



Where am I now?

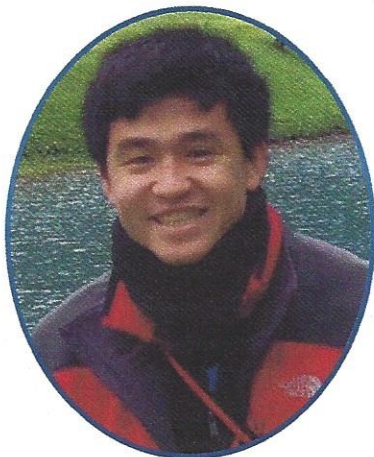
John Trent
2014 Scholarship Recipient

*M*y name is Johnathan Kengi Trent, and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to write an essay regarding my Okinawan heritage. The Okinawan culture is unique and hard to come by in the United States. Often times I come across individuals who have never heard of Okinawa. That is why I take every opportunity I can to express pride in my culture wherever I go and educate others in the amazing Okinawan culture.

I would have started this essay sooner, but I recently finished Basic Combat Training for the Army to help pay for college as well as serve my country. I am continuing my training at AIT (Advanced Individual Training). For the last 10 weeks, I was training to become a soldier and met many people from all over the United States. Although, mostly from mainland United States, I met some from Puerto Rico and even from Hawaii. Everyone knew of Puerto Rico and Hawaii, but most never heard of Okinawa so I enjoyed teaching them about my culture. I explained the differences between Okinawa and mainland Japan, such as the Okinawan dancing, simplistic lifestyle and typical meals, including goya. Everyone found Okinawa to be exotic and rightfully so. The unique heritage surrounding Okinawa is one of the reasons I'm proud to be Okinawan.

The Okinawan Kenjinkai allows Okinawans to connect with one another and spread the culture throughout the United States. For instance, during Basic Training, I talked to some other trainees about our origins and I brought up my Okinawan heritage. Another trainee lit up as he told me he too was from Okinawa! This was the first time I came across another Okinawan outside of the organization, so I was excited to talk to him about the cultural background we shared. As I got to know him, I found out he lives in Chicago and has even been to Kenjinkai gatherings before! The Kenjinkai organization as an amazing impact on the Okinawan culture and finding a fellow Kenjinkai Okinawan here in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri proves just that.

As I have said before, I'm proud to be a part of the Kenjinkai Organization. Without Kenjinkai, I wouldn't have the opportunity to meet other Okinawans from the Chicagoland area or enjoy Okinawan food. The organization is run out of heart and compassion, allowing Okinawans, such as my mother to spend a day in Okinawa even when it's thousands of miles away. The Chicago Okinawan Kenjinkai organization makes my mother feel at home and because of that, I thank you.



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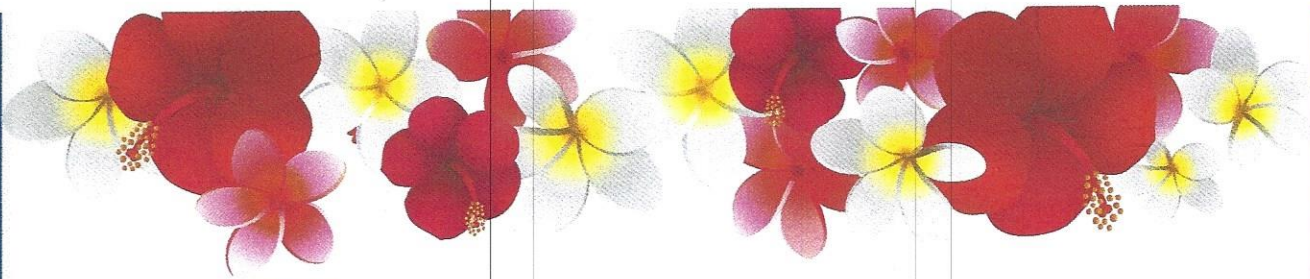
Robby Uehara
2013 Scholarship Recipient

*H*ello Okinawa Kenjinkai. This is Robby Uehara. I am a computer engineering student at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. I am writing this essay, after 2.5 years from starting my college journey and receiving the gracious Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai scholarship. These past 2.5 years have been some of the most transformative years to date. My school is run on trimesters, so I have 8 trimesters finished with countless hours of laboratory applied through my rigorous course load. I am the President of the bowling team and a part of the robotics club at MSOE. Coming out of graduation I am deciding on going for my masters degree or finding a career path in computer engineering.

