

### Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai Essay

My Okinawan heritage has always been of great importance to me, and I want to carry my heritage into college and into the rest of my life. In my future, I would like to attend Marquette University with a major in Psychology, and I want to study abroad during college, hopefully in Japan. I have dedicated my life to being the best person I can possibly be, and striving to make a difference in the world, no matter how small of an impact I make on those around me. The things I value most in life are responsibility, hard-work, and excellence-- these are the things I utilize to reach a goal. My teachers and my family have always been proud of me, but they were not the ones who pushed me to do better and be better. I have motivated myself for years in order to become the person I am today, and I have worked hard to make my dreams come true and to make everyone proud, including myself. I feel very accomplished as I head into college, and I feel that I am ready for whatever the future holds. I have kept my grades high, participated in four sports, starred in two high school theater productions, and was in over ten different clubs and organizations throughout my high school career. Being of service to the community was something that I cared for deeply, and I continue to work for my community during this unprecedented time by writing thank-you notes to essential workers and picking up trash around the city. The career I wanted to pursue in college was law enforcement; helping people has always been a part of my identity, and it only made sense that my career would have a focus on serving and protecting others as well.

Travelling to Japan over the years has helped me to connect more deeply to my roots. Okinawa has been a part of my identity ever since I was born, and that is because of my mother. My mother, a dedicated member of the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai group for over sixteen years, has made it her mission to teach me as much as possible about who I am and where I come from. I learned so much about my heritage throughout my childhood, and traveling to Japan and spending time with my Okinawan family has meant so much to me. I feel the ache that my mother must feel every day, and I wish that I could spend more time in Okinawa. Participating in the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai group as a child has helped me to show my heritage, and it has made me proud to be Okinawan and to be part of such an amazing group of people. I have learned more about culture, art, fellowship, and heritage because of this group, and the experiences I had have stayed with me every single day. I hope to share my culture with everyone I meet in college, and it makes me happy to meet new people and explain what my identity as an Okinawan means to me. Because of my connection to Okinawa, those around me have been exposed to a vibrant culture, with amazing food, music, and customs. I am proud to be Okinawan, and I hope to one day live in Okinawa after I retire and permanently live out my days breathing in the ocean, the humid air, and the beautiful hibiscus. Having a deep connection to a part of the world that is completely opposite of the United States has brought me so much happiness in my life, and I thank the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai group for opening my eyes and bringing me closer to my identity.