

Understanding

(Original)

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What a colorful parade! That was my first thought. Then, I realized that the parade was taking place right in the center of Shibuya. Both my eyes and my heart were captivated by this colorful parade, the likes of which I had never seen before.

In this way, in the spring of my grade 8 year, I encountered the LGBT community. In the Shibuya district of Tokyo, which I had visited several times before, I saw the Pride Parade for the first time. Normally, if I saw some new words that caught my eye, I would not feel so curious that I had to look them up later at home. But this time, I couldn't forget the impressive rainbow colors. *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender*. Two of these words I had heard before, and two I was seeing for the first time. I quickly took an interest in these four terms.

Right away, I started to learn more. In the spring of grade 9, I participated in an LGBT gathering in Tokyo's Shinagawa district. At that time, I was somewhat aware that LGBT people were often discriminated against and treated unfairly by society, and therefore I felt nervous imagining how gloomy this meeting would be. But actually, contrary to my expectations, all the participants were smiling. And even though neither I nor anyone in my family was part of the LGBT community, they accepted me and talked to me about their situation. It was the first time I had talked with someone from that community. I didn't find them strange or unpleasant at all—actually, I thought they were rather lovely. I admired the way they held on to their own way of living. However it was not all smiles—they also told me many sad things, and I saw some tears. *I want to change the situation. I want to help change things so that LGBT people are accepted as normal by society.* That was how I felt.

Now, I have taken the first two steps toward that goal. The first step was to make the people around me more aware of LGBT issues. To do that, I entered two English speech contests at school and presented the situation of the LGBT community from different points of view. What happened after the speech contests made me very happy. Friends of mine

came to me and asked me about LGBT issues, and for the first time, I felt I could accurately inform them.

My second step is to study abroad in the United States, which I am going to do in August of this year. Same-sex marriage is legally recognized in the United States, and many well-known people have come out as gay, lesbian, transgender, and so on. I was also surprised to learn that many American high schools have clubs for LGBT students to gather and hold activities. What still seems impossible in Japan has already become accepted in the United States. By going there, I hope to learn about what I can do from the administrative and judicial side to make LGBT rights accepted in Japan as they are in the U.S.

Although I am still lacking in knowledge, what I would like first of all is for people in society to stop turning away from things that are unfamiliar to them. In fact, my mother also had negative feelings about the LGBT community before she learned more about it. She even told me not to go to the gathering. But when I told her in detail about the meeting I participated in, my mother admitted that all of us have our differences, and she said she was ashamed to have thought badly of people just for being different. Thus, I would like for other people to learn the truth about the LGBT community, as my mother did. If people do not just get information from the news, but hear firsthand from people in the LGBT community, I don't think there is anyone who will be unaccepting.

So far, the only action I have taken is to participate in the speech contests. But by studying abroad in the United States and studying law at university, I hope to work with the LGBT community to create many more possibilities in the future.