

The background features a grid of watercolor brushstrokes. There are five columns of strokes. The first column has five yellow strokes. The second column has five orange strokes. The third column has five pink strokes. The fourth column has five blue strokes. The fifth column has five green strokes. The text is centered over this grid.

**ASIAN &
PACIFIC
ISLANDER
AMERICAN
HERITAGE
MONTH ZINE**

In honor of Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage Month, my friends and I put together this zine in order to highlight the stories of us. This zine works to bring awareness to our situations, celebrate our heritage, and **call to action** because now is the time to elevate our voices and be vocally anti-racist.

Each day we need to confront the toxic systemic racism that exists in our society.

To those that contributed; thank you for being generous and vulnerable.
To those who identify as AAPI; I hope these stories speak to you and that you feel less alone. To our allies; we hope that our stories spark radical empathy *in each and every one of you*.

In solidarity,

Emily Her (Hmong+Korean) & Cheyon Sheen (Korean)



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**FORMS OF RACIAL
MICROAGRESSIONS**

ALIEN IN THEIR OWN LAND:

when Asian Americans and Pacific-Islander Americans are assumed to be foreign-born

MICROAGGRESSION:

“Where are you from?”

“Where were you born?”

“You speak good English.”

A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language.

MESSAGE:

You are not American
You are a foreigner

AScription of INTELLIGENCE:

Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race.

MICROAGGRESSION:

“You are a credit to your race.”

“You are so articulate.”

Asking an Asian person to help with a Math or Science problem.

MESSAGE:

People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in Math / Sciences.

COLOR BLINDNESS

Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race

MICROAGGRESSION:

“When I look at you, I don’t see color.”

“America is a melting pot.”

“There is only one race, the human race.”

MESSAGE:

Denying a person of color’s racial /ethnic experiences.

Assimilate / acculturate to the dominant culture.

Denying the individual as a racial / cultural being.

DENIAL OF INDIVIDUAL RACISM

A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases

MICROAGGRESSION:

“I’m not a racist. I have several Black friends.”
“As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.”

MESSAGE:

I am immune to races because
I have friends of color.
Your racial oppression is no different
than my gender oppression.
I can’t be a racist. I’m like you.



"YOU'RE LIKE A
BANANA,
YELLOW ON THE
OUTSIDE,
WHITE ON THE
INSIDE"



"YOU'RE ASIAN?
BUT YOU DON'T LOOK
CHINESE"



"IS IT HARDER TO SEE
WITH YOUR EYES?"



"THAT'S WEIRD,
SHE DOESN'T SOUND ASIAN"

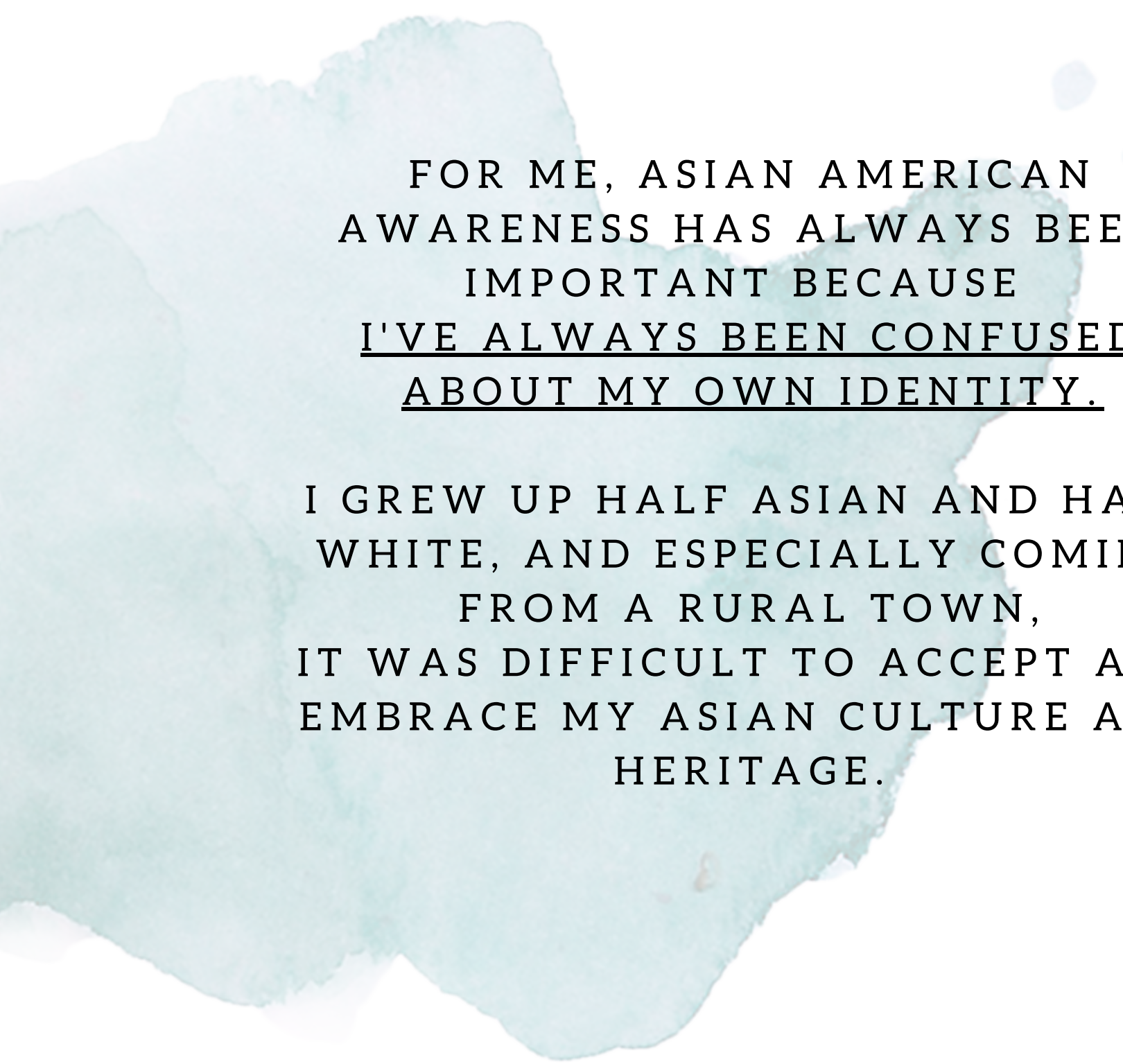
"I HEARD THAT"

