

As reported by her TAC counselor, Elif immediately drew attention with her strong, positive energy, is a natural leader and problem solver, and enjoys the respect of her teachers and peers. With the help of grandparents her family is weathering a lengthy period of financial hardship, so FABSIT is pleased to be able to help her follow her educational dreams at TAC with this scholarship.

FABSIT John and Gwen Scott Full Tuition Scholarship

2012 Recipient Autobiography -- Elif Şevval Koç

I was born standing on my own feet, I am sure of that. That I am sure, since I started longing when I was 10 days old, waiting and longing for my dad to return home after completing his military service. I have not known about the smell of father, what it feels to sleep next to your father, the joy of playing, wrestling, travelling with your father until about 2 years old, except for his official leaves. I am a child of longing; I was raised by that feeling. And all those years until the age of 11, without any sound of child other than my own.

I was born in 97 in İstanbul and into a wild winter, on the twelfth day of the month called "Şawwal" (hence my name), the tenth month of the Arabic calendar. My arriving into the world a bit earlier than expected also marks my philosophy of life: since then I have never been late to anything, I simply was not able to. I was also blessed with the name Elif, which means "to be the first, to lead, thin and delicate, standing up, unyielding". This very name obliged me to try to be the best in life, most essentially to love other people and to be "humane". My name was also strengthened by the meaning of the month of "Şevval". Then my years of exile, unibody with my mom, away from my home and my father, sometimes in İstanbul with my father's mother, sometimes in Mersin with my mom's mother.

My longing for father ended in the summer of 98, with his military discharge. Just when I was elated to start a more settled life, August of 99 took from us so many things which have not been easy to replace. It was mere longing, causing my happy life with mom and dad at home not to last very long. My mom had to go back to her original line of business, after quitting her family's business in textile due to the economic problems of those years, as well as her pending delivery. My mother was a tourism administrator. She loved her job and was successful too. Since then, I did have not had the opportunity to spend quality and ample time with mom, until my dearest sister Ekin, whom I love more than anyone else in the world, came to the world. It feels like yesterday when my mom showed the ultrasound printout, making me burst into tears. How long have I waited and longed for her...

Longing..... the leading actor of my life..... I, who was trying to heal the wounds opened by the longing for a father at the age of 2.5, started kindergarten with the gloom brought by being seperated from mom, my biggest support. Until the school age, I spent my time in pre-school from 7:00 until 19:00 in winter and for the three months of summer when the school is closed, in my grandmother's mountain house in Gözne, Mersin. My gradmother, my second mother, is still by my side. When I look at my grandmother, a retired elementary school teacher who worked for 35 years, dedicated her being to this profession, and to my grandfather who was the principal of an elementary school for 40 years, even elected as the principal of the year, but was then denied this honor since he was a member of Töb-Der

(National Teachers' Union), were both clear role models about what kind of person I should grow to be.

After the first and very difficult two days, I was on a happier routine thanks to the presence and concern of my teacher, Cemile. I grew up to be a responsible student, never tearing a book or broken a toy, partly due to my mother's being over protective. I had to do everything right, not hurt myself, so I did not have any physical wounds for all those years, except for a cut in thumb for which I had to have stitches.

During these three years in kindergarten, I was the most active, smart and socially able child. Thanks to my deprivations and the longing that I experienced in the very early days of my life, I think I was better equipped for life.

2002 World Cup. Turkish national football team received the third place. It was an amazing feeling. I especially remember the match with Senegal, at the end of which everyone was dancing in the streets of Istanbul.

We celebrated one of my birthdays in the United States. Accompanied by my parents, it was the most amazing trip I have ever had. Maybe that is when my American dream has started. The ten day trip to Fort Lauderdale-Miami was breathtaking. We had left Istanbul in snowstorm, but now in this place we were relaxing on a hot beach. I swam with an iguana in the pool. I had already been exposed to internationals before because of my mother's job, but to be breathing the same air in the same land with them was a very unique experience.

2003-2004 academic year at the Beyazit Elementary School – the Class for the Gifted Students. I was there since I learned to read prematurely and by my own efforts, and because it was a full time school. My mom was working, so it was always my father who showed up at the parent meetings. He used to be one of the two fathers in those meetings.

In this class, we learned a lot from our teacher Vahap Bey and the visiting university lecturers. We would have fun solving tests, and going on trips. Our field trips to various places during those 5 years laid the foundation of my passion of travel, seeing and learning. They were tough days though, a full day of school, a very rigorous academic program, then my father's workplace, my mother's office and finally, arriving home at about 8 pm. I had to complete my homework and assignments during the car rides. I was rewarded for my patience and academic challenges by being offered 100% scholarship for three years at Doğa Private Secondary School, going back to my five years. I continued the eight year compulsory education at Sarıyer for one year and at Acarkent Doğa School for two years.

When my sister Ekin was born in 2008, my father had to close down his business due to the economic crisis. My mom also had to quit her job since she could not trust anyone to take care of our family's little baby girl. I had both my parents at home. However, despite all problems, I had my baby sister along with full stress of preparing for the SBS (centralized national high school entry exam) marathon when I was at school from 06:00 in the morning until 18:00 in the evening. My grandparents continued to provide support to our family.

My dear friends, Ecem, Ceren and Buğra, who made life more bearable with their company. My awards in the essay writing competition at Acarkent Doğa among Doğa Schools, and the “Best Student” awards without any close rivals in the last two years of middle school were also the rewards to all my teachers who believed in me, and my parents who always supported me with their love, despite all challenges we experienced as a family.

Tarsus Amerikan 2011: that is where I am right now. I, who experienced a very strong longing for father when I was a baby, for a mother when I was a child, and a sibling throughout my entire childhood, I do not feel lonely anymore. Aside from my teachers and friends here, longing still continues to be my best companion. I intend to make the best use of the opportunities that I will be provided. Although I have had my share of challenges and hardships in a relatively short time period, I now stand proud. My personal goal is to receive the best education in these five years, be raised as an individual who is respectful to academic and humane values, getting one step close to the person that I want to be. It is only then that I can live up to the expectations of my family, who believed in me, without allowing be to be let down by challenges, and those of yourselves.

Writing this essay, I had a flashback of my wealth of experiences although I have many more years to add to them.