

Caitlyn Chailitlerd's scholarship application essay

As the fourth child in my family, I was the only one born and raised in America instead of my parents' home countries, which unfortunately, meant I didn't have as strong of a connection to my heritage compared to my siblings.

My father lived separately from my mother and I when I was young, so I wasn't as close to my Thai heritage as I would've liked. Similarly to my mother, I didn't get to experience certain traditions or learn more about my Japanese roots because of her tedious work schedule. However, I admire her diligence. Despite the challenges she faces every day at work because of her lack of knowledge in English, she made sure my siblings and I never had to feel financially burdened so that we could focus on our academic lives. Having to watch her work hard everyday my entire life made me realize that her way of expressing love to us was through action, which influenced my love language style as well. For me, I began to demonstrate my appreciation to others through the act of cooking, which in turn, also helped me overcome the language barrier placed between my mother and I. Although communication was not our greatest strength, we valued our actions more than the words we spoke.

Those moments were most apparent when my mother taught me different Japanese cuisines she had learned from her mother. Since I was little, she showed me several cooking techniques like how to wash rice or cut carrots in a *nanamegiri* way with my kid-friendly knife. I always liked these lessons because it was the only hour of the day I would learn the most about my culture and get closer to my mother through the various flavors we brought to the table.

Of all of the dishes I've learned, curry became my favorite. Every time I take a bite of it, the sweet sensation from the sauce and my mother's mochi-textured rice next to it floods back precious memories of my mother and our time cooking together. These valuable reminiscences later on propelled my interest in learning how to bake Japanese desserts. Now, I wish to become a patissier in the near future. I get to see the smiles on my friend's faces as I share my fresh-made treats, and it is a heart-warming feeling to look forward to all the time.

I've been continuously searching for numerous opportunities that would fulfill my love for culinary. I've volunteered with the Little Tokyo Community Council for festivals that promoted businesses like Fugetsu- Do, where I got to see how fresh traditional mochis were made. I now work at a Japanese restaurant, and there I enjoy my time making sure customers have a memorable experience in eating Japanese cuisines for the first time, just like mine was. By surrounding myself around my culture's food and gaining these hands-on experiences, I was able to form the longing sense of connection I had struggled to find with my Japanese heritage.