

A Thirty-Five Year Journey Back to UTA

UTA Loyal

The evening walks around my old UTA campus have been more than just reminiscing. Without the freedom to roam about due to the world's infectious hysteria, I retreated to the serene UTA campus for solace. I was amused and overcome with excitement at how this pandemic created an opportunity to reflect and unpack a treasury of memories that was buried deep within me for more than thirty years.

Taking this walk with my wife has become a routine we looked forward to after dinner. I had no idea it would offer so much comfort. Initially, I was impressed by the new buildings that emerged over the years with its grand structure and modern architecture. The overall landscape and walkways were the same, just a little more crowded. The same oak trees have grown tall and majestic offering a new romantic beauty to this quaint scenery. Scanning the lovely campus, I noticed that it was the older buildings that offered a warm, welcoming effect. Even the old pine trees leading up to the library seemed to be waving their leaves to greet me. This brought back such wonderful scenes of my youth.



The warm summer breeze was conducive to reminiscing as we strolled along and each turn evoked a strong sense of intimacy. A recollection of forgotten memories began to slowly resurface as each step helped clear the dust that settled from the long, latent period of life beyond the undergraduate years.

It was a good feeling. Every step on this beloved campus contained a page of my story. Each course of study and activity at this nurturing university over the years added content. This was a place that embraced each Vietnamese immigrant without judgment or prejudice. In accepting them, the University of Texas at Arlington offered hope to those like me—individuals with a goal of a brighter future.

What started out as an intentional evening debrief has now evolved into an expedition to uncover the small adventures that pieced together the forgotten will that shaped me to the person I am today. The effect is impactful creating a strong desire to pay tribute to a university that imparted so much to each of its students.

Each corner was filled with tales of the friendships that grew stronger through the passing of yet another semester. Faces of old professors came to life again as I looked past the windows while strolling from one building to the next. We walked at a leisurely pace and I could just hear their lectures echoing in the distance. I could feel the goosebumps emerge when those impossible classes and all the dreaded formulas hauntingly came to mind. I fondly recalled the “weed-out” pre-med classes, and a smile spanned my lips as the stories came pouring out uncontrollably, one after another.

The meticulous hours spent learning in a foreign language paid off in the end; our professors knew how hard we studied just to pass their courses. Their grading was more than fair. Eventually, we formed a deep sense of respect and love for their knowledge and the professors in turn, developed a unique admiration and compassion for our dedication to learning.

I continued sharing my thoughts on the myriad of possibilities that this generous university provided, completely unaware of my wife’s silence. When I finally looked over, I found her enthralled by my excitement. The more I shared, the more my wife and I recognized that our success was a grace bestowed upon us through this university, and it heightened the level of commitment we had to each other and to education.

As we passed by a familiar landscape, I registered that it was actually the place where my best friend and I had shared the last pack of ramen noodles while studying for final exams. A sad emotion emerged as I realized that the apartment where I used to reside had been replaced by campus resident halls. I quickly became emotional and reactive: Did they not know the significance of that apartment? Was my generation fading away? They cannot take away my generation’s mark on this UTA campus. How can I instill in my children that which was instilled in me?

We continued walking in silence and after a long pause, my wife finally reminded me that all the treasured memories I had shared with her mattered. She wondered if I recognized that the spirit and energy in my stories were a reflection of our entire generation and is completely irreplaceable... I listened but was doubtful of her confidence.

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Was my generation fading away?

We chose a place to sit down to get a panoramic view in front of the library and watched a group of students come out of the library. They were conversing purposefully and as we captured the spirit and energy of the moment, one of the students caught sight of us and waved.

Taking a closer look, we were pleasantly surprised to witness our son parting from his friends after their group study session. We enjoyed watching him bike the same path which we just traversed. I was beginning to see my wife's point and wondered if he was soaking in these experiences. Was he too preoccupied with tomorrow's exam and totally oblivious? Maybe someday, he too, will be able to recall the beauty of his university life? I wonder if these will form a precious treasury for him? I continued to reflect....

How refreshing it is to witness the vitality of this next generation. Much like me, they are creating their own stories through goals, relationships, and experiences. The university life continues to be woven into a timeless treasury collection for each student. Time will weave these stories into a tradition. Preserving the spirit of these memories will cultivate and foster the UTA feeling. A feeling that comes alive whenever we set foot on this university campus.

My friends are now scattered in many different regions of the country and my professors are long gone; however, these buildings remain and the trees still stand tall and always inviting us back to bring this campus back to life!

