

Member Spotlight:

Raithlyn Godfrey

Appalachian Studies
Association Intern



Having grown up as a Polynesian Asian Appalachian in southern West Virginia and O’ahu, Hawai’i, I’ve struggled with mixed feelings over my cultural identity, and truthfully, I’d be lying if I said this isn’t a theme I still find myself meditating on from time to time.

Throughout childhood and teenhood, I didn’t feel native Hawaiian enough. I was reluctant to reveal that I’m Chinese since I’m the least familiar with that aspect of my lineage. I wondered how I could be Appalachian if I was so embarrassed to admit it. I never fully resonated with those around me, in West Virginia or Hawai’i or any place in-between. No matter where I was, I constantly felt like an outsider in some way or another.

As I’ve gained exposure and experience, I’ve realized how extraordinary it is to be a part of all these cultures and how eager I am to continue to explore the pieces that help make me me. With age, and effort, has come an acceptance of who I am and (every)where I’m from. While it’s been an undeniable rollercoaster of a journey, working through the notions of self-doubt, confusion, insecurity, and even shame has brought me a sense of peace. Learning to be proud to be me has transformed the way I express myself, reshaped the way I interact with my community, and revolutionized how I view the world.

Having the opportunity to intern with the Appalachian Studies Association has been really special. After a lifetime spent torn between openly embracing my ethnic background and trying my best to divert attention away from it, I can share now with certainty that delving deeper into my roots in Appalachia—and elsewhere—is insightful, fulfilling, and unexpectedly healing too. I look forward to attending the ASA conference this spring and to meet people who can relate to my not so unusual upbringing in a—believe it or not—rather diverse Appalachia.

Raithlyn Godfrey is a Marshall University student and current intern at the Appalachian Studies Association headquarters in Huntington, West Virginia.