

Do you know what it's like to look in the mirror and hate what you see? I don't just mean the face standing in front of you, but the one behind the eyes staring back at you. I was just a kid. Why was everyone staring? Why was everyone telling me who I was? Sometimes it happens, but it still hurts. When you're made into a spectacle from such a young age, you grow scared of the world.

When you're in that space, you can be so mean to yourself, attacking yourself for making even the smallest mistakes. Unfortunately, English was no exception for me. In fact, English is where I feared making mistakes the most. I was raised overseas until I was 2, and ever since then, I've loved expressing my thoughts in English. With the help of my mother, and a former ALT whose compliments gave me pride in my abilities, I've continued self-studying. But even after all that time, I was still terrified to make mistakes.

But even so, I refused to give up on self-studying. There were times when I stopped, but I realized that it's what makes me, me. English is special to me, it's my reason for living. On top of that, if I give up English, I'm limiting myself. There are places to go, things to enjoy, people to meet, that I can't access through Japanese. Not only does my value as a person go up, but so does my happiness. There's no way I can let go of that.

After realizing this, I decided to really test myself and join the Speech Contest. Before then, I was terrified of being told that my English was "not good enough," so I'd been avoiding it. But I did it. I joined the contest. And I won. I was so shocked, but more than anything, I was proud. Everyone who helped me was so happy for me. I was finally happy. "Be confident," I thought, for the first time in my life. Thanks to my own efforts and the people around me, I truly understand the power that I hold.

Since then, I have fully devoted myself to becoming the best English speaker I can be. I joined an English event for the first time, and I'm not stopping there. In the future, I want to make the most of this skill and become an English teacher. I want to help people learn more about Japan.

There are plenty of things that I don't like right now, like math, tests, or homework. There are probably people who see that part of me and reject me for it. Someone is probably thinking my efforts are "not enough." Even so, I don't care. I'll just continue putting my effort in, doing what I like, and polishing my skills. The voices of those who are talking behind my back, laughing, or trying to make a fool of me don't even reach me. I have no time to entertain that. To everyone listening right now, there's something I want to tell you.

"The act of putting your best foot forward to gain confidence is amazing. It is totally okay to take time to figure out how to love yourself. So, please do not lend your ears to those who are trying to make a fool of you. You, who are trying your best, are shining the brightest.

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Shining the Brightest