Life in Trinity-Pawling School

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Trinity-Pawling School is an all-boys private boarding high school in Pawling, New York. There are about 80 faculty members and 300 students consisted of 80 percent boarders and 20 percent day students. The school was founded in 1907. Trinity-Pawling was one of the few boarding schools I was accepted to. Honestly, TP was not my priority among the schools I have applied to. I did not really like the idea of going to all-boys school for four years. Why should I go to all-boys school for four years if I have to serve my military duty for two years? However, TP was a perfect choice for my parents. They believed I could focus more on studying because I would not get any distractions from girls. Also, my mom believed that girls do better on academics than boys. What a typical enthusiastic Korean mom.

Anyways, it was my decision to move out to the United States. I decided to look at positive aspects of Trinity-Pawling School. It seemed prestigious school with the history of more than 100 years, and the location of school was only an hour away from JFK airport. I have met many Korean students who had to take more than three hours of trip to get to their school from the airport. There were also many out-school activities available such as musical shows in Broadway, mall run, movie run, dances with all-girls school. The school seemed not that bad after some researches I have done.

However, after I have got school handbook, I have realized that the school was run with many strict rules. The daily routine of school life was set. The amount of freedom was given to students according to groups they were located. The group rating was set according to academic, athletic, dormitory, work job, and attendance rating. A typical day of TP starts off at breakfast. Group of 3 to 5 students are obliged to attend. After breakfast, all-school chapel assembly starts at 8:00 am, which everyone has to attend. The chapel assembly consists of readings, brief speeches, and announcements from students and faculties. Classes usually run from 8:20 to 2:35, sports practices usually last two hours from 3:30 to 5:30. Underclassmen are required to participate in sports team for three seasons (fall, winter, and spring). Sit down dinner is held during week except Wednesday due to sport events from 6:00 to 6:30. Students are required to be quiet during study hall hours from 8:00 to 9:30 and group 4 and group 5 students are required to attend academic probation during the evening study hall. All boys are required to check-in their dorms at 10:00. Freshmen and sophomore’s bed times are at 10:30, juniors at 11:00, and not set for seniors. Each underclassman is given with their work job that changes every three weeks. Work jobs are varied tasks consisted of dorm cleaner, dish crew, classroom cleaner…. Etc. The toughest one was dish crew job, which I had to clean hundreds of dishes and cups students used after their meals.

Weekend life was also strict. The number of weekends a student can take is based on their effort rating. There were classes and sport events on each Saturdays. To visit local town, students are required fill out checkout form and fill out check-in form when they come back. We could get delivery foods only on Wednesdays and weekends. There were also study hall hours on every Sundays.

Those rules were very unusual to me who had only attended day schools in Korea. It took me some time to get used to school system. I struggled in group 3 during the first semester due to some absences in chapel assemblies and misbehaviors in dormitory. Also, each class had effort grades, and teachers did not give me great effort grades because they thought I was not putting my full efforts during classes. However, thanks to help from some upperclassmen and some faculties, I successfully got into group 2 and got used to school system gradually.

The athletics is huge in Trinity-Pawling. TP is in Founders League, which is one of the most competitive prep school leagues in New England. Many students continued their sports currier in collegiate level. I could feel the school spirit through watching and playing games representing school. I never had such chance in Korean school, because school did not have enough sports teams to encourage every student to play. How I do on sports team was important factor to earn respect from peers and teachers. One of the teachers who wrote my recommendation was my track team coach and AP US History teacher. Although I did not run as fast as fastest guy in the school, my achievement reduce my time for 200m to 26 seconds from 30 seconds impressed him.

I had interviews with three peers who went to TP with me. One of them is Phil Hong who was my classmate and also a Korean international student at Trinity-Pawling. Now he goes to UC Berkeley. I asked Phil how was his first impression of TP. Phil said it was fantastic. Phil enrolled TP at 10th grade. The school had a nice scenic view in rural side of upper state New York. He also liked that the school was only an hour away from New York City via train. Phil’s favorite part of the school was also sports. Phil is a huge fan of sports. However, he could not play sports as much as he wanted in Korean high school due to excessive pressure of Korean SAT. In South Korea, people can take standardized test only once a year. They also have to take every subject tests at once. Therefore, it is the most important exam of the life. Too much pressure is given to students. In American high school, less college prep pressure was given. Phil also liked the class size of TP. The average student and teacher ratio of TP is 7 to 1. In contrast, the average student and teacher ratio is 40 to 1. Phil said he could have more opportunity of getting close to lecturer. The only hard moment for Phil was the period of time waiting for college admissions and feeling homesick. However, his peers at TP were close enough with him to overcome such hard moments.

My next interviewee was Jed Bricker. I was in same dorm with him for two years. For the first two months we did not get along each other very well. I honestly misunderstood him as a redneck white racist because he was often being grumpy to me. However, we became best friends living in same dorm somehow. Jed is a white boy from Brookline, New York. He was recruited to TP as a wrestler. Jed made to semi-finals in New England wrestling tournament. Jed said he had a hard time adjusting to boarding school environment at first time. The preppy atmosphere and strict dress codes were completely different from his former high school. It was surprising for me that even American students like Jed whose home is only an hour away from school also struggles. However, Jed said he learned one of the most important life skills at TP. It was leadership he gained by being the captain of wrestling for two years. He said he learned true responsibility by representing school and encouraging his teammates to work harder.

I had trouble choosing the last interviewee. I had interviewed fellow Korean international student, and an American student. I wanted to interview a black (or African American) student. However, there was no black student I have been keeping in touch ☹. My last interviewee was my friend Matt Demaria who was in same class with me. All of Matt’s brothers went to TP. Matt went to junior boarding school called Rectory before he came to TP. His life was set to be preppy. Matt told me adjusting to TP was not that hard for him. His life in junior boarding school was very similar to life in TP except that athletics became more intense and serious. Matt was also a great wrestler like Jed and a captain of varsity soccer team. I did not ask Matt’s hardest moment at TP because I already knew what it was. His mom had passed away because of breast cancer when Matt was junior. However, Demaria brothers were not in gloomy moods at all after the funeral. They were bright as usual. Maybe they already knew their mom would leave them from long time ago. Still, their steady attitude surprised me. I could never imagine my mom leaving me at once. Like Jed, Matt learned leadership as being a captain from varsity soccer team and varsity wrestling team. He said he learned how to earn respect through his efforts during sports competitions and practices.

Through the interviews, I realized that sports take big part of every students’ lives at Trinity-Pawling School. Through sports activities, we learned how to get along with each other and how to be responsible men. Mr. Carpinello who was a dean of students always told us to include others rather than to exclude. Bullying and harassing were never allowed. Students who got caught violating school rules by smoking cigarettes or weeds were given second chances. However, students who had bullied other students were expelled with no condition. TP is a community where students, faculties, and staffs live and work together.

The graduation day was different with my expectations. I thought it would be a happiest day in my life. Finally I would be able to escape this stinky all-boys school. However, as the graduation day comes closer I became somewhat sad. I knew that I would not see people I met here as often as in here especially American peers. TP helped me to grow up as a real adult. In the first autoethnography project, I talked about how hard it was to get used to new foreign educational environment. Through the second one, I wanted to talk about how my high school taught me to become a part of community. I would never forget wonderful times and people I met at Trinity-Pawling School.