

Document 19.5: Essays by Dandelion School students, Beijing 2007, 2012

The Dandelion School in Beijing is the first non-profit middle school in the capital, established for children of migrant workers. Many of the children live nearby in homes of one or two tiny rooms with dirt floors, and no running water or electricity. Some of the students board at the school. These essays were written in January 2007 and 2012 in response to the principal's request to write about their lives.

Yan Zhiheng

Grade 9 (in 2007), male student

From Tianshui, Gansu Province

“Hearts of Love”

“Love” is priceless and the greatest. There are tens of thousands of “hearts of love” that care about poor kids like me.

I’m from Yangou village, Tianshui, Gansu Province. Because my family was poor, my parents left for cities to make a living when I was very young. I was living with my grandparents who never went to school. They couldn’t control me. Nobody asked me about my school day when I was back home after school. Another excuse for my not studying hard was that I had to help with farming and raising cattle for my family. I failed exams and skipped classes sometimes. I was even thinking about dropping out of school and going with my classmates to a city to work. Finally, my grandparents had no choice but to ask my mother for help. With help from relatives, I was brought to Beijing to go to school.

When I entered the gate of the Dandelion School, I saw a lot of kids in similar circumstances as mine. I also realized that all of them are not Beijing natives, but from “five lakes and four seas”—all over the country. They just attend school here. At the

beginning, I never listened to the teachers and didn't concentrate in class. But with teachers' help, I began to realize the importance of studying and that studying can actually be a joyful thing. Since then, I have decided to study hard and to not disappoint the people who have helped me.

As soon as I made some progress, the school gave me a "Progress Award" and a 250-yuan grant. After studying here for a few months, I realized that without an education and knowledge, one couldn't work in society. I see the grant as motivation and pressure to learn, and I will never disappoint the principal and the people who have helped me.

Yan Zhiheng is currently working in a factory in Beijing.

Translated by Kongli Liu

Zhao, Yumiao

Grade 9 (in 2012), female student

From Heze, Shandong Province

Before coming to the Dandelion School I had never been considerate of others; I only knew that whatever I did was right. But since I came to the Dandelion School I learned to think about other people and not do everything for myself only. Even my parents say that I am more considerate than I was before.

The biggest lesson I learned at the Dandelion School is gratitude. An "auntie" who I did not know is sponsoring me to go to school. Before this, we had never seen each other, and I even did not know where she is from. But the "auntie" is using the money she earned through hard work to help me, who she had never seen before. How can such

love be described? It enabled me to learn that as long as you have a loving heart, wherever you are, whether or not you know each other, the love can be transmitted—and not only family members can offer such love. This is because love does not distinguish social status, relationship, or distance.

Coming to the Dandelion School I also learned to be economical and frugal. In addition I hosted many volunteers from abroad, from which I learned their knowledge, attitude and life. From such experience I came to understand that everyone is equal, and that as long as you treat others by heart, others will treat you back by heart.

The seed of the Dandelion is always rooted in my heart.

Translated by Sinie Huang

Li Lili

Grade 9 (in 2012), female student

From Zhumadian, Henan Province

“Dandelion, Dandelion, flying to the West, flying to the East...”

When I first walked into the Dandelion School, I had a feeling that was hard to describe. I wondered why the school is called Dandelion. In addition, the students here were all children of migrant workers and were very common, but why is the appearance of the school so special?

I remember that when I was in Grade 7, once there was a sponsorship event. An older friend asked us why the school was called Dandelion. At the time as newcomers to the school we did not know why it was called Dandelion either. Later, our head teacher explained to us. The school was founded by kind-hearted people who wanted the

students here to be able to root and sprout even in harsh conditions and spread the spirit of hard endeavors to every corner of the world by wind—just like dandelions. This is the meaning of the name Dandelion.

During the time at the Dandelion School, we have all learnt a lot. We used to be ignorant, not knowing that there could be such kindhearted people [who would sponsor us] and thought that all our tuitions would be covered by our parents. But after coming to the Dandelion School, the fees are covered by benevolent people in society, in addition to our parents. We knew little about the loving heart before, but now we not only have deeper understanding about it, but also know the importance of having a loving heart to the world. What is more, we, who did not know about gratitude, have gradually grown to be grateful and willing to give to others...

Translated by Sinie Huang

He, Lijuan

Grade 8 (in 2012), female student

From Zhoukou, Henan Province

Before coming to the Dandelion School, I studied at a public school. My parents used their connections to send me in, and, of course, inevitably paid twice more than others. In 6th grade when I was about to graduate and go to a middle school, I came to the Dandelion School because my parents could not afford my tuition. I am very grateful to my parents now for letting me come to this school.

Since I came to this school, I discovered that I have many talents, which I had never known. My teacher read my essay to all the students in my class for the first time, and appointed me to the subject representative for the English classes for the first

time—these all encouraged me greatly. If my teacher had not given me the opportunities to show and improve my talents, I would never know that I had these advantages. The teachers at the Dandelion School would not leave anyone’s talents and advantages undiscovered.

Time flies. I am in my second semester of Grade 8. During the past busy year—a period that was both short and long—it was our teachers who have taught us to wash the feet for our parents and understand their hardship. It was also our teachers who taught us how to be a small dandelion, in the hope that we would root and sprout and become a proud migrant worker in the future.

Translated by Sinie Huang