

Chaemin Kim, 11 years old

Finding My Place in America

Over 14 percent of America's population is people from other countries, and my family is one of them. Three years ago, my father took an offer to join the International Monetary Fund in Washington D.C. Shortly after that, my family relocated from South Korea, a country more than 11 thousand miles away.

I didn't think transferring to a new school would be easy, but being thrown into a completely new country was another thing. Everything was different—language, culture, and even everyday lunch menus. I still remember my first day vividly, after all these years, when my classmates watched me curiously as I stood embarrassed, not knowing how to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. I was nervous and quite self-conscious, trying not to make any mistakes and impress the people around me. The COVID pandemic didn't help at all, depriving me of any meaningful interactions with friends beyond class. It was not that anybody was mean or unfriendly, but I couldn't help feeling as if I didn't belong here.

Fortunately, things have turned for the better, although I am not exactly sure when and how. Maybe it was because of my teachers who supported me along the way. Maybe it was because of my friends who were ready to take me as I am and made me forget about impressing people. Maybe it was because of my family who were always there to listen and encourage me. Or maybe it was just time that took me to blend in. Whatever the reason, I am sure that I feel more happy, confident, and belonged than I was three years ago.

When my family was heading for America, I thought this would be something like a long trip, one which ends up returning to where you came from. However, after living here for three years, I feel like this is the place where I belong, a destination where I am bound for. Someday, I might return to Korea, but I am sure that when that day comes, I will feel just as I did three years ago- that I will be missing this place where I call my second home.