

Two small scrapes rest on my palm as I bump around in the darkness outside. My body is sweating underneath five layers of winter clothes, even as my toes are icicles. Sitting outside in the frigid temperature, I may be torturing my body, but my mind is opened to the skies. The heavenly light navigates me, telling me exactly where “here” is tonight.

In the inky brilliance of a quiet night, I marvel at the beauty of the Gemini twins, Castor and Pollux, and am struck by Taurus's horns. The human capability to perceive beautiful constellations testifies to our astonishing imagination and capability for seeing the bigger picture. Each star that emerges under the dimming twilight is like another person who emerges out of the darkness to lend a hand. My friends, as various as the entire stellar spectrum, bring down heavenly fire to Earth in pursuit of human knowledge greater than any individual. From structured communities in the lab to the serendipitous groups formed at leadership retreats, I am always part of a greater group.

The night is cold – or is it just the chill in my blood? I soon feel small against those permanently shining searchlights of the soul. Under their steady (but slightly precession shifted) gaze, humans have won and lost continents, while I’ve merely won and lost Science Olympiad competitions. In this moment, I know that I am infinitely insignificant. Yet, a driving pulsar in my heart keeps me moving forwards. Although my beacon of light is dim against Arcturus’ brilliant red glow, it is all that I have. Even my small candle can cast out darkness from the minds of my friends; bringing smiles of realization to my classmates prior to a stressful physics test means the world to me. Helping teachers with feedback on student research papers and completing paperwork for clubs might not seem significant, but I’m happiest when I make a difference in the lives of friends.

Even in the perfect harmony of the heavens, impurities exist. The stars sputter and die, some with a bang and others with a whimper. Since Kepler, the planet's perfect circular paths have been replaced by oblong ovals. Yet, I connect with Carl Sagan who said, "We are made of starstuff." As crazy as my world seems to be, I am made of the same elements as everything else. Knowing this, I have hope in the concepts of love and acceptance, believing that one day all mankind will join in common pursuit of greater scientific knowledge. If the music of the spheres can use chaos to create something even more glorious, I can take my life and enrich the world.

I want to stay under this starry, starry night, but daylight will soon come, and even the brightest stars will be bleached out against the sun. As the stars wink out of sight, the truths they reveal remain with me. I will always live in the now; I will always be moving forwards.