

Kristi Ikemoto's scholarship application essay

Who am I? I would have replied, "Kristi," four years ago, but I am so much more than six letters. After eighteen years of laughter, unimaginable hardships, and growing pains, I have a better sense of my identity.

I am Kristi Ikemoto, daughter of Klete and Teiko Ikemoto, who loves playing basketball. My family undoubtedly holds a special connection with basketball. With both parents playing when they were younger, I have been around basketball all my life. Japanese American basketball has had an incredibly huge impact on shaping who I am today. Valuable life lessons of sportsmanship and lifetime friendships with my teammates are invaluable. So, with my parent's influence, I have incorporated our shared love for basketball into my own identity.

Along with my parents' influence on my interests, I have developed my own. Particularly when I was experiencing hardships, music became an outlet for stress and emotions. Listening to music calmly or singing my heart out, music has become an intimate part of my life. So gradually, I have also been independently discovering more of myself.

Upon recognizing my inner self, I could focus on my passions. Involvement with the Southeast Japanese School and Community Center over the years inspired me to give back and volunteer as an assistant teacher at the summer youth camp, Camp Hanabi. Only after the pandemic did I realize how important the center was to me. So I helped coordinate a virtual camp of past videos on a youtube channel, realizing how I could make a difference with my passions.

In addition to focusing on my present self and current life, I cannot overlook my heritage. My relatives set the standard when they immigrated to America, persevered through internment, and rebuilt their lives. I am determined to keep these stories alive, whether it is writing a poem about the Pearl Harbor bombing or restarting my school's Japanese Club. I have a newfound appreciation for being 100% Japanese.

Seeing the legacy that my dad left within me, I am inspired to honor his memory. The extended spring break of 2020 did not give me a break from school but broke my heart. He was taken away by Covid-19, leaving us no time to say goodbye. However, I realized that though I can not change the past, I can change how I react. This new mindset of accepting change brought the closure I needed to mentally move on from the past and find my new self.

I am much more complex than just six letters. I am the daughter of my parents' loving care and nurture and the embodiment of all those who came before me and left a legacy. I have discovered multiple aspects of myself throughout my adolescence, so I can no longer merely say that I am Kristi, for there is a much deeper person behind that simple name. So who am I? That is a question that cannot be answered in simply one word.