

Brooke Singson
2022 June Nelson Scholarship

My racial identity is not a simple category that I fit in or a box that I check off on a form. It is the foundation of who I am as a person, from the food I love to the features of my ancestors that I possess. I take pride in my identity, just as many other people do with their own. As a biracial woman, I have been given the opportunity to identify with and embrace not just one, but two ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

For the last eighteen years, I've grown up in a richly diverse, rural Alaskan community that is home to people from countries across the globe, known as Utqiagvik. I've had the privilege to experience and embrace the customs of several cultures outside my own. As a child, I ate maktak with kimchi from the local Korean restaurant, watched my friends perform beautiful Polynesian dances at community events, and attended my school's yearly cultural ceremony that brought local Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian, Alaska Native, Polynesian, and African American traditions together at the same time for everyone to experience and enjoy. My father, a Filipino immigrant, cooked our country's traditional foods to help me fundraise for sports and academic activities where his dishes sold out each time. I don't know who I would be if I wasn't exposed to this diversity. It embedded me with a sense of respect for all people by acknowledging that our cultural differences were something to respect and honor. I take these experiences with me and never forget the privilege I had to be raised around such a diverse group of individuals.

As I begin to branch out and forge my own path in the world, I stress the importance of the inclusion of all people, regardless of race, disability, or socioeconomic status in all things that I do. This means standing as an ally to marginalized groups in all scenarios—academically, politically, and socially. It includes speaking up for those who lack representation, embracing all people from all backgrounds in every space, and taking the personal responsibility to share your own culture while remaining open-minded to the idea of experiencing others. People deserve equal treatment and opportunity while retaining a safe space where they can express their individuality. As the future parents, educators, and leaders of the world, advocating for this safe space while providing marginalized groups with well-deserved help is essential to achieving true equity within the United States. Americans are a people of great ideas and great ideals. We began with a declaration of not only our independence, but also of our vision for the future. A future where everyone has the ability and opportunity to pursue their inalienable rights. Alaska is home to some of the most diverse populations in the nation, which is something our people should stand proudly with while continuing to embrace and protect it for the generations to come.

I can only wish that all people have the opportunity to experience the privilege of diversity the way I was able to as a child. Viewing our differences as a learning opportunity, a chance to grow, and as special qualities that make us unique individuals is what embeds respect for all peoples into our society and encourages true equity and inclusion.