

National service

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Last December, I went to Taiwan with my family. I didn't know that there was a "good" news awaiting me at home. When I came back from wonderful trip, I saw a letter put on my table nicely. What?! I was amongst the first batch of trainees to be appointed to Kem PLKN Titian Bintangor, Rembau, Negeri Sembilan. I broke down after I opened the envelop and scan the content. I had the urge to tear the letter into pieces. In my entire life, I never knew about the existence of Rembau in Malaysia until I received the letter.

I wanted to escape from National Service badly because I heard from many people that life during National Service is not fun. I had also been told that it is like a concentration camp where people are tortured. I thought of registering myself into a college so that I can escape from going for National Service, but my parents would not allow me to do it. They insisted me to attend the National Service. Because of that, I argued with my parents. One day, my cousin called me. She told me many funny things about her experience during National Service. For that moment, I thought she was crazy. How can National Service be fun?

She told me that National Service was not bad as I thought it was and that it was a precious opportunity to make me an independent, courageous and mature person. She said: "before you give a try, how would you know whether it is fun." After talking to her, I decided attend National Service as opportunity knocks but once. My camp was set deep in the forest and it was surrounded by dense foliage. There was a big difference between life at home and life in the camp. At home, there was an air-conditioner in my personal room. I never had to wash my clothes by myself; I just had to throw them into the washing machine.

After every meals, I never had to wash my dishes and my mom had always been the one who washes them. I can even wake up as late as 10am or 11am every day. On the contrary, lifestyle in the camp was totally the opposite. In the camp, I had to learn to do everything by myself. There was no air-conditioner in the dormitory rooms and no washing machine too. Therefore, I had to wash my clothes by myself as well as washing the dishes after the meals. Approximately 23 of us had to squeeze inside one room and each of us were given a tiny bed and a locker only. Besides it, I had to wake up at 5. 45 am every morning except Saturday and Sunday. When I first arrived at the camp, I was suffering from home-sickness and I found myself washing my face with tears every night. One week later, I slowly got used the environment. Last time, I used to make friends with people of my race only but ever since I entered the camp I started to learn how to mix and mingle with people of different cultures, religions and races. From this, I learnt how to communicate with the others and to treat them as if there were my own siblings despite the difference in race.

When we were set in a stage of insomnia, we would gather around and have a chat while eating “ Maggie cup” in the dormitory room. I also had a new pet name. All of my friends, as well as the teachers called me “ Ah Boy” because my hair was extremely short like a boy. The last month of National service was my happiest time. This is because I had experienced many exciting outdoor physical activities. I had many “ first-time” experiences during this time period such as trying out the flying fox. I used to be afraid of such extreme activities but I had successfully overcome my fear after my first tries at the camp.

Besides that, I had never thought I would have a chance to grip a M16 gun and trigger the rifle. Each of us were given 30 bullets to shoot, I enjoyed the shooting process although I failed to shoot at the target even once. “Wirajaya” was an activity that challenges our adaptability and skills to survive in a jungle. We were expected to have a sleep over in a jungle. We searched for wood ourselves to build up our tents. My group members and I tried many times to put up the tent but we failed tries after tries. Eventually, I got so fed up that I had the urge to give up. I was irritated by my failures.

However my group members were kind enough to stay by my side and motivate me. At last, we succeeded! On the 15th of March, a closing ceremony was held. I was very excited because I was chosen to perform “kawad formasi”. I always thought that marching was a simple thing but to my surprise, it was not as simple as I thought. There were many footsteps to be memorised. Besides that, the teacher was as fierce as a lioness. When one of us made a mistake, the whole group was punished. The trainings soon became a stressful activity to me. Every now and then, I will think of giving up.

Fortunately for me, my good friend would stand by my side and motivate me and keep my spirits up. In order to give the best performance, I had to attend dreary hours of training under the scorching sun everyday. On that day, we gave our best while performing. At the end of the performance, the audience clapped and cheered for us. From a distance, I saw my parents' faces glowing in happiness. I was so proud of myself. All of my hard work did pay off after all. At that moment, I also understood why my teacher was

strict on us and punished the entire group when only one student made a mistake.

The moral of it was to understand the spirit of team work and not care only for own success but also the others. I'm so relief that did not escape from this opportunity and the fact that I had made a right decision. I had to learn many things during the National Service. Now, I have become more independent. I am not to rely on others and to do everything myself. I am able to adapt and work with different kinds of people and I know the importance of teamwork. Every time there is a group work, I have to cooperate with my group members. The work is divided equally amongst us. I have to care not only for myself, but also for them.

When my friends are having some problem, I will lend a helping hand to assist them. Besides it, I have always mix and mingle with people of different cultures, religions and races, so that I have a lot of Malay and Indian friend now! Furthermore, I have become more courage and mutual. I can face challenges and difficulties bravely and not escape from them. When I have a problem, I will try my best to solve it and not give up easily. " Determination is the key of success. " In the future, I will put all my effort and work until the end with strong determination to achieve my goals in life.