

Outsider

**“So, here you are too foreign for home too foreign for here. Never enough for both.”* This was written by the poet Ijeoma Umebinyuo. Recently, I came across these words, and they lanced my heart. I had spent five years in Boston and currently, I am spending my eleventh year in Japan. I can say with confidence that being an outsider was the intercultural experience that changed me the most.

Firstly, it taught me the importance of patience and not giving up. My family moved to Boston the Spring I was four years old. When Summer came, my parents sent me to summer camp despite me not being able to understand English. I vividly remember refusing to get on the yellow school bus, filled with unfamiliar faces. I screamed and cried to get out of the camp, and I felt lonely because it seemed no one could understand me. I wanted to escape this strange new life where I thought I didn't belong. After summer ended, I started going to preschool. That was when I started adjusting myself to the new world. There, I copied the other kids, because I didn't understand the teacher's instructions. I tried hard to have fun like them and never gave up. As a result, I made friends and had a blast at the preschool. By the time I was in elementary school, I was learning to look at the world from a different perspective, which I didn't realize was special until I came back to Japan. I really have to thank my 4-year-old self for having the patience to persevere, even though I didn't have the faintest idea where it was going to take me. I learned that not running away and overcoming my difficulties can lead to some of the best moments of my life.

Secondly, I learned that to grow as a person, wherever I am, I need to take chances. At the age of nine, my family moved back to Japan. I had no idea what to expect. There were numerous things I wasn't used to, such as walking to school, writing kanji, bowing to people and so on. Yet the thing I struggled with most was 'blending in' and trying to be the same as everyone else. Especially at school, people expected

me not to stick out, and to 'be normal'. The teachers liked the idea of the class or grade working together toward one goal. I thought that having my own ideas, and expressing them was important. Sometimes I felt like I was suffocating by holding back my true self. I desperately wanted to return to my classroom in Boston, where it was normal for everyone to be different and we could say things without worrying about being thought insensitive or selfish. Things started changing when I realized that I didn't have to fit into just one culture. So rather than whining and waiting for things to change, I started thinking about what I could do to improve things myself. For instance, I took on the role of leader in several groups at elementary school. Moreover, in junior high school, I joined the student council and became council president. These experiences helped me build my confidence and I learned that no matter where I am, I can become a better person if I am just willing to take chances.

In conclusion, being an outsider in two cultures helped me learn how to overcome intercultural barriers. It wasn't necessary for me to be enough for both, but rather I should get the best of both and use them to help me become the sort of person I myself wanted to become. Moreover, it taught me how to grow as a person living in an increasingly globalized and intercultural world. I would very much like to meet new people, work abroad, gain a wider perspective on the world and help contribute to it. As for the rest of society, I hope that more people will have the chance to be in a new environment and see more of the world outside; because I believe that these are the moments we truly challenge ourselves and have the greatest opportunity to grow. [699 words]

*Umebinyuo, Ijeoma. "Disapora blues." *Questions For Ada*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015