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I became a vegetarian in high school because I was sure I was going to become a veterinarian in the future. To me, it didn't make sense to help some animals while hurting others. But, here I am now hunting for jobs as a design researcher. So why mention the vet thing? I think it sums me up pretty nicely: I am driven by empathy, compassion, and commitment.

These three principles are reflected in both my undergraduate thesis project as well as my masters' project. The key theme of my undergraduate thesis was building empathy for living primates by understanding the humans' place in the animal kingdom. This was done by using the medium of Noh masks and Noh theater, a traditional Japanese art form that explores human emotions abstractly. Transposing primates for human roles was done to relay the similarities as well as show the effects human activities have on the lives of these animals. Besides researching primates and Noh theater, I designed and created my own masks and accompanying stories. I then secured my own display location and partnered with the University of Michigan Undergraduate Library.

For my masters' thesis, I established a partnership with Mediva, Inc., a medical consulting agency in Tokyo, Japan, to learn more about the needs of older adults. Based on the field-work done, I was able to secure funding for further research through the Hayao Nakayama Foundation. With this funding, I was able to do work at senior living facilities in both Japan and the US. Through this research, I developed a tool and a service to help improve the quality of life of older adults living in long-term care facilities. The tool developed was the Haptic Remembrance Book and the service revolved around building content for the book.

I like to do work that builds connections in areas that have been overlooked or underexplored. Whether it be between theater and primates or creating a tool to connect all the stakeholders of a long-term care facility. I hope to bring to your team my drive to make the world, and those living on it, a little bit more understanding of one another.

Sincerely,

Elaine Czech