"OH MY BAD, I'M SORRY"

"IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER,
YOU DON'T SOUND WHITE.
YOU DO SOUND RACIST THOUGH."



"HEY CORONA!"



FOR ME, ASIAN AMERICAN
AWARENESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN
IMPORTANT BECAUSE
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN CONFUSED
ABOUT MY OWN IDENTITY.

I GREW UP HALF ASIAN AND HALF
WHITE, AND ESPECIALLY COMING
FROM A RURAL TOWN,
IT WAS DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT AND
EMBRACE MY ASIAN CULTURE AND
HERITAGE.

I ALWAYS WANTED TO FIT IN, TO BE
NORMAL LIKE EVERYONE ELSE,
WHICH OFTEN LED TO ME IGNORING
OR SUPPRESSING MY ASIAN HALF
AND BECOMING MORE
WHITEWASHED.

OVER TIME, HOWEVER, THROUGH
MEETING NEW PEOPLE, HAVING
NEW EXPERIENCES, AND JUST
LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE
WORLD, I'VE BEEN ABLE TO
EMBRACE ASIAN CULTURE MORE,
AND ACCEPT BOTH HALVES OF MY
IDENTITY.

- ANON

When I was
born, my
mother
decided to
give me up



Whether it was due to the one child rule which was still active in China at the time; or some other reason which made her feel I would have a better life somewhere else,

I may never know.

WHEN I WAS A YEAR OLD

a white, American, woman
came to take me from the
orphanage in Beijing and bring
me home to Idaho. I was her
second adopted daughter, and
we were her only chances to
become a mother.



WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD

I learned a rhyme from the other kids at my school. It involved pulling the sides of your eyes in different directions and chanting "my mother is Chinese my father is Japanese, look what they did to me".



I thought it was great fun.



WHEN I WAS NINE YEARS OLD

people began to ask me if I was lost in the grocery store when I was with my mom. I didn't understand at the time, but no stranger would ever see me and her together and think we were family.

WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN YEARS OLD

everyone thought I should start dating. You should date an Asian guy they said. Men love Asians they said. You don't have an ass they said. You don't have tits they said.

I hated them.



WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN YEARS OLD

I discovered that burns are easily explained away. The lighter in my desk drawer was ever present in my mind, as visible as the scars and blisters on my body.



WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN YEARS OLD

activism found me in the dark.
It changed my life. I learned
about oppression and other
marginalized communities.

Helping them taught me how
to help myself.

I AM NOW NINETEEN YEARS OLD

I am proud of my heritage;
proud of my family; proud of
myself. I am no longer
ashamed. I am no longer
scared to speak up.

