

My parents named me Tonya Madora Isabell after my great grandmother on April 18, 1981. I was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia, a small town close to Florida in South Georgia. During my time in Fitzgerald, I loved fishing with my Dad, playing outside with my brothers and neighbors, and going to school. When I was in third grade, I moved to Monticello, Georgia away from my Dad's family and he was no longer a major part of my life. In Monticello, I endured bullying every day from my peers and neighbors. I found comfort in reading, sports, and my activities in the Technology Students Association (TSA). During my senior year, I cheered in the Pro-Bowl in Hawaii, visited England with my drama club, and served as the First Vice President for Georgia TSA. I really enjoyed school, but I could not wait to get away from Monticello. Once I moved to Athens, GA to attend University, I have not spent more than three consecutive days in Monticello. I find the town filled with closed-minded people and a terrible small town mentality, which does not tolerate difference.

During University, I traveled all over the U.S. with the Residence Hall Association for leadership conference. I also worked summers in Amherst, Massachusetts and Oxford, England. I entered the University of Georgia (UGA) to study Genetics, but switched to Technological Studies my senior year. I was very happy with my new major, and I did better in my classes. I served as the Director for the South Atlantic Affiliate of College and University Residence halls during my fifth year of school. I really enjoyed being the director, but it taught

me that leadership is lonely and I do not need everyone to like me to be a good leader.

After University, I worked as an Engineering and Technology teacher at Morrow High School in South Atlanta. During these days, I observed the worst behavior in students I have ever seen. Fights, disrespectful behavior, weapons, and drugs were a daily part of Morrow HS life. I was always interested in Japanese culture, and my friends encouraged me to apply to teach in Japan. I got a job in Japan, and I loved working there. I could not understand many of the things Japanese people did, but I learned to accept the cultural differences. After Japan, I wanted to experience other cultures and I went to England to teach. I am currently teaching again in Atlanta, but on the Northside this time. I find my experience overseas helps me deal with my students from other cultures.

#### Personal Plan to Increase Cultural Knowledge

1. Travel to Central America and the Caribbean.
2. Spend more time with the multicultural students in my class.

I find that the most valuable experiences I have had with other cultures comes from traveling to difference countries and spending time with the people. I would like to travel more to the countries where many of my multicultural students originate. I have also learned during this class that multicultural does not stop at race, language, or religious belief. Spending time

talking to my students will help me understand more about their challenges and lives. The first goal is easy to measure by the number of trips I take during the year. I usually travel to at least three or four countries a year. This time I can add Central American countries and more Caribbean countries. I can add more time with my students by talking with them during independent working times instead of grading papers or working on other paperwork.