

American culture has always seemed special to me. I enjoyed my school life and had great friends in Japan, but I had never moved out of my hometown before. My school was a Taiwanese International School where I can learn both Taiwan and Japanese cultures. Growing up in such a diverse environment helped me gain a broader perspective on both cultures. However, I had been surrounded by the same people since kindergarten, which created a sense of security for me. I found myself relying on this comfort zone, making it difficult to forge new connections with people outside my familiar circle.

One day, my dad asked if I would like to attend high school in the United States. I took a risk and decided to seize the opportunity to study English in California. I never expected to spend my high school years in America. Growing up, I watched Hollywood movies that always felt out of reach. I longed to visit America whenever I saw them. This desire motivated me to study English. When I told my friends about the move, I felt both excited and anxious. I didn't realize that my environment in Japan was my safe haven until I faced numerous struggles in my new surroundings.

My first week of school started off well until I faced the reality of how difficult it was to understand the culture and interact with people from different backgrounds. Opening my mind in a new language and environment was challenging for me. In my first English class, the teacher told us to "share your opinion with your group mates." Once the class started, I couldn't raise my voice, and hiding in the corner only created more distance from my classmates. I constantly debated whether my choice to move here was the right one. The weight of American culture felt like it was crashing down on me, leading to feelings of failure. I felt apathetic and hopeless about my future due to my lack of communication skills and the language barrier. These barriers threatened my potential for friendship, and I dreaded the idea of ending up with nothing to gain and no achievements to show for my efforts. I felt embarrassed for not confronting my fears.

While I was feeling depressed, I decided to join several school communities to expand my horizons. One activity I got involved in was the cheer team. I had always enjoyed dancing as a child, which sparked my interest in becoming a cheerleader. However, I faced a significant barrier when it came time to try out. I was tempted to give in to my fears and not try out at all, but the coach encouraged me to have hope and believe in myself. I pushed through my anxiety and swallowed my nerves for the first time. In the end, I was able to join after all. Looking back, I feel really grateful to the coach, and I learned that fear is just temporary. If I had stayed within my comfort zone, I would have regretted it forever.

Now, I'm doing freestyle academy to gain connection and knowledge through arts. Freestyle academy is a program to exercise your creative skills. It is a unique experience for me. I express my perspective and use my ideas to create original artwork, which has allowed me to cultivate a creative mindset in Freestyle Academy. Being in this unique environment inspires me to broaden my horizons and to accept new cultural wisdom.

I still hesitate whenever I try to step into a new world, but I've learned that there is always help available to grow through experiences. I accept who I am and my decisions,

regardless of the outcome. I feel more independent now, and these experiences have created a new sense of security in my mind. I've begun to belong to myself rather than to any place or group of people.

Words: 648