

Dear Class of '55,

I was presented with an opportunity to go to Hungary and study math. You were a big part of that. I wanted to thank you, and I wanted to let you know what this opportunity meant to me.

Budapest was a wonderful experience, and in ways that I wasn't expecting at all.

I struggled in my classes. That was a novel experience. I'm not used to being behind the curve, to having things be so far over my head that I'm not even sure which questions to ask to get back up to speed. I spent a lot of time staring at problem sets, back and forth, from one problem to the next, with no idea of how to get traction on any of them. I've never experienced that before. And it meant I had to get help. I had to acknowledge my own naivete and reach out to others. I had to ask questions in class that made it painfully obvious that I didn't understand what was going on. I spent a lot of time working with other students. Sometimes they were in the same place as me, and we struggled through it together. Sometimes they knew exactly what was going on, and I had to acknowledge that I'm not actually a know-it-all. I'd never been in that place before. It was truly humbling.

I was also expecting Budapest to be a stepping-off point in heading towards graduate school. I didn't expect it to provide confirmation that I don't actually want to go to graduate school, at least right off the bat. This wasn't due to the struggling I described above. Rather, it was the people that I met there. There were a whole lot of students who were truly passionate about math for its own sake. I met people whom I could tell would be wonderful teaching professors, given a few years. The same was true for others who will be awesome research professors. These were the people who were doing math in their heads as they were on public transit. I realized that while I enjoy solving problems, I'm not as passionate about math for its own sake. That's all right with me; it just means I'll have to keep looking for my own passion. And it was an incredibly value realization: I'd much rather know that now than two years into a master's program.

And of course, there were the other perks that came with studying in Central Europe. I made some great friends and got to travel just about every other weekend. There was the cultural experience - having to learn how to live in a place that's just different enough to provoke cognitive dissonance, having to learn to communicate in a place where I didn't speak the language. All of these things contributed to the experience that was Hungary.

And you helped make that happen. For that, I'm grateful. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tanner Stirrat