I am a strong Chinese-
American woman and I would
never want to be anyone else.

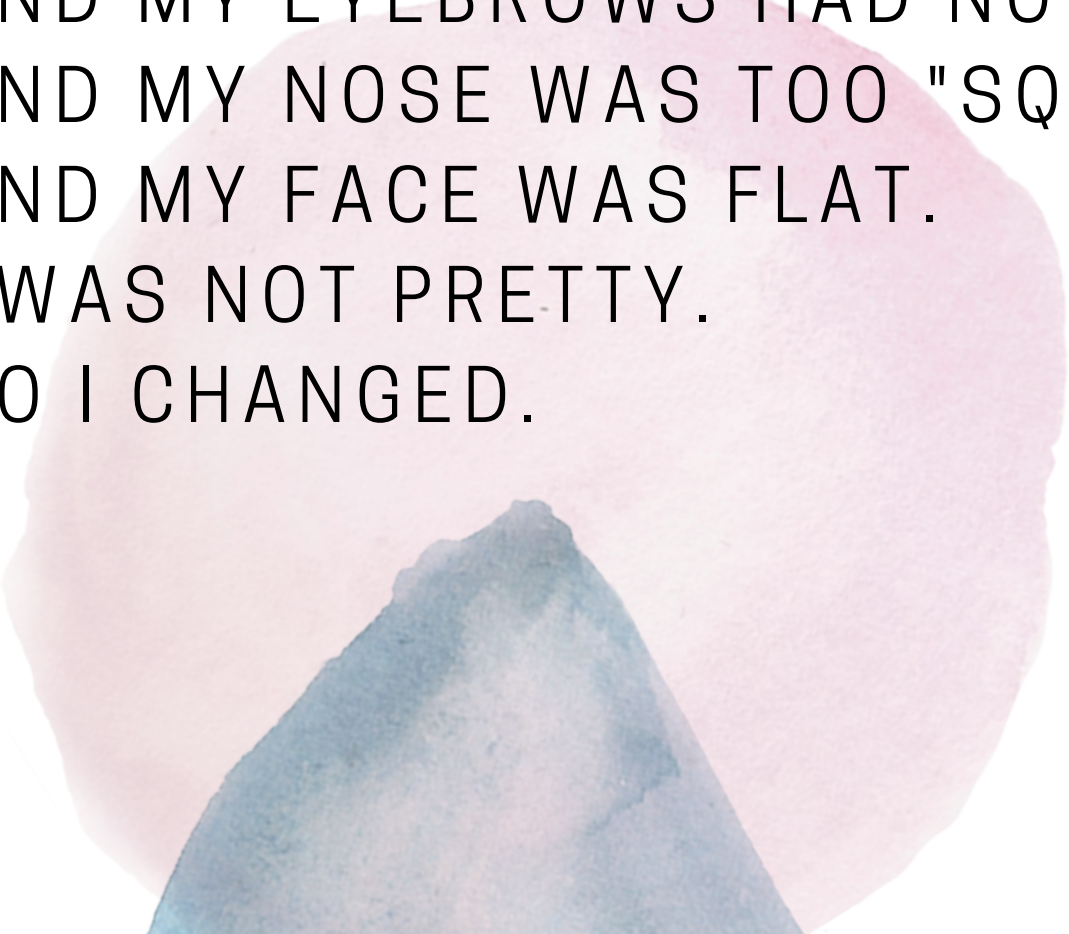


PAIGE HARWOOD

I NEVER WAS PRETTY.



MY SKIN WAS OLIVE
AND MY HAIR WAS BLACK.
MY EYES WERE "SQUINTY"
AND I WAS TOO TALL.
MY MOLES WERE DARK
AND SCATTERED OVER MY FACE.
MY LASHES WERE THIN AND SHORT
AND MY EYEBROWS HAD NO DEPTH OR SHAPE.
AND MY NOSE WAS TOO "SQUISHY"
AND MY FACE WAS FLAT.
I WAS NOT PRETTY.
SO I CHANGED.

