

The Story of Rachel Meang

"My heart races and I fidget my hands nervously as I walk into my new classroom. Seeing the sign above the door that's in English causes me even more stress as I struggle to read the foreign language. I feel like a failure. If I can't even read my classroom sign, how am I going to do anything in this new school? I walk into the classroom and hold my breath. I'm surrounded by strangers, and all I want to do is to just go back home to Korea."

The story of Rachel Meang is a tale of movement, loss of old friends, and the grand adventure of coming to America. Thai (pronounced *Chai*) goes by Rachel in school because it's easier for her peers to pronounce. Rachel, 17, grew up in a small town in South of the capital of Seoul Korea. Although American culture has proven to be drastically different than the Korean culture she was born into, she is confident and friendly to everyone around her. In Korea, Rachel's childhood was ruled by strict routine. There were specific rules for everything, from how to dress to how much she was allowed to eat in the school cafeteria. Her school lacked any semblance of diversity. Her fellow students looked just like her, spoke the same language and ate the same dishes each and every school day.

Hanging out with friends after school was easier in Korea, since houses are relatively close and she could see her friend in passing. Visiting the nearby food truck was Rachel's favorite pastime when she hung out with friends. Each mouth-watering bite of bliss kept her and her friends coming back for more. Rachel describes herself as someone who can scan the faces in a room and see who she will get along with. When she found someone that she thought she'd get along with, Rachel would approach them and simply ask if they wanted to be her friend.

She was only ten years old when her parents sent her on a flight to America. Her family had a close connection through friends who lived in Portland. Her parents were the first to experience rainy and the spontaneously fun area; they instantly knew that they wanted this life style for their children. Rachel still stays in touch with her friends in Korea. Her skill at scanning a classroom to make new friends served her well when she arrived in America. Soon she made new friends and discovered that language barriers would not prove to be an insurmountable obstacle at Sunset High School. Despite her initial trepidations, Rachel now says that coming to America has been one of the best-- yet also most challenging--experiences of her life.

Rachel, now a senior at Sunset, hopes to attend college in Oregon. She dreams of working for a magazine company and traveling the world. She knows she will have to work hard, but Korean culture values work, and she wants to uphold that standard. With her college degree and some solid work experience under her belt she plans to return to Korea and live their independently. She wants to find success by proving to herself that she's capable to going back and finding a better sense of what it's like in Korea on her own.