

Goodbyes, I once thought, were only said in sentimental TV shows. When I was younger, Hollywood taught me that goodbyes were expressed tearfully, in a longing sense. A word of much brevity and utmost gravity, it should not be used carelessly. Never would I have known that most goodbyes are said silently and most hellos unknowingly.

In grade three, I had my first rude awakening. I arrived at eight sharp, ready to perform my usual morning routine as the class president. But, what greeted me was a closed door. Fifty of my classmates sat behind it, intently listening to our homeroom teacher speak about my impending departure. From them, I learned that I would soon move to San Jose, California. Each student, in turn, was meant to give me a small token of appreciation. On that day, I learned how to say goodbye.

At first, it was an embarrassing mutter. I paused, contemplating whether goodbye was really the proper word. Could it be “see you later” instead, like normal? Goodbye, I said to the first classmate. Goodbye, I said to the second. Goodbye to you. Goodbye to you too. Monotonous goodbyes strung together like a preprogrammed sequence. No matter how many times I repeated myself, nothing seemed right. All I heard was the rhythmic repeats of syllables. While genuine, I couldn’t grasp the weight of those words that day. Shouldn’t goodbyes be used more sparingly? I mused afterward, going about my life. It was not like I hadn’t jotted down their contact information.

In San Jose, as I began forming new friendships, I started to lose those left behind. Hour-long phone calls dwindled in number; soon, the phone numbers I had recorded faded into obscurity, and, eventually, I lost the notebook altogether. It remains buried deep in an unknown drawer somewhere to this day. That, I discovered, was the true meaning of goodbye: the unspoken, the lost, the never-to-be-seen-again.

A year and a half later, three months into the school year, I had to move again—to Toronto. This time, I didn’t even say my goodbyes. I remember my friends’ smiling faces and my promise to return as soon as possible.

I lied.

On the plane to Toronto, I froze for the first time, realizing that, no matter how superficial “goodbye” may be, it must still be said. After all, the word carries with it an acknowledgement of the past and an optimistic outlook toward the future. And I had just missed my chance.

In 2019, I returned to shadow my friends in California for a day. There, lost in the labyrinthine hallways of their high school of more than two thousand, I paused for a moment in between everyone and everything, compelled to stand still despite the vivace tempo of passersby.

*Besides four of my closest friends, no one remembered me*, I repeated to myself, wondering if it were real. Soon, however, I smiled and carried on, finally recognizing that everything was, is, and will be fine after all. Establishing connections, saying goodbyes, only to begin anew. That was the cycle I had been experiencing ever since that day in grade three. That is the cycle of every day. Indeed, most goodbyes are left unsaid, and most hellos will not be remembered. Only the time in between will be etched into our memory, so let’s make the most of it.

To my extended family after our reunion during *Shangyuan*, I said goodbye, enjoying our time together and honouring our collective cultural heritage; to French sightseers whom I met and connected with in *Suzhou's* classical Linger Garden, I said goodbye, appreciating trilingualism's serendipitous surprise; to my friend during the CN Tower EdgeWalk 365 meters above the sprawling, breathtaking cityscape, I too said goodbye, excited for her to open a new chapter of her life.

While the true meaning of goodbye is the never-to-be-seen-again, the true feeling of goodbye is a hint of melancholia mixed with an appreciation for the past and anticipation for the future.