

特別賞

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帰国子女として他者との違いを感じながら過ごしていましたが、勇気を持ち行動することで、お互いに理解し合い、成長することができるという経験からの学びを書きました。

Belonging Beyond Borders

Although I was born in Japan, my life took a significant turn when my family relocated to the United States due to my father's job. The cultural shift from Japan to America felt overwhelming at first, but being young worked to my advantage. I quickly adapted, picking up the English language easily and immersing myself in American customs. I found myself chatting fluently with friends, watching American television, and even thinking in English. I had become so integrated into American life that people often remarked I was "almost like an American." Yet, despite my growing comfort in American culture, my Japanese roots remained strong at home. We spoke Japanese, ate traditional meals, and celebrated holidays that kept our cultural identity intact.

As I grew older, however, a growing sense of unease began to surface. Despite my successful adaptation to American life, I couldn't ignore the feeling of being caught between two worlds. There was a tension between my Japanese heritage and my American upbringing that often left me questioning who I truly was. I wondered, "Am I really Japanese?" or "Where do I actually belong?" This internal conflict weighed heavily on me, making me feel out of place in both cultures. While I was fluent in English and fully immersed in the American lifestyle, there were subtle aspects of American life that I didn't fully understand—things like cultural references, political views, or the family dynamics of my American friends. These differences often left me feeling like an outsider, even though I had grown comfortable in my surroundings.

At the same time, being one of the few Asian individuals in a predominantly Caucasian environment only magnified my sense of "otherness." I couldn't shake the feeling that, despite my outward adaptation, I didn't fully belong in America. This feeling of displacement continued to grow, leaving me wondering if I would ever feel at home in either culture.

Even though I always knew we would return to Japan eventually, I wasn't prepared for how quickly that day would come. During one of our regular visits to Japan, we received devastating news—my father

had been diagnosed with a serious illness, and we would need to move back to Japan permanently. My first year of middle school was marked by yet another major cultural shift, this time back to a country I had always considered my true home. I assumed that returning to Japan would give me the sense of belonging I had long sought in America, but reality quickly proved otherwise.

Attending a Japanese school and reentering Japanese society was more challenging than I had anticipated. Despite my heritage, I realized just how foreign Japan felt to me after so many years abroad. I had thought Japan would fill the void I had felt in America, but instead, it only highlighted the complexities of my identity. I was no longer fully Japanese, but I wasn't fully American either. My classmates couldn't understand my experiences living abroad, and I struggled to relate to theirs. I was still an outsider, but this time in my own country.

Over time, however, I began to come to terms with my dual identity. The key to overcoming my sense of isolation was confidence. By learning to express myself freely and sharing my experiences, I realized that being different didn't have to be a barrier to forming connections. In fact, my unique perspective allowed me to bring something valuable to the table. I discovered that I could connect with others not despite my differences, but because of them.

Eventually, I came to embrace the fact that my identity isn't bound by a single culture. Instead, it is a blend of both American and Japanese influences. My experiences in both countries have shaped me in profound ways, teaching me that identity is not about fitting neatly into one category or another. Instead, it's about finding strength in the intersections of different cultures. I no longer feel the need to choose between being Japanese or American. I've learned to take pride in the fact that I belong to both worlds, and that my identity is richer for it. [686 words]