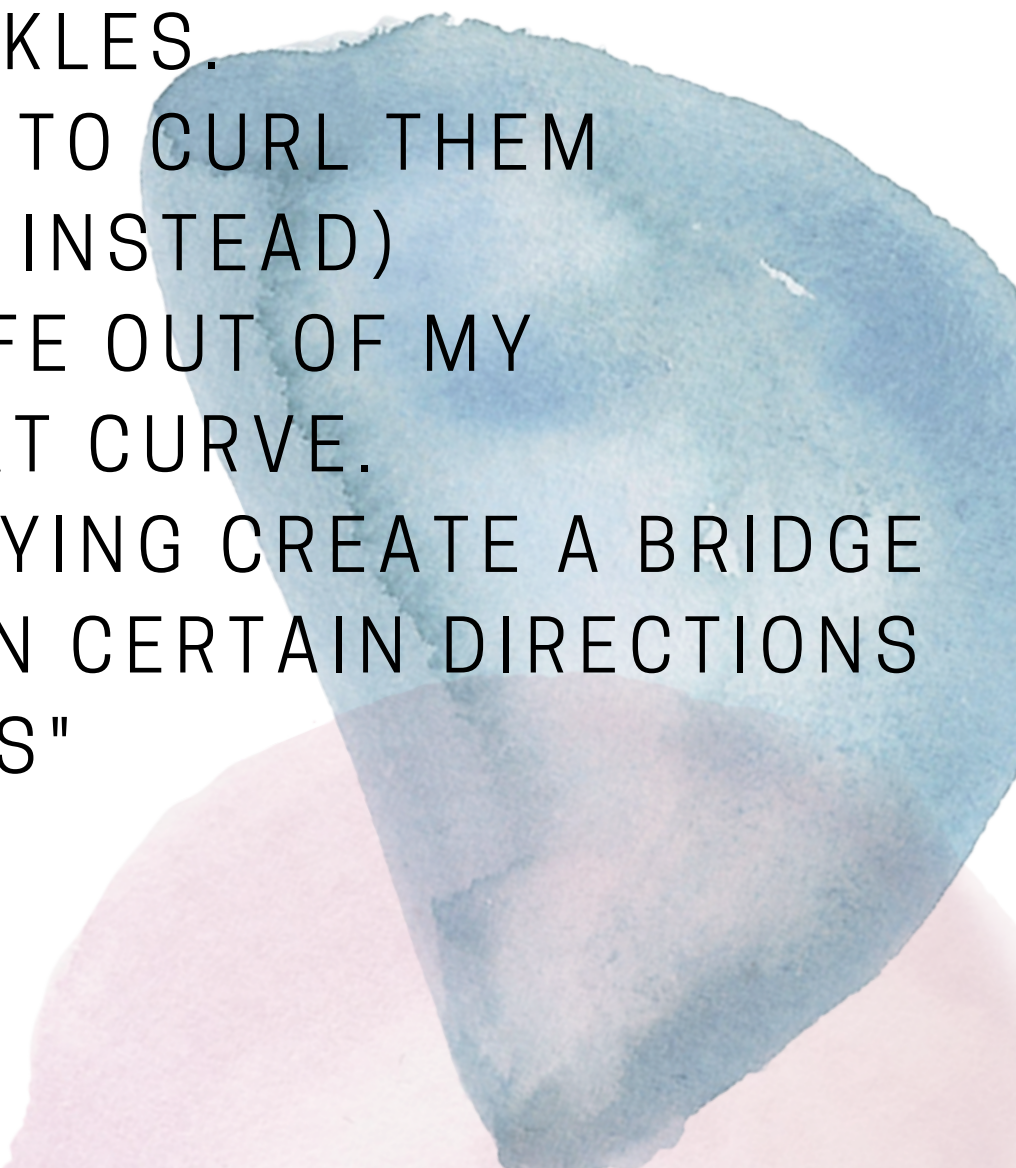
A watercolor-style background featuring a large, soft pink wash that transitions into a darker blue wash at the bottom. The colors are blended and have a textured, painterly appearance.



I WAS NOT PRETTY.

SO I CHANGED.

I AVOIDED THE SUN
AND FIXED MY HAIR.
I OPENED MY EYES A LITTLE WIDER,
LITERALLY NOT FIGURATIVELY,
AND SLOUCHED.
I PRICKED MY MOLES
AND WISHED FOR FRECKLES.
I LOST LASHES TRYING TO CURL THEM
(SO I GOT EXTENSIONS INSTEAD)
AND I TWEEZED THE LIFE OUT OF MY
EYEBROWS TO GET THAT CURVE.
I PINCHED MY NOSE TRYING CREATE A BRIDGE
AND TILTED MY HEAD IN CERTAIN DIRECTIONS
TO HIDE THE "FLATNESS"





I AM PRETTY NOW,
BECAUSE I AM LIKE ONE OF THEM.

BUT NOW, WHEN MY PEOPLE GREET ME,
THEY DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE THAT I AM
ACTUALLY ONE OF THEM.

