

As a fifth generation Japanese-American, many people told me that my lineage didn't matter or that it wasn't strong enough. This only gave me the drive to learn about myself and my culture throughout my life. My commitment to learning my heritage began with my Japanese family's ignorance to the culture and language that they had been so disconnected from. I began my Japanese learning in high school, where I was a part of the Japanese program. In that program I was a leader of the Japan club, studied in Japan for two weeks, and participated in community wide academic board meetings as a representative of the program.

After completion of the course in high school, I began attending California State University Monterey Bay. From the application process to graduation, I have always kept my path as a Japanese Language and Culture major. I was enthralled by everything the major had to offer, from the small class sizes, the capable teachers, to the study abroad program. One of the most important things I can recall from participating in this major was "if you think everything is easy, you have plateaued". This has stuck with me for the past four years in both America and during my Japanese exchange. Every step of my learning process, this quote has stuck with me and pushed me to work at my limit every day in my learning process.

During my junior year, I was able to participate in the EPOK (Exchange Program Okayama) at Okayama University. I was able to fully immerse myself in the culture I never felt that I had. Although I learned many things about culture in my classes at Monterey, I never felt like it applied to me. I learned more about myself and Japanese language and culture in my one year abroad then I thought I would in my entire lifetime. It was also there that I was able to reach an intermediate-high level of proficiency and finally felt comfortable speaking Japanese to anyone. Upon returning to the States, I began taking a class called Service Learning, which solidified my already incredibly strong drive to join the JET program to teach English in Japan.

Entering this major, I had so many things I wanted to accomplish and thanks to the staff and to Okayama University, I was able to finish an incredible amount of goals. Namely, studying abroad and finding my identity as a Japanese-American. I wish to enter the JET program to teach English in Japan and after, return to America to teach Japanese at a high school level. I want to give people the same type of inspiration that I felt every day studying Japanese.