

## Making the whole world my “comfort zone”

From the moment I moved to the US, I was “the person who came from another country”, or in other words, an outsider. I especially felt alienated when I first flew to this unknown (to me) continent, surrounded by people that didn't understand my native language. Every day was gut-wrenching. The worst part of it all was that I had no close friends as a support group. I was in what can be called a “prison of the mind”, and very much alone. As I couldn't express my true self, this added to the fact that I had no one to express it to. When I started playing football, everything changed quickly. A sport that I only started for the sole purpose of wanting to utilize my speed became a life changer. Football is a team sport that requires cooperation in order to achieve victory. I desperately tried to make communication with my meager English skills and used gestures to their full potential. My circle of friends expanded as we practiced hard. As a result, our team won the district tournament and advanced to the finals. Before that important game, our coach said to us, "Our team has Yuta." At that moment, I was able to feel that I was actually worth something in my existence on American soil. And that I could be of assistance. When the time came to go back and live in Japan permanently, incidents that I never would've thought of were coming my way.

As a returnee student, I experienced inter-cultural differences not only when going abroad, but also when coming back. I thought I could live a life without any discomfort in my home country, but that wasn't the case. Although some of my classmates were friends of mine since I was young, my new mindset and the difference in my way of thinking distanced me from the others. What staggered me the most was the fact that although I can speak and am Japanese, I still wasn't able to feel like I was “in the loop”. I felt that everyone valued their circle and had a high sense of camaraderie, ultimately making them avoid the “outsider”. This time, it wasn't a classmate or teammate that got me on my feet, it was a teacher. This was my Football coach and teacher at the same time, and he offered heart-warming conversation and advice. He would always bend his ears towards me and would lend a hand.

From these two experiences, I perceived that even if a person can't speak the language or doesn't feel like they belong in a specific place, they will feel joy when they feel connected to others. By actively joining a circle of people, someone who understands them will surely appear. When people start to recognize the value of their existence, it enables them to demonstrate their abilities many times over. I changed in many ways through these experiences, but the two biggest changes I went through is that: one, I started to think that no matter the situation, I shouldn't just start thinking of reasons why I can't or shouldn't do it, but rather take a leap of faith, and expand my comfort zone by joining a community. Two, I realized the importance of recognizing and caring for the significance of other people's existence, and since then I have kept this in my mind.

Through these experience and the changes I went through, I was able to grasp a clear vision of the future, which I continue to value making connections with people, embracing diversity, learning and acquiring a broad perspective, or in other words, expanding my comfort zone, so that I can play an active role in further developing Japan in the world. No matter what kind of difficult situation we are in, the world can only develop if we value our relationships with people and value others' existence, which leads to the extension of their comfort zones. This method can be utilized by anyone in the world and is paramount in growing as a person. By doing this, it will surely create a positive domino effect on life, and the world. [694 words]