- ANON



妈妈

This piece of art is a visual representation of how women in China were subjected under the one-child policy in China. Many were forced to have their children in secret, have an abortion, or face the consequences. Sexism in China placed boys above girls, so many baby girls were placed in adoption or left in the streets.

- GRACE BURGERT

A large, soft pink watercolor splash is located on the left side of the page, extending from the top left towards the center. The splash has irregular, feathered edges and a gradient of pink tones, from light to a slightly darker shade.

**“Filipino-
American”:
thoughts**

Angela Aninon



I am a child of two Filipino immigrants (Olive and Andrew)

Who met in Saipan, in the middle of the Pacific.

They brought their hopes, their fears, their pain,

Their joys, and their experiences.

They left their families, their homes, and their lives to

Start anew where "America's day begins".



“Simple! Then, you are Filipino-American!”

To me, there is nothing simple about it. It is strange, almost. Sounds like:

A scientific name for my species?

A collision of two worlds I thought were separate.

An identity that contradicts the independence of one
And bears the imperialistic history of the other.

They are communities where anti-blackness must be
unlearned and

Institutions of racism and discrimination must be
dismantled.

They are the communities where I have learned the
Meaning of unconditional love and support.



Thank you.



"Salamat po. "



MAN, DO I LOVE FOOD
KIMCHI, KIMBAP, OR MISO
BUT.. I SIT ALONE

ANON

I come from the small group of islands located in the Pacific Ocean collectively known as Chuuk or Truk.



This is the island of Tonoas, located south of Weno in the Chuuk Lagoon.

There are no paved roads on the island so all transportation is usually done on foot.



The homes are often one-story due to all personal constructions such as homes or outhouses having to be built by hand.

One-story buildings also makes it easier to survive the hurricanes.



In all my time on the islands, I have never seen a construction machine of any type unless government owned and operated.

A favorite competition of mine is seeing who can climb the coconut trees the fastest/highest...



...and usually you get rewarded with the coconut you pick when you climb it.

Due to the separation of all the islands it is a daily routine for you to ride a boat to and from the islands.

