

Kenji Horigome's autobiography

I was born in Korea to a Korean mother and a Japanese father. Throughout my childhood, I faced massive cultural adversities and often wondered what the purpose of these struggles were. No matter what country I was in or how fluent I was in Korean or Japanese, I was always an outsider because I am a "mutt." Even so, I learned to embrace my diversity and ability to understand the people and beauty of both cultures.

When I was still a baby, we moved to Japan where we spent 12 happy years until my father's cancer diagnosis. By the end of his treatments he couldn't talk at all and we lost him to the disease. Prior to his death, my father expressed his dream to move to America. With no family support, my mother and I decided to fulfill my father's American Dream. I was amazed but overwhelmed with what America had to offer; I was forced again to acclimate to another language and culture. The amazement didn't last very long because I started hearing my mother's quiet whimpers late at night. She tried to hide it, but her swollen eyes, distressed look and fake smile said it all. She could not speak English and struggled to find a job to support us.

My mother's love for me and my father enabled her to endure and I pushed myself to do all I could to help. I matured very quickly that year. I had to learn English at warp speed because I needed to be the man in the house and translate for her. Watching cartoons and movies were fun ways to learn English. Google was my best friend because I learned to find dictionaries, videos and translations that helped me to navigate my way through classes, grocery stores, Home Depot and conversations with others. Sometimes I would use the wrong words, and it was embarrassing but I never let that bother me. My quest was to learn English and to culturally acclimate by building skills. I learned to seek out all possible resources and I developed a passion for knowledge.

During my many long nights I would think about my father. I used to question why we had to struggle but now I realize that his dream gave me the opportunity to chase my own. After this realization, I threw myself into school and found my calling in the stars. In school, I learned that matter cannot be created or destroyed but only transferred; so can my father still exist in this expanding universe?

Science is the universal language that remains constant in my life. My goal is to become one of the most influential physicists in the science world. I plan to study physics' applications in space and develop a research center where creativity, innovation, and advances are limitless. I want to contribute scientific advancements that better the lives of humanity. Maybe all this knowledge will help me find the speck in space where my father resides.