

I began my university career rather late. I was almost 24 by the time I began my first day of classes.

"Better late than never," was the clichéd retort casually thrown out by those to whom I would explain my frustrating predicament.

While it was largely true, it rarely made me feel better. My mind always reverted to, "well, everyone I know and look up to from secondary now is practically finished their university degrees."

Rejecting any attempts at quenching my inferiority complex, I still defiantly thought, "early is always better than late."

I didn't have much growing up. While my parents tried their hardest, being landed immigrants in Canada, being forced to learn first French, then English, all while attempting to assimilate in two different provinces while desperately holding on to any vestiges of their culture and identity from back home took a toll.

Moving from school to school. My mother's depressive episodes. My father's anxiety, frustration, and anger. The ministry of Child and Family Development; the foster families and subsequent group homes. The blame that was put on us for wanting, needing, yearning normalcy.

It all took a toll on each member of my family.

I was formed in this schizophrenic dichotomy. That was my childhood; that was my teenage years; those were my early twenties. The only thing that kept me going was that if I got my act together, I could escape this veritable cage.

I painted this piece with all those frustrations in mind. They're always there—implicitly pushing me to make something of myself.

This is where Kwantlen Polytechnic University comes into play. I never even thought I would make it into university, much less excel at something that I was interested in; nor expand and learn to accept and move past my predicament through hard work and the incredibly encouraging (and inspiring) professors and students I've been lucky to meet.

We all have our own cages that we're so eager to escape. We all are drawn to our own version of happiness; like moths to a flame. Education was my flame.

This painting is a metaphor for what education has meant to me: we are formed with flaws (the crinkles of these exquisite origami cranes), yet even if we are tied down in inexplicable ways, we are all meant to fly. We are all longing to escape.

Through hard work, through pushing me to never give up and strive for excellence, Kwantlen has been instrumental in my growth and transformation of what I would refer to as insecurities into something I can honestly call fulfillment and inner strength.

In other words, KPU helped me find freedom.