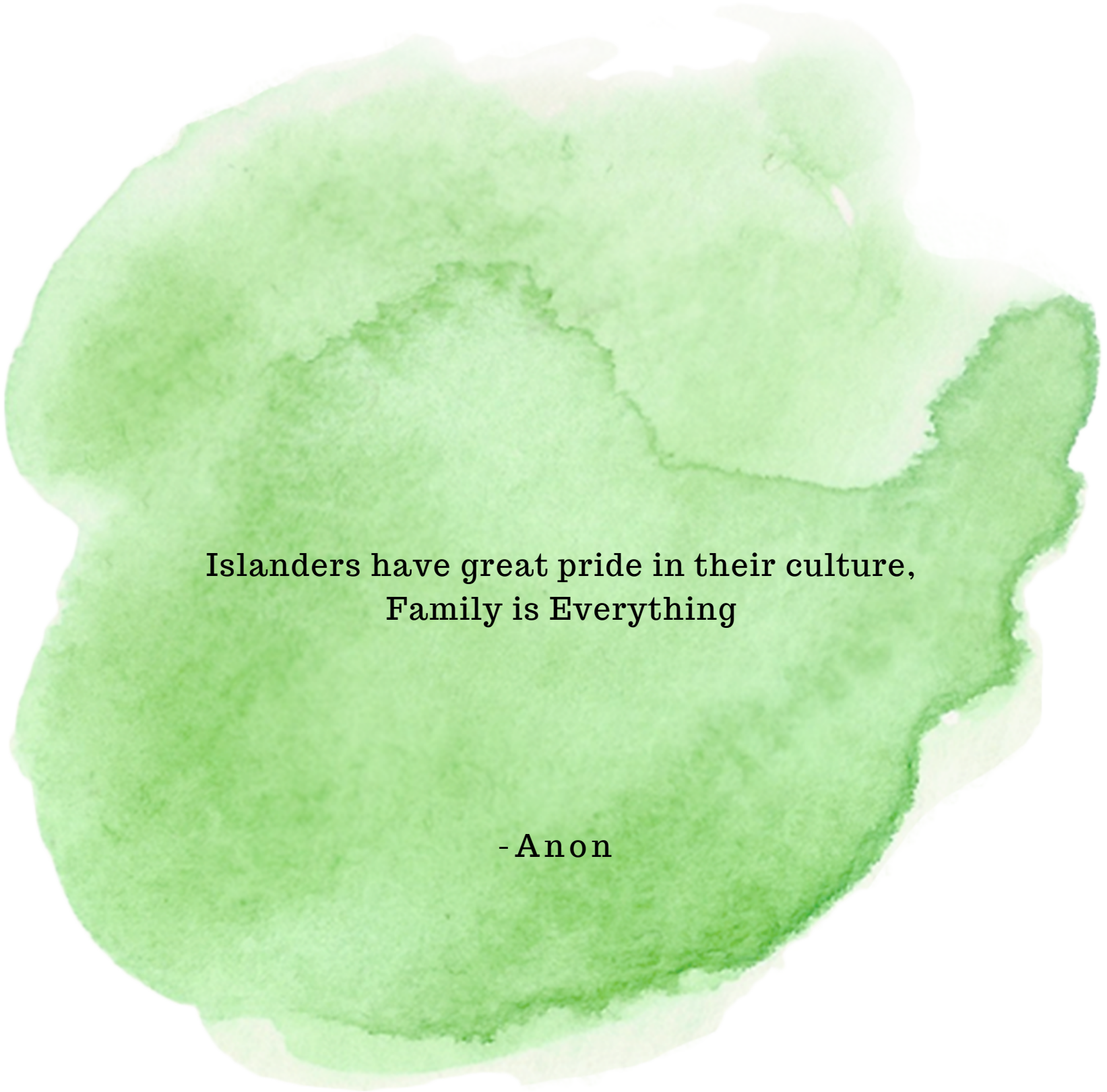


This is a picture of me returning, to Weno from Tonoas, on my uncle's boat.

The Chuuk lagoon is a popular diving spot for tourist cuz of the old sunken warships



This is one of the piers you can walk out to and watch the divers from a distance.



Islanders have great pride in their culture,
Family is Everything

- Anon

**TO ME,
I WAS WHITE,
I WANTED TO BE WHITE**

ANON

Growing up
I felt like everyone else,
I felt *normal*.

But there was always something
that categorized me into
something "*not normal*"

There was always something
small that showed that I was
different from everyone else.

I didn't even know that I was
Asian until I was 13.

Before then, I just thought I
was an American, with
heritage from Hawaii.

The moment I began
introducing myself as Asian,
people treated me
differently.

It was the people closest to
me that said things.

There were times when I was
with my friends and they
made it clear that I was not
like them.

"You're not like us"

To me, I was white, I wanted
to be white. But to them, I
couldn't be, because they
kept creating a divide


So I've repressed my
Asian heritage, because
it highlighted this divide
between me and them.

A friend asked me about my Asian heritage and I didn't say much because I never felt like it was a part of who I am.

This person told me that I **had** to learn more about my heritage because it was who I am.


I feel defaulted to be
proud of my Asian
heritage, even though I
have no connection to it.

It doesn't feel like my
place-it doesn't feel like I
am the one to represent
the Asian heritage I have
because...



I'm $1/4$ Asian
but $4/4$ American

*I feel like my life has been
a series of dramatic
beginnings and endings.*

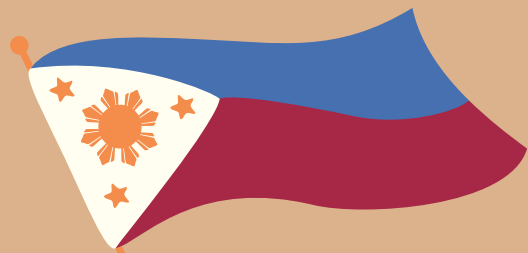
Three horizontal brush strokes in a shimmering gold color, positioned below the text. The strokes are slightly irregular and overlap each other, with the top stroke being the longest and the bottom stroke being the shortest.

I was adopted from China when I was 18 months old. I'm still not sure what to think about my adoption. There is no doubt I was loved and am grateful to have the privileges I do. However, my adoption has always been on my mind evolving from one emotion to another. People have layers; layers that inform their personality and the way they experience the world. My dad who is a clinical psychologist always reminded me to have compassion and encourage others precisely because of these layers. As a Chinese adoptee my inner layer is also my outer layer.

The deepest and most painful part of my existence is exposed to the world everyday.

