



EDWARD YEE

Changemaker &
Dyslexic Rhodes Scholar

I never really saw dyslexia as something to overcome but a strength to make use of. Dyslexia also helped me understand that it is okay to fail, but to embrace and learn from mine and others' failures, hence my favourite quote by Sir Isaac Newton, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

I am currently studying at Oxford University undertaking a Master's in Social Data Science and Evidence-based Social intervention and Policy Evaluation under the Rhodes Scholarship. I came to Oxford 1.5 years ago. Stepping onto Oxford campus I recalled being nervous, apprehensive, and thoroughly filled with 'imposter syndrome'. Apparently, the last bit was not unusual, in fact, the Rhodes Trust had already pre-empted it by providing a course on it during welcome week. But I just KNEW that I was different from the rest, they were fake imposters, I was really one! Surrounded by institutions and buildings that are hundreds of years old, and people I have only read about as authors of books, news articles, or journals (joking on the last one, I never read a journal before Oxford!), it was easy to get a sense of fallibility. It was not just the history of the place or the impressive intellectual stature of those who surrounded me, it was also the culture, language, and mannerisms that they held and expected from me.

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People seemed to come from all over, but were oddly similar in thoughts and sophistication, as if they were part of this one invisible tribe and I was supposed to be part of. Hearing boujee “woke” words like lived experiences and people’s realities to systems change and additionality, I felt like a fish out of water. Not that I was unused to that feeling, especially in the last 6 years where serendipity, the universe, and plain dumb luck happened to coincide, bringing me to hallowed halls that I never imagined stepping into.

Today, this strange community feels oddly like home, I have adapted and grown comfortable here - with friends and people to pull close and surround me with warmth and friendship.

It has been an incredible experience, and I’ve taken away far more than I ever thought possible. I’ve picked up incredible stories like that one college who planned 400 years in advance to plant timbers to replace its dining hall’s roof, studied in the same rooms as CS Lewis and Tolkien, and created shared memories such as enjoying a Turkish hammam with a Ghanaian friend I met here. I’ve had incredible opportunities like writing a white paper for an OECD country’s climate commission, working on transforming the broken capitalist system we have today, and starting an inclusive e banking start-up!

Reflecting on my journey over the last few years, there seems to be a recurring theme, that has given me a sense of perspective of how far I have come, and with it a deep sense of gratitude and humility. I know that I am continuing to learn, and I look forward to seeing the impact I will create in the world. But this opportunity to take pause and look back at how far that young Singaporean kid who was constantly afraid of failing at school has come has been a humbling and grateful experience.

It has been amazingly easy to always look towards the next mountain, and not taking the time to appreciate the hills that I have overcome.

I know I am speaking from a position of huge privilege, but I hope that each of you would be able to do the same wherever you are.

Author Bio: *Edward Yee works at the intersection of finance and social impact to drive social change. He has played leadership roles in non-profits, founded start-ups, and is running his current ventures, Givfunds and Masref. Inspired by his visits to over three hundred social enterprises globally, Edward co-founded Givfunds to help neglected social enterprises gain access to catalytic capital at scale. Alongside Givfunds, he has worked at various levels of the global impact investing sector, from systems change at the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment to consulting for global impact funds and performing academic research in Oxford. Edward is a Rhodes Scholar, Kairos Society Global Fellow, and a Diana Award Recipient. In his free time, Edward enjoys sticking his nose in a book and collecting stories from around the world. He has stood on Bangladeshi train tops, hacked in Silicon Valley, and travelled 16 days in a third-class Indian train.*