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40th English Oratorical Contest

Okinawa Christian University

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“Finding Identity”

Good morning everyone, I am Sakura Ishadoh and this is my third year here at Okinawa Christian Institute. I entered OCJC in April 2018 and transferred to OCU this year. In the three years here at this university, there have been several things I experienced, learned, and gained. I have also been able to meet many new people who have stimulated me both intellectually and emotionally. Speaking about the people I met, the other day I met a girl who was struggling for 21 years to find an answer to one of the most essential questions a person could ask themselves as they walk on with their lives. The question was: “What is my Identity?”

Let me give you a short story about her and how she was able to find her true identity. She was educated at an International School from the age of two years old but had to attend a Japanese public school when she was in 6th grade. She was pretty excited at first to attend a new school and meet new people, but the six months she spent there were 180 degrees the opposite of the fun and enjoyable time she had expected to spend there. Instead, it felt like a never-ending journey in the darkness, ending up with her being bullied because she was “different.”

By the time students are in 6th grade, they have already formed a group of friends and people with whom they always spend time. That already made it difficult for her to fit in, but the fact that she was able to speak English made it worse. In her class, there were quite a few half-American students who basically looked American, but who couldn't speak English at all. The first words they said to her were “Hey, say something in English.” She was still

immature and spoke in English because she thought they were able to speak in English too, but that was the start of her days being bullied. Every time they had to make pairs or groups she was left out because she “couldn’t speak the same language as they do,” and she was “not Japanese nor American, but someone from a different planet.” Being in a new environment with new people and being bullied for the first time was already a big challenge for her ...but that wasn’t even the worst pain for her back then. The worst thing was that her teacher just ignored the fact that students were bullying her. Not only that but at the parent-teacher conference, he told her mother that she was the one causing bullying to happen. He also told her mother that the reason she was being bullied was that she was being a “lone-wolf” and “didn’t try her best to fit in.” That was the last day she attended that school.

Now, to be honest, this whole story about my friend was actually about me, and are the things I experienced back in elementary school. I spoke about it as someone else’s story, because it felt a bit awkward for me to talk about it as my own personal experience.

Since then I have struggled for years trying to find a way to give myself an identity. “Who am I?” “What am I?” “Where do I belong?”: I always asked myself these questions. In the midst of trying to find a way out from the endless loop of questions, I graduated high school and came to this school. Honestly, I was pretty scared to enter a new environment and to interact with many more new people compared to elementary school, but because I came here to OCI, I have now found who I truly am and my identity.

My nationality is Japanese, but I have the blood of both Japan and Okinawa. I speak both Japanese and English, but in my head, I prefer thinking in English. I could read books written in both Japanese and English, but my Kanji writing abilities are horrible. But this is all **ME**. I am who I am and no one has the right to fit me into a mold that they made. The teachers and faculty members here at OCI didn’t try to shape me in the way they wanted me to be like cookie dough, but instead, they took my hand and walked with me to discover who

I really am, and helped me find the right shape for me. Some of you here could be struggling with the same questions I had. Some of you might be looking for someone to find an answer together. Please don't try to struggle inside. Please don't carry it all by yourself. Please talk to your teachers; they might not always have an answer, but they will definitely take your hand and walk with you. Come to me, we could go get some coffee at Maki-san's and chat to look for an answer. Most important of all, NEVER, EVER, think that no one will accept you as you.

Thank you for your attention.