

Xiaotang (Tina) Wang
Grade 11
Jericho High School
99 Cedar Swamp Rd, Jericho, NY 11753

A white boy with freckles made me cry once.

We were running laps in first grade, and my choppy English gave him the motivation to push me and laugh. Subsequently, I cried.

It was similar to the horror stories on the news. My aunt had told me that it was different from my hometown, and that I was bound to face challenges. She also spoke in fluent English, so I'm not sure that's quite what she said, since I only understood the word "hometown." I had mentally prepared myself, as much as a six year old could, to be outcast for my inability to communicate. My fears were soon solidified by that one moment. Looking up at his pale skin and crooked mouth, I affirmed my fate, and my eyes turned glassy.

Unseen in the media that outlines the stories of bullying, however, was a hand. A ladder, a wing. Through my now wet cheeks and the burning sun, I managed to find the figure of a slightly taller boy. I took his hand with a bit of hesitation, and while propelling myself from the floor, I noticed something.

He looked like me.

I smiled.

Growing up as an immigrant was never easy. My school had tons of Chinese-Americans, but I haven't earned the bottom half of the title yet. I was different from them, but the community at Nassau county allowed me to find a belonging of my own. I lived alone with my mother, and making friends wasn't easy, but my school was surprisingly welcoming. Often, we would visit local parks and talk about my school and all the people I've met. There was something unique here. Among the nature, Nassau County forested a home for someone like me, someone who didn't know a home unless it was 7000 miles away.

Quickly, six months had gone by and it was now halloween. I liked the idea of Halloween, as any child would. However, my liking originated from the simplicity of Halloween. It was script-like. "trick or treat," then you take a piece of chocolate. I started my journey at four o'clock, dressed in a princess costume and carrying a plastic pumpkin. Two streets and many candies later, I walked up the steps to an elderly lady holding a plate.

"trick or treat?"

"Would you like Twix or Skittles?"

I looked up from the array of candy to her eyes. Her wrinkles seemed confused at my pause, and my eyes darted to her plate for an answer. I wrangled helplessly in my head for a phrase, but she picked up both and dropped them in my basket.

"Happy Halloween," she smiled.

I smiled back.

Visiting Jones Beach was also a landmark in my journey. In Beijing, they didn't have parks that weren't littered by plastics and waters filled with grey. Although that seems like a reality for more and more beaches around the world, visiting Jones Beach for the first time felt like magic to me. It opened my eyes to the skyline and a world of possibilities. With my feet

covered in seawater and sand, my hotdog having an unfamiliar crunch once in a while, the wind blowing sand on top of my face as I tried to sleep, I had never felt more at ease. Watching the fireworks at night while sipping on lemonade, I resolved that I would return many times in the future.

And I did.

Gradually, I had become more and more “american.” I had learned which clothes to buy, memorised the map of the United States, and even went onto the second round of my school spelling bee in middle school. I started exploring the community, making new friends by signing up for softball and lacrosse. I wasn’t good at either of the sports, but my teammates understood me and cheered me on either way.

However, finding how to belong was different in Nassau County. I had never lost the six year old that moved here and only ate rice and dumplings. Although I had started to fit in, Nassau county allowed me to express my unique identity. In high school, I learned how to become proud of my culture, something I had tried to shy away from for years. The numerous societies inside Nassau County allowed me to engage with a community that helped me relive the memories of my childhood. Whether it was helping host a new years celebration with the Chinese Association of Jericho or dancing to Asian music at school fairs, I had kept my culture tight to my heart. Along the way, there were obstacles, but the support from the asian american community in Jericho had helped me overcome them.

Within this new country, I felt like a foreigner for many years. However, in the midst of all the chaos, Nassau county made this new land home.