

**Building Unity in Rhythm Nation**  
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**Monterey Park, Calif.**

Thunderous applause spread like wild flames across the field. The crowd, tired but jubilant under the sweltering summer heat, beamed with pride. Squinting through the multitude of the gathering huddled under canopies of umbrellas, I smiled away the months of our group's intense preparation for the success of this festival. Amidst cries of laughter and group hugs, a surge of emotion shot through me as I finally felt a sense of acceptance to a group I once avoided due to ignorance.

"5, 6, 7, 8..." the countdown began as a vibrant beat pulsated through the speakers. As I looked at the mirrored wall, I cringed at my awkward movements in comparison to others. Shy but with a love for the stage, I was at the brink of submitting to my negativity when girls from the back of the room hollered encouragement. Being the only one to represent my nationality in a group comprised of Caucasians and African Americans, I knew that all eyes at that moment were on my moves. Determined to complete this task, I vowed to get through this rehearsal with extraordinary perfection.

Many retreated to corners of the room during the first meeting. I, too, sat by myself with no one to talk to. It was fascinating to note that within several hours, distinct groups comprised of similar races were formed. Ironic as it was, the relaxed atmosphere still held a slight tension in the air. It was a surprise to everyone in the room when an African American girl unexpectedly proceeded toward me at the end of the day to introduce herself and her friends. I was shocked and just nodded and smiled. Even though I returned home with such happiness and optimism after my encounter with this friendly approach, I could not convince myself to stay.

Several weeks passed, and I felt like an outcast. Alone and unsure of where I belonged, I excluded myself and judged most as being unfriendly, obnoxious, haughty and those who crave nothing but attention with their silly conduct. I befriended a girl who also spent her time in extreme bitterness. In the several hours that we practiced together, her constant criticism of others brought me to such shame. This shame was further elevated when warm hugs welcomed me to practice in the weeks that ensued as though we had parted for years. Being one of the eldest, I knew that my conduct particularly affected the girl who frequently complied with me. At that point, even if I emerged as the worst dancer, I made a goal to exert myself positively in every way, especially when it boiled down to communication.

Due to incidents in previous years, the many prejudices I held made it especially trying to open up to those of a different race. In lieu of that, I continued to remind myself to be more compassionate and open-minded. With compassion and understanding, I eventually found myself surrounded by those who I previously felt "unworthy" of my attention. They were of different races, ages, backgrounds and sexual orientations, and all became dear to me. By the time the performance rolled around, I could not help but be so moved by our solidarity and harmony that spread like sunshine across the field. We practically tore the stage up! The embodiment of oneness of life and environment was clearly exemplified in this group perfectly named Rhythm Nation.

I feel so fortunate for having encountered such people for the great cause of promoting peace and culture. With them I have shared much laughter, ideas, and lessons, which soon served to not only open up my mind to the human race but also for the human race. Previously deemed as overly extroverted, I realized that they in effect possessed characteristics which I have long tried to secure for myself. My initial inability to do so

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created my insecurity and grudge, which ultimately led to adverse thoughts. Easily judgmental with an unwavering mind, my extreme intolerance was unlocked by their easygoing nature. Being my first performance, I was undoubtedly hesitant, but by the end, I gained invaluable lessons on patience, resilience, poise and optimism through hard work and a strong commitment to learn.

My fortune for not encountering prejudice does not dismiss the fact that discrimination is very much a part of our society. To overcome it we need to call upon ourselves to have an open mind to accept new ideas and culture from people of all races. Family and friends shape the lessons we learn on tolerance and love. Surrounding ourselves with people who care for us and/or actively engaging in activities which promote unity are extremely vital in developing our humanness. Regardless of our skin color, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc., there is no dispute in the world that humanity — the answer for lasting peace — is what every living being needs to advance positively. Until we can search within ourselves and bring out our compassion, there will be no certainty as to what our future holds.

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