

Connecting The Lifestyles

A choice I made right: coming to Berkeley and living at I-House. My 2 semesters in Berkeley is about to end, but what I experienced here this year was worth more than what I would have gained just in a year elsewhere. For me, living in I-House was not just about meeting international students and getting to know their culture. It was more about getting to know myself, and who I am in this big universe. As an exchange student, and having my past experience of living in the United State from 6 to 10 years old, I came back to the United States after 10years, expecting that I would confront situations where I would have to overcome the different value judgments and culture that all people hold in their background. I love interacting with people, fining out new things, and getting to know them, but the cultural difference that made some difficulties in my past experience, was something I always took for granted. However, my days here at Berkeley that started off and ended with sharing a lifestyle in I-House enabled me to experience relationships with people beyond the level of understanding cultural differences. Sharing a dinner table together at the dining hall, brushing your teeth in the bathroom next to somebody, greeting good mornings with a smile across the corridor, a daily lifestyle accompanied with someone, opened my eyes to acknowledge that even though people take all kinds, we have so many things to share in common. The dinning hall at first, for me was just a place to socialize and meet new people. But the more I had a chance to sit with different people, the more I came to find it the most interesting place around I-House, as the place where everybody gathers together to share their story of the day. The little conversations taught me more than what I would learn from just reading a history book, or googling online. People would sometimes debate about a political issue, talk about the news that was going on, or even talk about their country in

comparison to others. Being a Japanese, it was uncommon to get into a deep conversation or even exchange opinions at a dinner table with someone you barely knew. We tend to be shy, or avoid giving a direct opinion of our own, but the dinner table experience amazed me on how much people were used to expressing themselves, although not necessarily, but also on how much we can share and know about others just by a 30mins conversation. The dining hall was where I started to acknowledge myself as a Japanese representing my country. One of this semester's eye opening moments at the dining hall was the morning President Mubarak of Egypt resigned and the Egyptian revolution had taken place. I was not fully aware of what had been going on in the country, but seeing the I-House residents from Egypt crying with happiness, greeting each other and cheering, made myself aware that the news around the world was nothing apart from ourselves. If I were living outside of I-House, and even hearing the news back in Japan, it would still have been a big news, but would have seemed something far away. Seeing the revolutionary moment in the dining hall with the friends and people I shared my everyday life with, provoked a great significance that nothing around the world would be irrelevant or far. The earthquake that took place in Japan this March, was something much more close to me, but also made me aware of this connection of how people can relate to the on going news around and connect as global citizens sharing and caring for one another. What touched me most through this news was that so many people, even the people I only said 'hi' to across the corridor stopped by, or even texted me and sent me prayers and thoughts for my friends and family back in Japan, which I very grateful for. Finding things in common and sharing and caring that enabled stronger connection changed my perspectives about how I used to think about cultural differences as something that would get in the way or create hardships. Every moment at I-House, is interesting and had been thought provoking, but one of the

most pleasurable moments I shared in I-House is the times I shared with my two roommates from Taiwan and Norway. I owe many thanks to my roommates who have shared so much with me in room 509 where we would start talking, and go on for hours about what our day was like, or what was bugging our minds. They two became my great soul mates. One of my worries, in fact, was to have a roommate for the first time in my life, which never came from me as being the only child. The casual conversations we had, and by coincidence, finding both of my roommates to be just like me in the way they thought and acted, was where I came to know how much we can agree together despite the differences in our backgrounds. In fact, that was one of the things we both would talk about sitting in chairs saying, "isn't it amazing that we think so alike even though we were brought up in completely different environments?" I never met anybody from Norway, or even heard their language, but it was funny how much we could understand what each of us were thinking even through a language which happened to be our second language. It was also interesting to find similar Asian thoughts and culture with my Taiwanese roommate as well. It was so exciting when we always shouted "I EXACTLY know what you mean", the joyful and exciting moments I loved most. When something came by, or when things were blue, I just wanted to go back to my room and talk to my roommate. Through sharing my part of the everyday lifestyles under the same roof with the variety of people at I-House made me aware of myself, as one Japanese with my own set of cultures, but also as a global citizen that is no more different than the others. At the end of the day, I-House on the top of the hill, is where I rest and felt at home coming back from short trips, and where I could find smiles that supported me and lovely roommates that were there to talk to.