In addition to studying in the old style town of Milwaukee, I took the opportunity to study in the old style town of Prague, Czech Republic, last spring. It was an amazing experience that has greatly increased my love for traveling and cultural awareness. My love of traveling came from participating with the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai. I was fortunate to go on the Uchinanchu Junior Study Tour when I was 17 years old and travel to Okinawa and learn more about my heritage and get to know my Okinawan family.

What I have definitely learned from the past 2.5 years is to get out of your comfort zone for getting things done and exploring new things. You have no idea of what may be accomplished or enjoyed when you try something new.

Thank you Okinawa Kenjinkai for all of your support. I appreciate the generosity and your scholarship and the ongoing strong Okinawan community in the Chicago area.



Where am I now?

Jessica Saucedo
2012 Scholarship Recipient

*H*ello, my name is Jessica Saucedo. I am majoring in International Business with a concentration in marketing at Illinois State University in Normal, IL. I was the recipient of the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai scholarship back in 2011. I am now a senior in college and will be graduating in May. I am walking in my graduation ceremony, but I will be participating in a study abroad program in France from June to July to finish up two more classes, and then I will be going to receive my diploma in August. In my program, I will be studying in Angers, France, and also be spending some time in Paris and Brussels.

My time at Illinois State University has been amazing. I'm apart of the University Program Board where we plan events for students on campus. Some of the events that I've helped plan include major concerts, comedy shows, and speakers. I am also a part of the International Business club here, and I love it. I get to interact with people who are in the same major as me and have the same interests as I do. We get to go on trips to different consulates and participate in many awesome events. This semester we may even be going to the Japanese consulate.

I just wanted to say thank you to the Okinawa Kenjinkai for the scholarship that I have received. I appreciate it so much!



Where am I now?

Theresa Geiger
2007 Scholarship Recipient

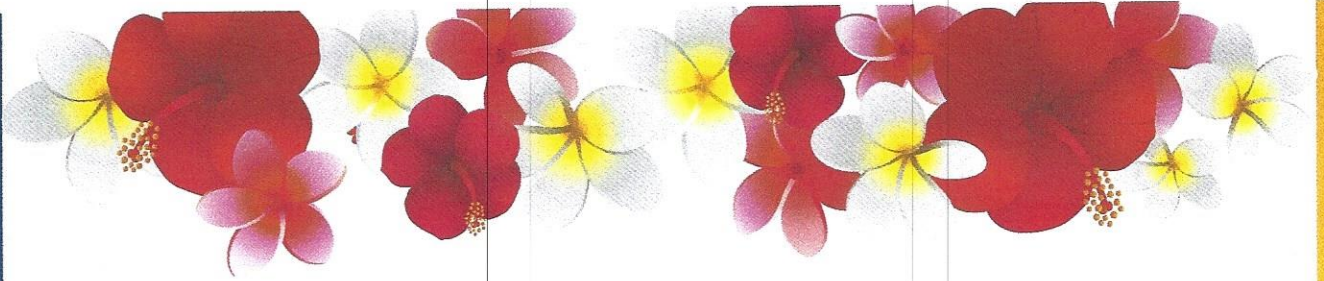
*C*ongratulations to the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai on your 50th Anniversary!

I was a scholarship recipient in 2007, when I graduated from the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. I used the scholarship to pay for textbooks during my time as an undergraduate chemistry student at the California Institute of Technology.

After college, I went on to complete my PhD in Immunology at the Gerstner Sloan Kettering Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in New York City. My research focused on the biology of innate lymphoid cells, a cell type important for our bodies' initial responses against viruses, bacteria, parasites, and tumors.

This month I start a new job as a Postdoctoral Fellow and Associate Scientist at Merck & Co. in Palo Alto, California.

Thank you to the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai for their generous scholarship, and congratulations again on your 50th Anniversary!



In memory of

Alicia Berenz

2003 Scholarship Recipient
Chicago Okinawa Treasurer 2009

*A*licia Berenz was awarded our scholarship in 2003. She is the daughter of Yoneko Berenz, and sister of Robert and Bryan Berenz. Alicia graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor's degree in finance in December of 2008. In February of 2009, she was elected and served as the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai's treasurer. Tragically, Alicia passed away suddenly in August of 2009. She was only 23 years old. We remember her as a smart, beautiful, and wonderful girl.

Alicia will always be in our hearts.