

What I Gained by Not Going to a School Field Trip to NYC: My Upward Bound Experience

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In my last year in junior high school, my drama class teacher planned a trip to New York City to see a Broadway play. I was beyond excited! At every school event from football games to club meetings, I was there selling snacks and soliciting donations. I participated in every carwash and bake sale. I even stayed after school to work the small snack bar in the commons for extra “points” towards the fundraising goal.

As spring break approached, our teacher sent home reports of our fundraising totals and the amounts each student owed. That is when my mother explained I wouldn’t be able to go. The difference was just too much. She wouldn’t be able to make up the funds before the deadline. I could tell she was truly sorry it wasn’t going to happen, but still, I was crushed. She told me that she had signed me up for an amazing summer program that would be just as much fun. I was curious but skeptical that anything could be as fun as a trip to NYC.

The program she enrolled me in was Upward Bound. When I learned I would be attending summer classes all day, I was not thrilled. However, I quickly made friends with people who would be attending my high school and our rival high school. We built a strong sense of community on field trips. We bonded over the classes we enjoyed and the ones we hated.

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We ate two meals together every day, explored campus, and shared our dreams and goals with each other. Upward Bound students are all aspiring first generation college students, so we carried our families' dreams and goals with us as well.

My summers throughout high school were full of friendship, scholarship, and mentorship. I am still close with several of my UB classmates including a Lt. Colonel in the Air Force and a medical doctor. Attending Upward Bound helped prepare me for my rigorous high school class schedule. The extra practice in math and French put me at the top of my classes. I still have the book of French poetry my UB French teacher gifted me after our last summer together. She wrote *Je suis fière de toi* inside the front cover. "I am proud of you". I am proud of myself too. I was the first person in my family to graduate from college and receive a master's degree. I have studied abroad, participated in service-learning projects, and volunteered in my community because of the opportunities Upward Bound afforded me.

Yes, a tiny part of me wishes I had been able to visit New York City with my class way back when, but I know that I gained so much more right here.