

Dresses of the Diaspora

Seniors share how their cultural clothing connects them to their heritage.

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Sana Schaden arrived at her nani's house for the Hindu festival of lights: Diwali. Her grandmother's house was filled with family and friends dressed in salwars, sarees and other traditional Indian attire. Schaden, dressed in American attire, felt isolated.

When Schaden visited India this past February, she took the goal of bringing the perfect Indian outfit back with her.

After hours of searching boutiques and navigating bazaars, Schaden found an outfit that checked all her boxes, perfectly matching her style.

"I love wearing black with a pop of color," Schaden said. "There's a lot more Western fusion happening in Indian fashion right now, as opposed to traditional saris and lehengas and that kind of thing."

The intricate work on the outfit is threaded with blue, green and pink colors to create floral designs along the top. The salwar doesn't just fit Schaden's style, but it also makes her feel connected to her heritage.

"I felt like having this piece of more traditional Indian clothing just brought me a lot closer to the culture," Schaden said. "It had been seven years since I'd been to India before my last trip and I feel like my recent trip gave me a huge opportunity to reconnect with Indian culture in a lot of different ways."

In contrast to Schaden's dark outfit, Joana Sanchez-Miranda's bright pink Folklórico dancing outfit is meant to accentuate and highlight their feminine side. The skirt of the dress has countless layers of fabric, allowing it to create waves while dancing, but also making it a heavy garment.

Sanchez-Miranda started dancing Folklórico at a Spanish school, which they attended all through elementary school up until 2020 to further study their first language.

"I used to go to Spanish school every Saturday," Sanchez-Miranda said. "So it was kind of a place where I could really just indulge in my culture a little more and speak Spanish with other Spanish-speaking people."





Sanchez-Miranda performed and danced at their Spanish school with their cousin.

Every day after school they'd go to their godmother's house to practice for upcoming performances.

"They also had this little talent show at the end of the year," Sanchez-Miranda said. "My mom would sign me up and I would do it. I'd dance with my cousin and that's how I got into it."

Sanchez-Miranda also remembers performing at the Ann Arbor Public Library in downtown Ann Arbor for the Day of the Dead.

They cherish the memories of sharing their culture with others and dancing in front of those who had never seen Folklórico before.

"When I wear traditional clothing I feel more in touch with my culture," Sanchez-Miranda said. "I feel recognized as being Mexican."

Bridgette Kelly had been to Japan for spring break countless times before, but this time as she watched the cherry blossoms bloom, she put on a kimono for the very first time.

Kelly's mother is Japanese and grew up in Japan, moving to the United States in her mid-20s with Kelly's dad.

Her mother never brought back traditional clothing, meaning Kelly had never been introduced to it until her most recent trip.

"But this time on our trip to Japan my mom's friend was like 'Oh, we should dress Bridgette up in a kimono,'" Kelly said. "That was the first time I wore one, I went out in public and I was kind of very self-conscious."

Kelly's mom knew how to drape the fabric in a specific and technical way, taking over thirty minutes to get into the traditional dress.

They headed to a view with the freshly bloomed cherry blossoms in the background to photograph Kelly.

Kelly has often felt disconnected to her culture when she visits family in Japan.

"I definitely feel disconnected," Kelly said. "I don't speak Japanese, so when I go there it's kind of like I'm not fully immersed into the culture. But because I've gone there so often and also my family's there it just feels very, very familiar. When I'm there the smell, the sounds and the food all come back every time."

Dressing in traditional Japanese attire has made Kelly feel not only more connected to Japanese culture but to her family as well.

"In Japan, there's all kinds of different events that you dress up for," Kelly said. "I know my mom growing up wore a kimono for different events and stuff like that. I guess it makes me feel more connected to my mom in a way."

Kelly is wearing a kimono she brought back from her most recent trip to Japan.

The blue base has an intricate design with purple, blue and other cool colors. She acknowledges how special it is to be wearing one and being able to bring one back.

"I think it's like a really special time to be able to wear one when I'm in Japan," Kelly said. "It makes the line that separates with the language barrier and stuff like that blur."

