’t last long if you do not take care of yourself first. And try not to feel guilty about that self-care. Trust me, I know it is hard. Secondly, be willing to sit with that
discomfort. Be willing to face this reality, yourself, and your privilege. This will be hard and endlessly uncomfortable. Do it anyways. But know your limits, some days you won’t be able to confront yourself, so grab that beer (I hope that it’s cold) kick back and watch the sunset. Tomorrow will be better.

Or it won’t.

I can’t lie to you, we are friends after all. Tomorrow won’t always be better. Sometimes it will in fact be worse. There will be days, or weeks, when you want to quit. Your lows will be very low. But let me tell you, the highs are just as high. And I can promise you that if you are willing to look, and I know that won’t always be the case, you will always be able to find something good in the day. Even if it is just a high-five from a small child, or a cup of tea with a friend.

My final piece of advice, feel deeply. There will be things that threaten to break your heart. Let them. You are human. You are living where you are. This is your life. You did not press pause on it, even though it may feel like it at times. Be invested. Be fully present. Allow yourself to grieve for the things that need grieving. And rejoice the joyful things. Dance and laugh and cry. Be generous with yourself, and your community will be generous with you in return.

Re tlaa bonana *(we will see each other)*,

Molly (cohort IX)