LUAN TEED





ELDIN EVANS'

PANCIT
CANTON

a traditional Filipino noodle dish

16 OZ OF PANCIT CANTON

1/2 LB PEELED SHRIMP

1 POUND CHICKEN BREAST



2 CUPS OF CHICKEN BROTH

(OR 2 BULLION CUBES IN 2 CUPS OF WATER)

1 SLICED CARROT

1 SLICED ONION

2 CUPS SHREDDED CABBAGE

2 CLOVES OF GARLIC (OPTIONAL)

1 CAN MUSHROOM

(OR 3 FRESH SLICED MUSHROOMS)

1 POUND STINGS OF PEAS

(20-30 SNOW/GREEN PEAS)



3 TBSP CORNSTARCH

SALT

BLACK PEPPER

3 TBSP COOKING OIL

1 TBSP OF SOY SAUCE



-SLICE CHICKEN BREAST THINLY, SPRINKLE WITH CORNSTARCH, SALT AND PEPPER (TO TASTE)

-SAUTE GARLIC AND ONION IN HOT OIL

-ADD CHICKEN SLICES, COOK UNTIL FIRM

-ADD SOY SAUCE, PEPPER, SALT TO TASTE, ADD BROTH AND BRING TO BOIL

-ADD SNOW PEAS AND MUSHROOMS, AFTER 3 MINUTES ADD CARROTS AND CABBAGE, SEASON TO TASTE

-DROP IN SHRIMP, LOWER HEAT TO MEDIUM

-ADD IN NOODLES, STIRRING OFTEN UNTIL NOODLES ARE DONE (MOST OF THE BROTH WILL BE ABSORBED)

