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Undergraduate-Honorable Mention

The way to love myself as what I am

I'm halfway into my semester. It's time to ponder my past and to make further plan for the rest of my time in America. I don't want to have regrets with how I spent the rest of my days here. What is the biggest difference between my life in my country and my life here? What is the biggest change that I made on myself?

Maybe the answer is the fact that I became pure and learned the way to love myself for who I am.

I was born and raised in South Korea. I think that the importance of education in my country is extremely high. Since elementary school even kindergarten, we have to study hard to prepare for admission into a university. It sounds crazy, I know but that is real life in my country. There I had to be smart and competitive in every situation even when hanging out with my friends. I had to focus on what others thought about me and be conscious of the way other people were looking at me. I could not focus on myself and I had to fit into the expectations of others. I was always rational and calculating because I had to survive and win the first place in every exam and I did, but not without paying a heavy price. After finally getting into a university and getting free, I was not happy because I did not know who I was outside of working hard or studying. The reason for this was I had never focused on myself or listened to my heart at all. Once I became a university student, my days were spent in the same way I had always lived before. Nothing had changed.

Thanks to a good chance, I came here as an exchange student to the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. I met lots of people in my host family, school, church and outside of school. They all have one thing in common; they are always pure and considerate. They never think about receiving anything in return when they do kind things for me. They see everything in an optimistic perspective.

I was really surprised by their kindness. I had a difficulty in communicating with people when speaking in English and in the midst of these difficulties they were so patient with me and did everything with regard for me. I would not have experienced this had it not been for them. They also had an optimistic view of the world and were always full of joy. They sincerely cared about having a friendship with me. They were really pure and nice people. When I realized their nature, I strived to become like them. It helped me in many ways. Now whenever my former behavior comes out, I think of them and leave my old ways behind me. Finally I have become the person who can give without expecting gain. I also try to think of everything in the best way possible. After this experience, I do not get stressed and I can concentrate on listening to my heart. That is because I can now consider myself without the need to focus on others opinions. Now I am truly happy. I hope that I can continue to live in this way after I go back to my country.