

Although I am a native-born citizen of the United States, both my parents are from Japan, making me the first person in my family that will ever attend a four-year university in the United States. While I honor this title, I also treasure both my Japanese ancestors' traditions as well as the American culture that surrounds me everyday. Because I am bilingual, I have often translated for new students who moved here due to their parent's job transfer from Japan to the United States. This was beneficial for me, even though I resided in America, as I learned to remain connected to my culture through the Japanese language. Each time a new student from Japan joined my class, I became exposed to the formal language that I did not use conversationally at home. Hence, the relationship was one of mutual gain where both of us benefited from each other's own knowledge and experience of our language. I am extremely grateful for my parents who chose to speak Japanese to me, as I feel more strongly connected to my ancestors, knowing that we all lived our lives speaking the same language. I cannot even begin to imagine the colossal loss of not being able to communicate with my grandparents every summer when I visit Japan. If I were unable to speak Japanese, I wouldn't have known about my grandparents hardships of coping with World War II, nor about the daily lifestyles they went through as a typical Japanese farmer in the agriculture industry. I believe that a mutual understanding born from conversing in the same language brought the family closer.

However, my main source of Japanese actually originated from the education I received at San Mateo Nippon Gakuyen. I began attending this Japanese language school when I was still only five years old. I enjoyed learning about my Japanese heritage so much that I continued to attend for thirteen years. Not only did I learn how to construct my first sentence in Japanese here, I can now read and write books and essays. I also recently won an essay contest regarding the current U.S.-Japan relations, which only strengthened the ties I felt as a Japanese person living in the United States of America. After passing the second level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (level one indicates college-level knowledge of the language) as recognition for my fluency in Japanese, I began to realize my potential to influence my community as an individual.

During my twelfth year at San Mateo Nippon Gakuyen, I decided to give back to my school by teaching Japanese to elementary school students. I volunteered as the teacher's aide in one of the classrooms for a year. Each week I would dictate the Hiragana and Katakana alphabet to the students as they would repeat after me. When I thought that these children were part of what could make my future, as I would for them, I could not help but smile. Up until then, I had entirely underestimated how much hope teaching had brought. I now realize how connected I am to each and every student as well as the teachers at school through their efforts to communicate, uniting as one large Japanese community.

After discovering the power of getting involved in one's society for the greater good, I decided to take the initiative and hold a leadership position at my high school. As the secretary of the Asian Club, I felt responsible for the rest of the club members. I also understood the value of one's commitment to the club. Those who cared about working together as a club attended every meeting and their efforts to participate in the club fund-raisers and other club activities were evident. Respect was earned from these members and thus a network of trust allowed the club to run even more efficiently. As an individual attempts to express themselves, they should consider how these character traits play a significant role in giving the proper impression to others. In addition, by acknowledging their heritage, I believe that one can better qualify themselves for taking an important leadership role in their own community.

Now Asian individuals are being recognized for their efforts in their community more than ever. Just recently, Professor Ei-ichi Negishi of Purdue University in Indiana, was awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize in Chemistry, for palladium-catalyzed cross coupling, which increases the possibility of chemists to create sophisticated chemicals such as complex carbon-based molecules. I believe that no matter how small of a feat, such examples and efforts of Asian individuals in America represent the power that we have in influencing our society through our careers. Similarly, I wish to become a part of

my society through some of my own career goals. Although I had already declared my major to myself when I was ten years old, I only recently began acknowledging the important factors in pursuing architecture as a major. After interning at a local residential design firm, I realized how space was one of the most crucial concepts in architecture; it is within this space that families are connected on a daily basis. For example, our dining room is not just another area to eat, but the space also provides us a place to communicate. Though each family member goes their separate ways in the morning, we come back together at the dinner table by the evening to recount our day to each other. I plan to immerse myself with more knowledge of architecture at the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, in the fall, in order to understand similar concepts at greater depth. In doing so, I hope to pursue this career as an architect who will consider people's lifestyle in order to create a more comfortable living space for them. Therefore, I believe that my Asian-American background along with the qualities I have gained from my past experiences have helped me prepare for my contribution to the community as a future architect.

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