日米協会会長賞	服部 鈴さん　市川高等学校　1 年	千葉県

今年の夏に行ったカナダでの留学で多様な価値観や考え方を持つ仲間達と出会い、以前は私にとって単なる流行語でしかなかった LGBTQ やアイデンティティ、多様性について多く考えるようになった。海外に飛び立ったからこそ得られた学びについてまとめた。

Discovering the Meaning of Identity

Tempestuous clouds abruptly loomed over the city of Toronto, and before we knew it, violent rain plummeted to the ground, creating an intimidating rhythm. Desperate to reach the campus by dinner, we dashed through the streets like seven impalas chased by cheetahs. " Look! A rainbow!" I heard a girl exclaim, but as much as I wanted a glimpse of it, my eyes were blurred by the constant stabs of rain. Never had I imagined that these strangers would be the most valuable gift in this pre-university summer camp at the University of Toronto.

Having arrived on the campus in time, the elevator door to the cafeteria opened with a heavy creek, revealing a metal room with seven soaking wet people, water dripping down darkened jeans. Still painting, I quickly grabbed a bowl of tomato pasta and settled in at a round table to finally clearly see everyone's faces. I immediately fell in love with their effervescent personalities, laughing about how wet their clothes were and how we must fight over the shower afterwards. We talked unceasingly for an hour, and it almost felt as if we had been best friends for years, except that we were all from different countries: Spain, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, the USA, Colombia, and Japan.

On our first Friday night, we squeezed onto the worn-out sofa with popcorn on our laps to watch the Olympic women's soccer game in the common room.

"I play center midfield," I murmured, being glued to the TV for the penalty kick.

"My girlfriend too!" Maia, the Spanish girl, jovially jumped up from the couch, making us fall like dominoes.

Did she just say girlfriend? While everyone else continued the conversation, I was perplexed by that one word. Did I mishear it with "boyfriend"? My scrunched eyebrows and squinting eyes were conspicuous enough for Maia to softly ask, "Is it your first time meeting a bisexual teenager?" I gingerly nodded. Living in

Japan, in a homogeneous environment, LGBTQ was merely a buzzword to me. Even though I had actively participated in various SDG-related presentation contests and workshops, the topic of non-binary gender and sexual orientation always felt untouchable. Following Maia, 2 more divulged their complicated relationships they had with "identity"　and the girl from Thailand, who confessed to be bicurious, expressed how she was currently in the process of discovering herself. Many parts of her story felt like a reminiscence of my childhood, which made me very sympathetic and emotional.

As a third-culture kid, I have always had a feeling of alienation and detachment for not having a specific culture to belong to. Both of my parents are Japanese, but I was born and raised in Hong Kong, disciplined in a British-curriculum school. Due to such a multicultural childhood, I was at times confused about my national identity; therefore, I would struggle to find a consistent self-perception. However, my concept of identity has now been overridden, as Maia taught me that identity is for us to create and enjoy, not something that controls who we are. The more she introduced me to the world of LGBTQ, the more I understood the significance of exploring unique identities. I am glad that we were able to grow the bond of trust to openly articulate our emotions and experiences, because every word we shared helped me reveal and accept my true self, reminding me that I am the narrator of my life.

The next 2 weeks were so fulfilling that in a blink, it was our departure day. A mist of rain sprinkled like confetti as we buried our faces into each other's chests, cherishing our last group hug. None of us knew whether it was the rain that blurred our eyes or our tears. Waving my numb arms as I was slowly swallowed by the airport bus, Maia's face suddenly brightened, her frown turning into a beautiful upward crescent. Even through the reflection of her hazel eyes, I saw it with all colors vivid; I turned and saw it glow—a rainbow.

[670words]