

My Taiwanese Background and Me

My name is Cassandra Korcel and I am proud of my Taiwanese American identity. My mother is from Taiwan and my father is from America, this led to my diverse cultural lifestyle of academic and cultural achievements. As a sophomore at South County High School, I am in the National Honor Society, with a high academic record (4.1 GPA) and strong leadership qualities. I am also a member of the National Art Honor Society, where we do volunteer work and public projects for the community.

Some of my earliest memories come from learning Mandarin and Taiwanese at the Washington DC Taiwanese School. I was enrolled at the age of two and met some of my closest friends there. While attending classes every Sunday wasn't always something I looked forward to, I am thankful and grateful to have attended. I studied hard to prepare for speeches and tests with information about my relatives and my own experiences in Taiwan. We travel to Taiwan whenever we get the chance, experiencing the culture and testing our understanding of Mandarin and Taiwanese. Every time we travel to Taiwan I always learn new vocabulary from relatives, incorporating them into daily use.

A few years ago, I volunteered at the National Asian Heritage Festival in Washington DC for the Washington DC Taiwanese School. I helped raise money for our school by selling different homemade items which reflected our school's identity. With my experience from the cultural festival, promoting the awareness of something that means so much in my life, I felt that fundraising for the Lab Rescue of the Labrador Retriever Club of the Potomac (LRCP) would further my experience of community service. So moved by their campaign, I wanted to help them by fundraising with homemade baked goods. Our family also decided to adopt a dog from the LRCP. As part of the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS), my group collected donations to help BARN, a non-profit group which helps families in need by empowering mothers. We stood outside our local Giant and spread the message of BARN and their mission. I also volunteered to help run concession stands at my high school where a portion of the sales went to fund turf athletic fields. I am so grateful for having a loving home and I understand that not everyone does. In response, I made warm hats for babies and young children to be sent to third world countries through a local knitting club.

I recently started attending the Taiwanese American Next Generation (TANG) annual camp which provides a sense of community to Taiwanese Americans. Their objective is to develop "well-rounded leaders" with a strong identity to make an impact on communities. My two-year experience has allowed me to understand the importance of my diversity and Taiwanese culture. Many people I met there were so inspiring. They are experienced, ambitious, and passionate about controversial world topics. I have learned more about Taiwan's history and political issues this past year than ever and I am eager to learn more.

My mother came to America to further her education and opportunities. She worked hard to enforce that mindset in me. Growing up in a household where academics are held to the highest degree, I developed a strong work ethic to achieve my goals. My family encourages good health and soccer was that early motivation for me. I started playing soccer at the age of five and it has made a huge impact on my life. Soccer gave me life skills such as leadership, teamwork, decision making, and quick thinking. To show my commitment to soccer and my high school, I attended conditioning and weightlifting practices on early mornings (5AM) as well as

afternoons. My hard work paid off last spring when I was selected to join the team and worked my way to a starting position.

As a Taiwanese American, I have been taught hardworking values and I am learning the importance of diversity among cultures. Attending Taiwanese school at a young age was my starting block for the strong qualities I have. I am hardworking, dedicated, a volunteer, and proud to have my Taiwanese American background.