

# Maya Trowe

*Grade 12*

*Forest Hills Eastern High School*

*“Where Liberty is a Statue”*

My mother always felt it important to keep my knowledge of the culture from my country of origin alive. As a result, I was actively thrust into camps, classes, and any opportunity to do so. One of her numerous attempts included our multiple dining experiences at Chinese restaurants-- though I did not mind. Though my menu preferences varied, my brief interactions with the staff remained constant. Every visit, no matter the restaurant, I was told by the staff, “You have been given such a great gift; you will have such a great life here.” Having not even reached the double digits yet, I was unable to comprehend the recurring phrase told to me time and time again. As I have continued to grow as an individual, the meaning behind this message has become clear to me.

Accompanying my mother to China to retrieve my younger sister and bring her back to the United States where we resided was an experience not most kindergarteners are able to have. My mother was excited for me to be exposed to the culture of the country I was born in--I was excited for the fortune cookies. As we journeyed to the orphanage in the taxi cab, we passed by a rice field teeming with workers. As we drove forward, I made eye contact with a girl not much older than I. In both of her hands she gripped weeds, dripping down to the mucky ground she stood upon. I looked down to my old hands. Gripped tightly was a Barbie Doll I had brought with me from the states. I then realized: the life this girl lived; waking up each morning at dawn; down on her knees in the mucky water tending to the rice field; her lack of access to education; this life could have easily become my own. As we neared the orphanage the little girl became smaller and smaller, soon becoming a dot, then disappearing. As she vanished, so did the life I was intended to live if I would have stayed in this country.

My high school attendance record has admittedly been lacking for the four years I've attended. As many other high schoolers do, I take my education for granted, occasionally choosing sleep over class. Regardless, I have maintained adequate grades and have a slightly blurry vision of what I intend to do with my life--although it fluctuated as the year progresses. As

I inch towards the next chapter of my life, I understand now the opportunities and chances given to me in this country I now call home.

Nicanor Parra quotes, "The United States; the country where liberty is a statue." As Parra emphasizes, The United States of America prides itself on it's ability to give any and all residing citizens equal opportunity and allowing all the capability to create a desired life for each individual. As I read about Communist China and the rights revoked and the monotonous, laborious lives children my age live, I realize: Liberty IS the opportunity to choose: choosing to pass or fail a test; choosing to attend or skip a class; choosing what to make of the life one has been given. Nevertheless, we must learn to not abuse the liberty we have been given. One must not squander the freedom that has been given by delaying or hindering opportunities. We have been awarded liberty in order to utilize it as much as we can, not to take it for granted. Liberty is intended to be used without waste; not wasted without use.