

No One Is Like Me

No one was like me. It was not long ago when I was enjoying my summer break, buying the next semester's textbook for my class, hanging out with my friends, and eating spicy rice cake with chopsticks. Abruptly, I was informed by my parents that I would be going to a school in America the following semester and would be leaving within a week. When I landed at the Dulles International Airport, I did not know how my life would alter in the foreign land of Dover, Delaware. Even harder to overcome than the 14-hour jet lag were the language and cultural barriers. On the first day of my 8th-grade year in America, I felt the turmoil of two loud voices inside my head: "I want to go home" and "Being different is not wrong."

Distressed by those two voices, I reflected on my cherished memories of the past 13 years in Korea, leafing through photos of friends and family. Amidst these treasures, a family picture captured my attention. In it, I proudly display my first-degree black belt in Taekwondo, a symbol of my commitment and confidence. In this simple yet powerful image, I found the key to reclaiming my self-assurance in my new home.

With a renewed sense of self-confidence, I began sharing more about my life in Korea with my new friends at school, revealing the hidden talents and passions that define me. I gathered these friends around me and introduced them to the world of Taekwondo, a martial art deeply rooted in Korean culture. As I imparted my desire to share my culture through Taekwondo, they gained a deeper understanding of who I am. This interaction led me to the idea of starting a Taekwondo club at my school.

Every step of founding the Taekwondo Club — from finding an advisor to running fundraisers — presented new challenges. Yet, I remained resolute in my determination to seize

this precious opportunity to unite people through my culture. The first Taekwondo Club interest meeting was a pivotal moment for me. Sixteen individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences gathered, each drawn by their curiosity. Their interest turned into enthusiasm as I taught them both the physical and mental aspects of Taekwondo, strengthening their confidence.

Every Friday morning, I wake up an hour earlier; my stomach flutters with anticipation. As club members spend more time together practicing Taekwondo and bonding over shared passions, our connections deepen. "Ah-yah!" I thunder the Kihap before the eager learners, just as I did on the very first day I embarked on this Taekwondo journey in Korea. My cheeks are flushed like red tomatoes; my heart races like a relentless metronome of 120 beats per minute, but beneath the blush and the palpitations lies an exhilaration unlike any other.

My desire to share this thrill, peculiar to moments when I wholeheartedly embrace my culture and my true self, has led me to volunteer at a local Korean school on Saturdays, teaching Taekwondo to 2nd generation Korean Americans. Today, I no longer yearn for the familiarity and comfort of Korea. I have come to realize that being different is not a flaw to be hidden but a virtue to be celebrated. I embrace the uniqueness of my Korean culture as a passionate Taekwondo practitioner and have learned to simply be myself — Somin Park.

No one is like me. That is something I now cherish. As I discover my passion for distinguishing myself, I anticipate more days to come in America and find my place at UD. Among many precious opportunities held by CGPS, I got the best interracial and intercultural lessons at Friday Coffee Hour from many representatives who came to study from all over the world. It gave me the courage to discover another key to finding my place at UD and also find other international friends' uniquely sublime keys so that they can better enjoy life at UD as well

as appreciate their uniqueness. As I proudly share who I am, I hope to open the worldview of other people. And just as I did, they may one day open their doors and share their stories.