

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover

“A Cover is not the book ,so open it up and take a look. ‘Cause under the covers one discovers that the king may be a crook!” sings Marry Poppins and Michael Banks in the movie *Marry Poppins Returns*¹. When I hear this jolly tune, it always reminds me of a boy that I met in the UK that changed my perspective, and possibly my life.

When I meet somebody, they always ask me the very same question: “Are you mixed blooded?” Yes, I am racially mixed, to answer this question. My father is Scottish, and my mother is Japanese. Because of this unique identity of mine, I had a time where I could not put my finger on what my identity exactly was. This was quite a burdensome problem for me, and I had a rough time, especially through elementary school. People thought my appearance and identity as sort of a weird thing ,which eventually forced me into thinking that being the minority was wrong. No matter how hard I tried to look “normal”, I knew that I truly could not deep down in my heart.

¹ *Marry Poppins Returns* (Marshall, USA, 2018)

When I was in the 6th grade of elementary school, I had an opportunity to visit a private school in the UK. I was excited to go there, since in Japan I looked Scottish. I thought that if I go to Britain, my appearance will fit. I was really looking forward to visiting, thinking that I could finally find a place where I could be comfortable being Alanna!

Unfortunately, this feeling would not last forever. When I arrived at the airport, I was really happy. Heading to the customs, I noticed there was a big mirror. Casually looking into it, I noticed one grave thing: I looked very Japanese! I heard my heart shatter into tiny pieces. My display was not suitable for both of my home countries, and this made me devastated. This feeling became worse once I arrived at the private school. As it was a noble private school, every student had the Anglo-Saxon features, and I did not see any students with the Asian looks. I did not want to spend even a minute there, since it felt like there was no place for me.

When I was at the cafeteria eating lunch, feeling very nervous, I saw a senior student approaching to my table. He was a boy with orange hair and freckles. "Can

I sit here?" he said as pointing at the empty seat in front of me. I was surprised but happy at the same time. At first, I was a bit scared that he will point out something about my features, but surprisingly, that did not happen. When I said I was from Japan, he was eager to hear about my culture, not making fun of me at all. I was utterly astonished.

After an hour, we finished eating our lunch and was walking out of the cafeteria. I noticed he said nothing about my features, and did not tease me like the students in Japan. This was so eccentric to me that I spontaneously asked him this one question: "Am I weird?". As soon as I said this, we stopped walking. The boy looked eminently surprised, and the minute I saw his reaction, I regrated saying that from my heart. Suddenly, he laughed and said "No, of course not!" Followed by that, he started talking about his past. Apparently, he was having problems with his appearance and identity too. Some students bullied him for being Ginger, which made him lose confidence. "Have you heard the idiom, the cover is not a book?", he said. While explaining it, he made me realize something: It is impossible to identify a person just by their looks. Being Ginger or Asian is a part of our identity, but not everything. It made me recognize that I could be Alanna no matter where I was.

Being yourself is absolutely fine!

In the future, I really hope to be an open-minded and strong person like him.

Remember, as the song goes, "A cover is nice, but a cover is not the book!". [699

words]