

My Different Parallels

Have you ever watched a film and resonated with a character or two?

I have! And that is the case every time I watch films produced by Studio Ghibli.

Toastmaster of the evening, fellow Toastmasters, and lovely guests, I hope you're all ears tonight, because I will share my world through my top three Studio Ghibli characters that mirrored a glimpse of my life.

Let me first introduce you to Studio Ghibli. Studio Ghibli is a Japanese animation film studio, known for its high-quality films and artistry. Ghibli was derived from the Italian word ghibli, meaning a hot desert wind. The studio's goal was to "blow a new wind through the anime industry." And yes, you can pronounce it as jibli or gib-li.

The first character that resonated with me is Kiki from Kiki's Delivery Service. She's a young witch who left her town for her training. I can feel Kiki's excitement when she finally had her taste of independence for the first time. But when she reached her destination, she made use of her flying ability by offering delivery services but she ended up only thinking about others' welfare that she forgot about herself. She was so depressed and exhausted that she could not fly anymore.

I used to be like Kiki. I had a journal divided into sections from the bucket list of my lifetime. I have my monthly, weekly, and quarterly goals. I have well-written plans, from plan A to plan F. I was so fired up. I even have my notes from my preparations for college entrance exams. There were goals that I did not achieve. Like studying Biology. I passed all of my College Entrance Exams, 3 out of 4 offered me my first choice. Yet I chose to apply to that one university that offered the second. I made an impulsive decision to enroll in Computer Science. I can still remember watching a movie alone in the sala, lights were turned off and I was crying. Not because the couple in the movie is in the middle of a heart-wrenching conversation, but because I was reminded of my decision. It was the start of the pandemic that time. I was panicking, always thinking,

"You need to be practical. Computer Science is more practical."

"You can give back to your parents immediately. Technology is the future."

I thought I could learn to love the degree program but I felt worse. You have coursemates already well-versed in different programming languages and are passionate about all of the activities. That made me feel guilty. It made me feel that I don't deserve to be around them.

There are also plans that I am living inside now, yet I still feel so listless. I've lost my spark. Kiki's journey taught me to be kinder to myself and to always prioritize my well-

being. My worth should not be anchored on my achievements but on how I positively affect the people around me.

The second character is Shizuku from *Whisper of the Heart*. Her father is a librarian, her mother is finishing her graduate degree and her friend has a massive dream of becoming a master violin maker in Italy. Just like her, I am surrounded by amazing people. People with big dreams and are already contributing much to society through their talent and skills. And I am just here, feeling so lost. I don't even know if this is normal to a 19-year old but I just feel so lost. And it frustrates me. A part of me wants to be so sure that everything I do now will matter to me in the future. I was jumping from different hobbies to another and realized that I never pursued most of them passionately — taekwondo, drawing, painting, and coding. No passion at all. But Shizuku's road to self-discovery and to being a writer taught me to never rush things. We get too caught up with people who are of our age or even younger than us being established and successful. But be reminded, that they too, were put in the overwhelming process of learning, experiencing both ups and downs to get to know themselves better.

The last character that resonated with me is Haru from *The Cat Returns*. She is quiet and shy. She worries so much about what others would think that she immediately apologizes for her opinion even though they are correct.

Just like Haru, I also worry about what others think of me. How I walk, laugh, or talk. I overthink everything. Some people would judge my decisions even though they are not aware of the choices available to me. Overthinking is paralyzing. I stopped expressing myself. I stopped smiling widely. I stopped doing my little dance when the food tasted good. I stopped standing up for something I believe in.

A thing about me is that I like cute stuff. Actually no, I love them, may it be jewelry, hair accessories, stuffed toys, and outfits. I believe that self-expression does not stop at a certain age. But people would tell me that it was too childish. That belief was gone when I reached Grade 9. But then I realized, this is my life. I am aware of the work I put in and the struggles I conquered. Friends, opinions are different from facts. Life is too short to care about the thoughts of people who are not even important to you.

Kiki, Shizuku, and Haru were the three characters who reminded me of myself.

Kiki with her drive to be independent and help others taught me the value of choosing myself first.

Shizuku, who feels overwhelmed with her busy surroundings, taught me to do things at a speed that I am comfortable with.

Haru, being an overthinker, taught me to separate facts from opinions.

I know our situation is hard right now, but I am inviting you, fellow toastmasters and guests, to start doing 2 things. Just two.

First, is to look around you. Hyperfocus on the things that bring you joy. It could be at the sight of your loved ones or your dog running excitedly towards you. It could be the little things.

And second, is to look within you. You've been very brave. Give yourself some credit.

Back to you, Toastmaster of the Evening!