***6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.***

AP Psychology provided answers to my lingering questions; I came to find that my grandmother could not remember who I was due the amyloid plaques that built up between the dying cells in the brain. I learned that my friends were facing depression due to a chemical imbalance of neurotransmitters such as norepinephrine and dopamine. I was satisfied with these explanations.

Psychology was a class that made me excited to learn, listen to lectures, study the textbook, and engage in my own personal research. Since there were things that helped me understand my grandmother, my friends, and even myself, I was compelled to further my knowledge. My understanding of the brain, neurological disorders and human personalities grew, and my curiosity seemed to grow even faster. After an assignment in AP Psychology called “Breaking the Social Norms," was introduced, I was already in the midst of my own similar experiment. I voluntarily decided to explore of a realm outside of my comfort zone, while also gathering empirical research. Today, it's considered a gutsy move to approach a stranger on public transportation, and unapologetically ask them about their biggest regret, but I wanted to break that norm.

I wondered, what stops us from diving deep into the questions of life with people we’ve just met? Why do we feel more comfortable engaging in small talk and meaningless conversation? I was seeking to build instantaneous connections. So instead of slowly trying to build up the conversation, I jumped right into bigger philosophical questions.

For three years straight, I traveled by public transportation. The riders on the bus were always a mixed bag. Some were mentally ill; some were homeless; some just didn’t have a license or car. But I constantly wondered about each person’s background. What kind of past have these people had? What will their futures be like? I decided to interview every rider I encountered for an entire day. I asked them each different questions: What is your biggest regret? What’s your philosophy on the meaning of life? What’s your belief on the afterlife? What place makes you happiest and why?

By asking these questions from a place of non-judgement, I received enticing responses. One woman had created her own religion by combining dogmas of Hinduism, Buddhism, and scientology. One man had backpacked for ten years, getting to travel from Croatia, to Serbia, to Bulgaria, traveling the world with no money. In the end, many thanked me. And it struck me because a few people mentioned how some of their stories and beliefs were never verbalized because nobody had ever asked. And I felt honored to be able to listen to these strangers’ stories with open ears and an open heart.