I have always longed for a feeling of belonging. My parents are from Taiwan, but I grew up in Long Island, NY as the only Asian in my class. I was not Taiwanese enough at home, and I was not Caucasian enough in school. My mother complained about the American habits I was learning, and I was teased on a weekly basis for having small eyes and a small nose. I tried my best to fit into both worlds, finding instead, that I was in a third world of my own.

This feeling of disconnection grew until I was in high school, and I started looking for answers. I realized I was being judged by superficial characteristics – my looks, my academic performance, my piano playing – none of which were actually reflective of my worth. I had to find my own center, something to keep me grounded and protected from the whims of others’ judgment. I found solutions through my physicist father’s personal library – psychology, Buddhism, neuroscience. I read books that emphasized inner characteristics – emotional intelligence, intuition, compassion, caring for others. I felt a deep peace when I found my center, my capacity to experience and extend compassion towards others. My life had new purpose, new meaning, and new room for growth.

After reading about it, I remember practicing compassion meditation in my bedroom. I sensed how limited my circle of compassion was, and saw my life’s work ahead of me. I looked at people in a new light and saw our common pain rather than what separated us. I grew less shy and felt more connected to others. In college, I melded my inner values and outer expectations by studying the neuroscience of emotions, and was amazed to discover that scientists were also studying meditation. As I read another one of my father’s books, I got the chills when learning how Richie Davidson knew he was supposed to study the neuroscience of meditation after meeting Daniel Goleman. This feeling said, “This is what *you* are supposed to do,” and I immediately contacted Richie.

At my first meeting as a graduate student, Richie said, “I think you should study compassion,” and I felt a deep resonance with that assertion and agreed. I designed and implemented a two-week intervention to confirm what I had experienced first-hand: even brief exposure to a compassionate state of mind is enough to impact the neural and behavioral responses to suffering.

I am continually amazed that I am studying the process that changed my life: increasing compassion towards others. This is the best way I could have imagined to meld my inner and outer worlds, my personal and cultural expectations. This year, I had the honor of presenting my work to the Dalai Lama, to the scientists detailed in my father’s book, to the authors who inspired me in high school. I feel deeply indebted to the logic of the universe, and look forward to seizing the next opportunities it will bring.