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My Second Hometown-East Lansing

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My Second Hometown-East Lansing

Minako Yogi

Recalling the reason why I chose Michigan State University (MSU) as my graduate school takes me back to my junior year in college. I was given a golden opportunity to study abroad at a small, private college in Michigan as an international exchange student under a scholarship program of the Ministry of Education of the Japanese Government. The student population of the college was only seven hundred. The campus was so small that it took only a few minutes for us to tour it. Thus, almost all of the students knew each other quite well and everyone knew me because I was the only Asian student there. Surprisingly enough, however, it was not easy to make friends because most of the students there did not seem to be interested in other cultures. I soon realized that I should not just wait for them to talk to me and should adopt a positive attitude and put myself into the crowd.

College life there was challenging in the sense that we were given a lot of assignments in all the courses I took, and I made a great effort to keep up with these classes. During weekdays, I spent most of my time in the library preparing for classes. Strange to say, I could hardly find any students there. Dead silence often reigned over the whole library. This silent

and cold atmosphere seemed somewhat frightening at times. Once in a while, I met some students in the library. I felt relieved by their presence. One day I was shocked when my floor mates asked, "Why do you study so hard every day?" They were so curious about what I was doing in the library every day. They just couldn't understand me at all. They were freshmen, fresh out of high school. They were cheerful and nice, but their primary focus in college did not seem to be their academic success. In contrast, as an international student, I had nothing to do but study. Professors of the college were very friendly and enthusiastic. While I was there, I took eight courses in two semesters, earning 24 credits. That made me extremely busy.

The college was situated in a small town not too far from MSU, around 40 minutes away by car, where I had friends. Every weekend, I would ask them to pick me up and take me to their gigantic university campus full of stimulation and excitement. I couldn't wait for Friday to come. I worked very hard during the week days so that I could stay with them for two days at MSU. There I felt a great peace of mind, visiting the museum, going to the library, going to the movies, going shopping and the like. This weekly routine served as the incentive for my studying. My junior year experience inspired me tremendously to pursue my graduate work at an academically celebrated school like MSU. It was at that time that I made up my mind to pursue my graduate work at an American university, not in a small college, but in a big university.

I came back to Okinawa for my senior year and worked on my graduation thesis to finish all the requirements for graduation. Around the end of my senior year, I applied to the MSU Graduate School in the College of Arts and Letters. In the application for the graduate program, I enclosed: 1) a personal letter addressed to the chairperson of the Department of English; 2) a statement of financial proof for international graduate students; 3) a bank statement signed by a bank official which proved that I had funds available; 4) a curriculum vitae in which I stated the factors that led me to decide to undertake graduate work at MSU, the program I hoped to pursue in the department, my preparation for graduate study in the proposed area, a statement on my past work in the intended field of study, my experience in teaching English, and some significant events in my life. Three letters of reference were sent directly to the department by my professors: one by my academic adviser, one by my thesis adviser, and another by the chairperson of the Department of English. In addition, my graduation certificate and official transcripts were sent directly to the Office of Admissions from the university, and my TOFEL score was also sent directly to the institute by the ETS / TOFEL office. It took about three months for me to receive a letter of acceptance from the Dean of the Graduate School. I just can not express in a few words how pleased I was when I received the letter saying that I was officially admitted to the graduate school starting from fall 1990. My heart was filled with excitement and ambition. My dream had come true at last.

Michigan State University, where I had been longing to study for a long time, was founded in 1885 as the first agricultural college to teach farming as a science. The university is actually an arboretum-park which has long been recognized as being among the most beautiful in the country; has received national awards for its campus site planning and its wide variety of plants and bushes. It is located in the center of the state of Michigan, right outside the state capital, Lansing. The university has its own golf course, theater, planetarium, football and basketball stadiums, hospital, and over 30 dormitories. You must walk through the beautiful gardens and woods with various kinds of trees to get to classes, to dorms, to the library, to the student union. I am sure you will find beauty and grace in almost every corner of the campus.

I understand a university campus should not just be a collection of buildings, but an environment for learning. As a matter of fact, MSU seems to have been serving the whole state as a center of excellence in teaching and research. Departments of instruction at MSU are organized into fourteen colleges. It has thirteen colleges authorized to offer programs leading to master's and doctoral degrees, such as: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Arts and Letters, Business, Communication Arts and Sciences, Education, Engineering, Human Ecology, Human Medicine, Natural Science, Nursing, Osteopathic Medicine, Social Science, and Veterinary Medicine. Of course, the work of these colleges is supported by strong undergraduate programs. The university offers a wide variety of programs and areas of

study, more specifically, 234 areas of study. Its enrollment totaled approximately 45,000 including the off-campus programs. Over 2,000 students from more than 100 countries were enrolled when I was there.

MSU is a dynamic institution with natural beauty. East Lansing is a college town that provides a very comfortable environment for all the students. The public order of East Lansing seemed to be relatively good compared to that of other big cities. During the fall season, you could enjoy the leaves of the trees changing to yellow, orange, brown and red. You will regret it if you miss the opportunity to capture these breathtaking views with your camera. They are definitely worth keeping.

When the trees start shedding their leaves, you become aware of the coming of winter. From October through April, the whole place is often mantled in pure, white snow. The scenery was so beautiful that I even had a guilty feeling when I walked on the snow leaving footsteps behind. You will, however, experience severe winter weather. The temperature can go down to 20 degrees below zero. The cold in Michigan was beyond description, with my whole body shivering, numb fingers, running nose, frozen hair. I could easily understand why people invented face masks with three holes for the mouth and eyes. During this time of the year, most people usually didn't care about how they looked. It was just perfect as long as they were covered with layers of warm clothes to protect them against the cold.

In the month of May, the snow starts melting and becomes slush, that beautiful white carpet of snow turns gray, and people start wearing shorts and T-shirts. That tells you of the arrival of spring, the season people have patiently been waiting for. The trees sprout fresh green leaves and cherry blossoms begin to bloom. Just looking up at the blue sky brightens up our day. In June, July, and August, you find many students suntanning in their colorful bathing suits on campus. This is a sign of the arrival of summer, everyone's favorite season. Although it lasts for only a few months, people have the pleasure of playing various outdoor sports. MSU students enjoy themselves canoeing on the Red Cedar River, which runs through the campus.

Michigan is famous for its unpredictable weather. During the fall and spring, I often went out in light clothes and came back frozen to the marrow because I could never tell what the weather was going to be like. Even the weather forecast was often unreliable. If you ever visit Michigan, I suggest you bring both summer and winter clothes in all seasons. Although I often suffered from its changeable weather, I really enjoyed my life in East Lansing, my second home town.