

As I enter the double doors, the smell of freshly rolled biscuits hits me almost instantly. I trace the fan blades as they swing above me, emitting a low, repetitive hum resembling a faint melody. After bringing our usual order, the “Tailgate Special,” to the table, my father begins discussing the recent performance of Apple stock with my mother, myself, and my older eleven year old sister. Bojangle’s, a Southern establishment well known for its fried chicken and reliable fast food, is my family’s Friday night restaurant, often accompanied by trips to Eva Perry, the nearby library. With one hand on my breaded chicken and the other on Nancy Drew: Mystery of Crocodile Island, I can barely sit still as the thriller unfolds. They’re imprisoned! Reptiles! Not the enemy’s boat! As I delve into the narrative with a sip of sweet tea, I feel at home.

“Five, six, seven, eight!” As I shout the counts, nineteen dancers grab and begin to spin the tassels attached to their swords while walking heel-to-toe to the next formation of the classical Chinese sword dance. A glance at my notebook reveals a collection of worn pages covered with meticulously planned formations, counts, and movements. Through sharing videos of my performances with my relatives or discovering and choreographing the nuances of certain regional dances and their reflection on the region’s distinct culture, I deepen my relationship with my parents, heritage, and community. When I step on stage, the hours I’ve spent choreographing, creating poses, teaching, and polishing are all worthwhile, and the stage becomes my home.

Set temperature. Calibrate. Integrate. Analyze. Set temperature. Calibrate. Integrate. Analyze. This pulse mimics the beating of my heart, a subtle rhythm that persists each day I come into the lab. Whether I am working under the fume hood with platinum nanoparticles, manipulating raw integration data, or spraying a thin platinum film over pieces of copper, it is in Lab 304 in Hudson Hall that I first feel the distinct sensation,

and I'm home. After spending several weeks attempting to synthesize platinum nanoparticles with a diameter between 10 and 16 nm, I finally achieve nanoparticles with a diameter of 14.6 nm after carefully monitoring the sulfuric acid bath. That unmistakable tingling sensation dances up my arm as I scribble into my notebook: I am overcome with a feeling of unbridled joy.

Styled in a t-shirt, shorts, and a worn, dark green lanyard, I sprint across the quad from the elective 'Speaking Arabic through the Rassias Method' to 'Knitting Nirvana'. This afternoon is just one of many at Governor's School East, where I have been transformed from a high school student into a philosopher, a thinker, and an avid learner. While I attend GS at Meredith College for Natural Science, the lessons learned and experiences gained extend far beyond physics concepts, serial dilutions, and toxicity. I learn to trust myself to have difficult yet necessary conversations about the political and economic climate. Governor's School breeds a culture of inclusivity and multidimensionality, and I am transformed from "girl who is hardworking" or "science girl" to someone who indulges in the sciences, debates about psychology and the economy, and loves to swing and salsa dance. As I form a slip knot and cast on, I'm at home.

My home is a dynamic and eclectic entity. Although I've lived in the same house in Cary, North Carolina for 10 years, I have found and carved homes and communities that are filled with and enriched by tradition, artists, researchers, and intellectuals. While I may not always live within a 5 mile radius of a Bojangle's or in close proximity to Lab 304, learning to become a more perceptive daughter and sister, to share the beauty of my heritage, and to take risks and redefine scientific and personal expectations will continue to impact my sense of home.