

I am American by Manjari Kannan, Grade 10

What does it mean to be an American? When I wrote my first draft for this contest, I was brutal. I couldn't think of a reason that I would be happy to be called an American. Well, to start off with, I didn't consider myself American. Maybe it's because I wasn't born here. Maybe it's because I'm not a citizen yet. Especially in today's political climate, there are times when I don't even know if I want to be considered as an American.

But is that really what being an American is about? I was so caught up about the technicalities and the current events, I forgot about the memories that I've gained here. Recently, while going out to get a meal with my family, we stopped at Ben & Jerry's. I appreciated the time I got to spend with my family, as I don't get to see my sister often since she's currently in college. As we got back into the car, and I put my headphones back on, I was hit with nostalgic memories. Memories that I've neglected to cherish.

I forgot about walking to the public library, holding my mom's hand. I always checked out way too many books than I could read, but I managed to somehow finish them. Not only was I able to make a connection with the characters in my books, but also with the many children, who visited the library. Many of them came from a variety of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Back then, I didn't see them for their ethnicity, I saw them as my friends. Just my friends.

I forgot our first Thanksgiving feast. I didn't have any family members to celebrate with, as they all lived in India. I remember my dad buying a huge turkey. It was so big that it didn't fit into the oven. I remember my mom splitting the turkey into two-pieces so that it would fit. We invited the whole entire neighborhood to help us finish. Although we didn't get the chance to spend this night with our family, at the end of the day we had a new family.

I forgot the feeling of dressing up and going trick-or-treating. For one day, I could be anything I wanted. Back then, no one cared about the color of their neighbor's skin or their religious beliefs. All we cared about was who was giving the king-sized chocolate bar on the street.

What I really love about America is the variety of people we have here. People who come here for a better life. Next year, I'll be applying for citizenship and I'll finally be an American, on paper. But I don't know if I care about what's on a paper, because being an American is what you gain from your experience and heart. So even if I'm not technically an American yet, through all these memories, I know that I am. So call me an American, because that is exactly what I am.