

Jumping off a Ledge

By Tina Saw

When you are stuck on a high ledge, you cling tightly—frightened, scared and panicked. You look down and see the world, overwhelmed by its presence—everything so foreign and new. And all you can think of is finding a way to come down and run back to the comfort of home.

But I have to say that while being on a ledge is both terrifying and nerve-wracking, it can also be a learning experience. When I first entered Case Western Reserve University, I was excited and thrilled to take the next step and move away from home, make new friends and create a new and better me.

After my family and I said our goodbyes, a sudden feeling of emptiness overshadowed me. My mom was no longer there to cook homemade food. My dad was no longer there to fix my computer problems and my sister was no longer there to bicker with me about who got to practice piano and when. The thought of being alone in a place full of life overwhelmed me.

I felt like I was sitting on a high ledge, clinging tightly—frightened, scared and panicked. Sweating from numerous internal questions of my direction in life, I wrote, rewrote, edited and re-edited my goals and aspirations of life. I wavered between becoming a professional musician then a doctor and vice-versa, neither of which I was quite fond of doing for the rest of my life. I could see the general view of everything on the high ledge, but I had no idea in which direction to leap into and journey towards finding happiness and satisfaction.

I had nothing to lose, so I closed my eyes and jumped into everything I could possibly get involved with. Becoming an Elper of the Emerging Leaders Program, a student representative of the Summer Common Reading Selection Committee and the president of the Juniper Residential College, I had the opportunity to meet numerous people and develop new relationships and

improve my social, communicational and organizational skills. While I was able to learn how to become a better leader, have a persuading voice among a committee of university faculty and staff and make residence life better at Case, I still was not satisfied deep down inside, often wondering what would have happened if I leaped off the ledge in the other direction. There was something lacking that made me feel unfulfilled—and that something was passion.

During my second year, I decided to seek for that passion. There had to be something in life that I loved. I thought long and hard, looked at the Undergraduate Student Government's website for a list of organizations that I could participate in and other opportunities. I even leaped into a dental internship, an internship in a field I had never imagined going into.

It was that summer as I was planning for my second year that a friend called me and asked me to help start an organization. He explained his recent shock of discovery that 3,000 children were dying each day in Africa. Once again, I jumped into it. I had nothing to lose.

At first I was not quite sure what I was doing nor the extent and seriousness of the mosquito-borne disease. But overtime, after creating and a compiling a brochure, laying out the format of our organization, writing the constitution, filling out tons of paperwork and recruiting new members, I realized how important this issue was and how blind I had been. Everyday, I was busy with my own life. Stuck in a bubble only thinking about myself, I never realized that I had every resource and ability to do something to change the fact that so many children were dying.

And as for the dental internship, I was forced to stretch my mind and learn quickly on the spot. I improved my dexterity, my problem-solving skills and my communication skills even further. I learned more about dentistry and realized how much it related to my love for playing the piano, creating works of art and making people smile. I looked forward to going in everyday,

meeting and conversing with new and returning patients. I further learned more about the lives of others and picked up on conversations we had the last time they came in.

Dentistry was almost like art, but even better. There was carving, chiseling and drilling of the crowns into a beautiful tooth structures. There was fineness and maneuvers of the hand and fingers that were required just like that of playing the piano. And the best of part of all, I made everyone smile because I had passion and I had made a difference in their lives.

Reflecting back upon this year, I realized and learned that with passion, I can excel and exceed in what I loved. I could be internally satisfied and truly excited for life. I could stand and proudly say, "This is what I do, this is what I believe and this is why." Ever since the creation of Nets for Malaria, I have been avidly raising money for nets and raising the awareness of the malaria crisis and, ever since discovering my love for dentistry, I have been volunteering as a dental assistant at the Case dental school. In my final years at Case, I hope to recruit more passionate people like me who are willing to help change the malaria statistics and get more involved in dentistry through continued volunteer work at the dental school and additional research and public education of the importance of oral health. And most of all, on the way I hope to inspire others to find their own passion and ultimately jump off that high ledge into the right direction.