

Experiences that Build My Future

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There is nothing abnormal about the fact that I live in a house, with my parents and a brother. I go to school, I eat whatever I feel like, and I learn new things every day. It's normal for people living in Japan. However, one step out of the country, and you learn that it just doesn't work that way. There are people out there who have to live in slums. People wondering if they have anything to eat the next day. People unable to get a job because their education ended in elementary school. The list could go on and on. We learn that one step out of the country where people are fortunate enough to not worry about being killed by bombs the next day, there is a world out there where people are worried that they actually are going to get hit by bombs.

Before second grade here in Japan, I guess that I never knew about that world. Of course, there were things on TV about starving kids in Africa and the kids suffering from diseases that can be easily cured elsewhere. I knew about them and felt sorry for them. On the other hand, I liked my little bubble I lived in. Just my family, friends and I. How wonderful. When you have just started elementary school, they never teach you much about those things some people would rather not think about. So, it scared me to look at the TV and see those poor people. Why were they there? Why weren't they like me? I would ask myself but not get an answer.

It's pretty scary stuff for a seven year old. Back then, I was magnetically attached to reading books. People might think that after reading so much, I would know more about the world outside of my bubble. I didn't, though. Maybe I did know a little, but I'm not going to lie and say that I knew a lot. The truth is that I really don't remember how I could have not known.

However, everything changed after I moved to the U.S. Kids my age knew about those people in poor countries all over the world. They knew things I wouldn't have imagined when I was in Japan. I will never forget the time when I didn't want to drink out of my juice box. It had a cartoon character on it, and I thought that it was for little kids. I just didn't want to drink out of it. However, my very sensible friend took one look at the juice box and me and said, "You know, Mako, there are kids out there who can't even drink juice." I felt ashamed of myself. How could I have been so selfish? How could I have thought that the world was just a planet packed with happiness? Even now, it makes my chest tight when I think about this. How could I have been so stupid?

After that small incident, or maybe before that, I don't remember exactly, an African kid came to our school. I think that he was some kind of exchange student. Either way, he couldn't speak English so he came to my ESL class. He told me that it took him 23 hours to get to Michigan from where he used to live. I never got to know about his background fully, but I remember the day when my homeroom teacher told us about how there are kids out there who aren't as fortunate as we. She also mentioned the kid from Africa. Back then, I hadn't mastered the English language

perfectly, so I didn't understand most of what she was saying. Despite that, I got the image that he came from somewhere that was clearly different from places we were used to. He left about a year later, but even as a young child, it left me thinking that I wanted to know more about the world outside of my bubble.

I suddenly wanted to learn more about everywhere in this world. I made lists of countries I wanted to go to someday, and the languages that I wanted to study. It was indeed very interesting to learn about different countries, what their currency is, and what languages they speak. I was amazed at how unique each country is, and how much they differed from what I was used to. My English tutor, who had gone to many different countries around the world, told me all kinds of stories about what it was like in other countries. It was mind-blowing to hear all those stories. On the other hand, I learned about the dark parts of this world too: about the terrorists lurking around us, and about the people who lost parts of their body from mines that are still buried in places that used to be involved in wars. I found out that in some countries, only a small percentage of people can read and write. The "this is typical" things here were without a doubt not typical for many, many people in our planet.

Now, at age 14, I don't have much time to think about what I want to do when I am older. There is so much to ponder, though. However, I want to keep in mind the people who are less fortunate than me. I want to discover more about the world by traveling and experiencing different cultures. I'm still not certain if I can actually do that or what kind of things will be available for me to do. I certainly don't have much of a talent for anything. On the other

hand, I still want to know more about the places I don't know about. I want to work in the international world. The United Nations is one of the places I'm considering. Maybe there, I will finally be able to work internationally and help those in need. Right now, though, there is much for me to learn though. I have many goals for my future. Some of them are: master at least four different languages, learn more about organizations that are helping those in need, try to broaden my view of the world, and be the best person I can be, because I can't change the world before I change myself.

I have a lot more years to live. In the end, though, when I am lying on my deathbed, I want to make sure that I will have done something good for the world and that I will have already traveled to different countries. When I think about now, about those experiences I've had, it all add up to who I really am now. Some experiences were joyful; some were depressing. I can think of many things I regret now and of things that make me proud of myself. Because of those experiences, I have a goal now, to work in this world with people in different countries. I've met so many wonderful people I wish to be like. I want to have many more experiences in life and learn more. I'm ready to take whatever comes in my way in my future.