

Something to smile about: Samantha Yellan, author of an award-winning essay, pauses during a busy school day at Dunckel Middle School.



JOHN HEALEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Teen's chilly arrival was a warm welcome

This is Samantha Yellan's award-winning essay "My Roots In America And How I Can Nourish Them."

"The wind rushes through the sliding doors, and I can feel the icy winter air piercing my face as I step out of the airport. My first image of America is the snow-covered parking lot of the Capital City Airport. I can taste the freshness of the air. The cold breeze swirls around me and envelopes me in a sense of belonging. Back in Taiwan the coldest winter temperatures barely fell below 11 degrees Celsius, and it never snowed. Even when expecting a fairy tale I am not disappointed. The feeling is near indescribable. I have never seen or felt anything so beautiful and relaxing. The

sun reflects off the fresh layer of glass-like snow, its glitter blinds my sight for a brief moment. I shade my eyes and take in a deep breath: America.

"America and Taiwan are two very different places. Almost nothing is the same. To me school in the two countries were the most different. I went to special English classes for four years to learn how to speak and write well. I was surprised to find how kind and understanding the teachers are. In Taiwan we had to write pages and pages of the same word just for practice, and we would get slapped if we didn't do what we were told. My English teacher helped me a great deal. She would take a few minutes of every class just to teach me something new

about America so I could become more familiar to the country.

"My aunt was the first person in our family to come to America. I always looked forward to her phone calls and letters. I remember waiting outside our house in Taiwan for the mailman to come and racing upstairs so my mother could read the letter to me. My aunt would describe all the new things she saw in America, and I would pretend I was there with her.

"America is like a big tossed salad where people from all around the world come together. People of all different sizes and shapes, skin and hair colors of the widest variety, and even different religions living together like one big family.

"Many people ask me, 'Do you

like Taiwan or America better?' I think I like them both the same, but in different ways. Even though America has given me new opportunities, friends and experiences, Taiwan is where I was born, and where I grew up. If I was compared to a building, Taiwan would be my foundation, and America would be the supplies that help me build the building. America has helped me grow and develop into who I am now, and it will have a great influence on who I will become.

"I will probably continue to live here in America for a long time, but I will never forget where I came from. I will tell my children and their children about Taiwan and America, the countries that helped make me who I am."

Essay on roots buds into award

Success in life came early for 14-year-old Samantha Yellan, an eighth-grader at O.E. Dunckel Middle School in the Farmington District.

Yellan, one of the top 10 winners in the statewide America & Me Essay Contest, received a \$1,000 savings bond during awards ceremonies in Lansing in May. Eighth-graders from across the state participated in the 25th annual contest, which is sponsored by Farm Bureau Insurance.

Yellan's essay, based on the topic "My Roots In America And How I Can Nourish Them," earned first place in the state out of 4,250 essays submitted by students from 425 Michigan schools.

Yellan, whose roots are in Taiwan, is the daughter of Frank and Helen Yellan of Farmington Hills.

The top 10 winners and their parents and teachers were treated like visiting dignitaries during the awards day at the State Capitol on May 12. John Truscott, press secretary for Gov. John Engler, met with the young winners and gave them a certificate of congratulations from the governor.

The winners also met with Sen. Debbie Stabenow, who had an official copy of a Senate resolution for each of them.

Another highlight of the day was being commended by Secretary of State Richard Austin.

After their meeting with state officials, the young winners were honored at an awards banquet at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Lansing. Larry Thomas, executive vice president, and Jack Stucko, director of corporate communications, both of Farm Bureau Insurance, presented awards to each of the winners during the banquet.

The final ranking of top 10 winners was determined by a panel of VIP judges made up of Engler, Austin, and U.S. Rep. Bob Carr.

Open to any eighth-grade student in Michigan, the America & Me Essay Contest was developed in 1968 to encourage Michigan youth to explore their roles in America's future.

Each winner received an engraved plaque and a savings bond ranging in value from \$500-\$1,000.

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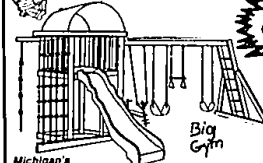
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