

One Race

I am half American and half Japanese. I was born and raised in Japan but I went to American school on the military base for about 8 years. I transferred to Japanese school when I was in 8th grade. I didn't know much Japanese. I was scared but the people in my new school were all so nice and helped me out. What also helped me was that there were other so-called `half` kids. I had so much fun in my Junior High School. Everyone was so nice to me. I didn't want to leave but I was excited to go to high school. However, I had no idea what high school would be like and how it would change my view of myself and the world.

I went to Okinawa Fisheries High School because I was interested in learning Marine Biology. If you don't know, that school is in Itoman City. Not many `mixed` kids were there. I didn't think negatively about it. I was worried about whether I could communicate with people as I was still bad at speaking Japanese, so that was my biggest concern.

I got into high school and the only `half` kids there were me and another girl. She told me she'd only gone to Japanese school and that she didn't know how to speak English. She also told me I stood out in the school and that I was different. I laughed it off because I didn't think it was a bad thing. I started getting attention, being the only person who can speak English in the school and who went to American school. I was happy, I was making friends until I realized something was off. I started to get `bad` attention.

A girl in my school started a rumor that because I'm half American, I'm okay with being touched and that I would sleep with all my guy friends. People started lifting my skirt, touching my behind, asking to `chill`. I was devastated and confused. I asked the girl, why she started the rumor and she told me, "Americans are okay with being touched, right? Its always in movies and tv shows." I couldn't believe it. Is this what everyone thought?

This kept going on for quite a while. I told the teachers but they would only tell the students to stop. People kept telling me "You're different and that's why people do that." "You're American and that's why they say this." They would also leave me out and say "You're half. You wouldn't understand." I thought being different was a bad thing. I wished that I wasn't half. I didn't understand why this didn't happen in my junior high school and its happening here. I didn't know what to do. They were basically discriminating against me. "You're American and that's why you're this way." I was so heartbroken. I didn't do anything and they were treating me like I didn't belong here. Why is it that just because I'm half foreign, I get treated differently? Im no different from others. I have a brain and a heart too and just because I have a different nationality, I get treated differently? I couldn't go to school anymore. I hated

being different. I hated standing out. I hated being half and I hated myself for being those things.

I had two friends in that school and I couldn't even face them. I was so scared to open up to people, even to the ones that I trusted. They would check up on me but I couldn't tell them I wasn't okay.

One day, I got a call from my friend who lives in Australia. We were good friends and told each other everything. She told me, "You have to stand up for yourself. No one's going to protect you but you. You have to accept who you are. You will never be truly happy until you accept yourself. You are different from them and that's okay. You have something they don't have. Embrace your uniqueness. Stand out. Don't let them get to you and love yourself. These qualities make you who you are and you can't change it. All you can do is accept it. You have your back. Are you going to choose to let them take you down or are you going to take control and stand up for yourself? Be proud of who you are and where you come from."

I didn't realize how weak I was. I was ashamed of who I was and I shouldn't be. No one should be. No one deserves to be treated any differently just because we come from different parts of the world. We are humans. We are all the same in this regard. There is only one race and that is humanity. No matter what religion, what nationality, what race you are, you should never be ashamed of who you are and definitely do NOT let anyone bring you down because of that. I learned that it was okay to be different. It's okay to not fit in sometimes. I learned to stand up for myself. I learned to love myself and I'm forever grateful to my friend who gave me that confidence.

There will be people who will bring you down because of where you come from. It is your choice whether to let them destroy you or you could stand up for yourself. I am proud of who I am and where I come from and you should be, too.