

**IYSIS DASILVA**

**Student Diplomat from Providence, Rhode Island**

**Participant on the Canada: How to Get to Haida Gwaii program 2024**

## **A Moment of Realization**

As a child, my mother softly sang “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” to me. I would gaze up at the dim holes in the sky at night. Despite their faintness, they were beautiful. Growing up in the city, the stars would, both literally and metaphorically, go over my head. Distracted by the bright signs and lights connected to the ground, I never looked up. Who needed stars when you had beautiful city lights?

I loved the city. I had grown up in it, and it offered so many opportunities to do things and meet people. However, I occasionally dipped my toes into nature. I had gone on a couple of hikes and enjoyed being in the forest. Therefore, when I was nominated for SDC, I wanted to challenge myself. I signed up for one of the most remote trips SDC offered: Canada – How to Get to Haida Gwaii.

I had to leave the comfort of my small town, in the smallest state, to fly across the continent to British Columbia. I was terrified. However, I knew I needed this experience and opportunity. I was pushing myself out of my small town and meeting people I had never even passed in my life. This would prepare me for what my life after high school would look like.

In the first week, I was introduced to the people I would spend the next month with. We did icebreakers and tried to get to know each other. Our group bonded unusually quickly, becoming good friends within the first week. The following week, we faced a challenge: going to the remote island, Spring Island in Kyuquot Sounds. There, we would have no phone service for a week. This was almost everyone's first time without phone service for a prolonged period. Little did we know, this would be crucial for our bonding.

On the first day in Kyuquot, I got used to the island. We slept in tents, relying on sleeping bags to keep us warm through the freezing nights. We used open outhouses and our kitchen was unconventional, but we would all eat together by a campfire, trying to escape the mosquitoes. Despite all this discomfort, the first night was a moment I would never forget.

It was the first night I was blinded by lights—not by city lights, but by the twinkle of the stars. I was sitting on the sand, listening to the waves roll in and out, my breath matching the sea. I asked aloud, “Wait, do stars actually twinkle?” It sounds humorous, but it was a genuine question. I had never seen the stars twinkle before; I thought it was just a description of their brightness. This realization hit me hard.

There is so much more to life. There is so much more beyond Rhode Island, the East Coast, and my country. I grew up pretty poor. As a child, I was in a shelter. Ever since I was in school, I have tried my best to show my family that there's more to life. Most of my family hasn't left New England. SDC helped me show my family that through hard work and branching out, anyone can find great opportunities and get out of their normal.

Learning that stars twinkle was just the beginning of my understanding that I have so much more to experience and explore.