-SERVE WITH RICE





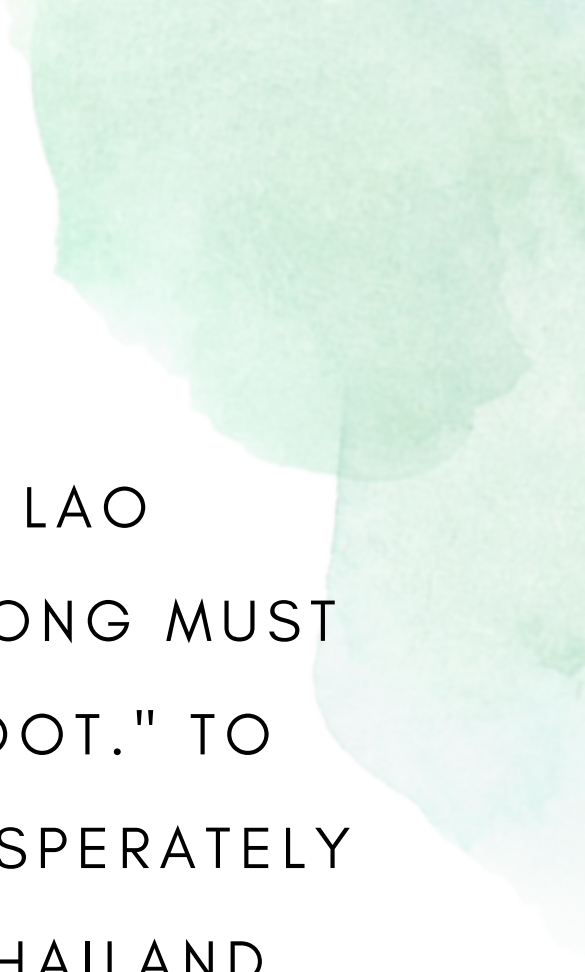
I AM NOT AT HOME IN THIS WORLD

EMILY HER

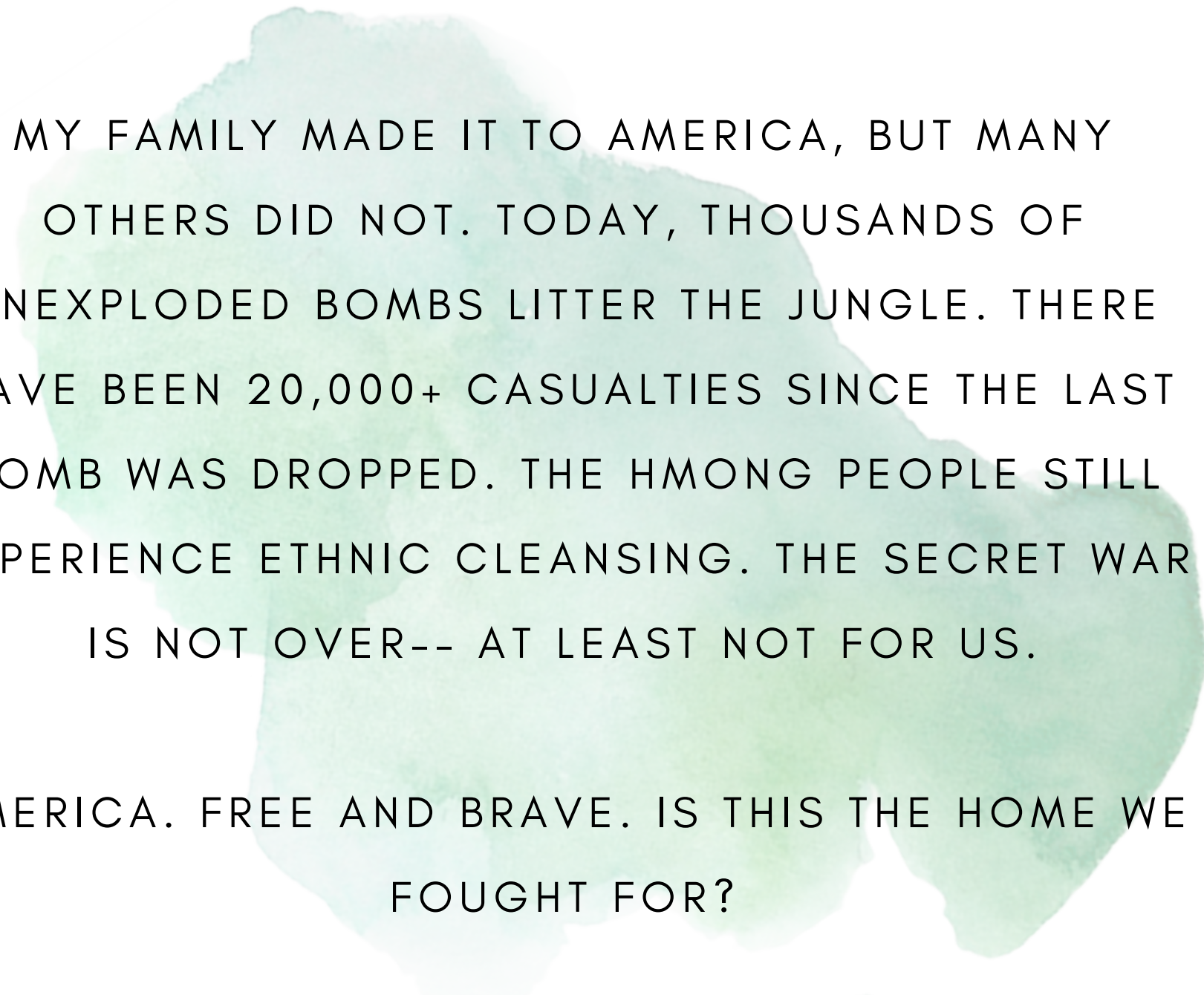
THE HMONG ARE A STATELESS-NATION LOCATED
THROUGHOUT SOUTHEAST ASIA.



THE UNITED STATES FOUGHT THE SECRET WAR IN THE MOUNTAINOUS JUNGLE BETWEEN LAOS AND VIETNAM. THAT'S WHERE MY PEOPLE LIVED. ANTI-COMMUNIST AND DESPERATELY TRYING TO PROTECT THEIR FAMILIES, THE HMONG BECAME A STRATEGIC ALLY TO THE U.S. AS THEY CONDUCTED THIS COVERT MISSION DURING THE VIETNAM WAR. THE U.S. RECRUITED AND TRAINED HMONG GUERRILLAS, SOME BOYS SO YOUNG THEY COULD BARELY CARRY THEIR M16. DURING THIS TIME AMERICAN CITIZENS WERE UNAWARE OF THE CHAOS IN THIS REGION, BUT MY PEOPLE KNEW ALL TOO WELL. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF HMONG DIED FIGHTING DURING THE SECRET WAR.



THE GENOCIDE BEGAN WHEN THE LAO GOVERNMENT DECLARED THAT THE HMONG MUST BE "EXTERMINATED TO THEIR LAST ROOT." TO ESCAPE PERSECUTION, THE HMONG DESPERATELY FLED TOWARDS REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND. THEY SWAM ACROSS THE MEKONG RIVER, SOME USING PLASTIC BAGS AS FLOTATION DEVICES, AS THEIR BABIES CLUNG TO THEIR BACKS WHILE BULLETS RAINED OVER THEIR HEADS. IN TOTAL, OVER 100,000 WERE ASSASSINATED WHILE TRYING TO REACH THE REFUGEE CAMPS.



MY FAMILY MADE IT TO AMERICA, BUT MANY
OTHERS DID NOT. TODAY, THOUSANDS OF
UNEXPLODED BOMBS LITTER THE JUNGLE. THERE
HAVE BEEN 20,000+ CASUALTIES SINCE THE LAST
BOMB WAS DROPPED. THE HMONG PEOPLE STILL
EXPERIENCE ETHNIC CLEANSING. THE SECRET WAR
IS NOT OVER-- AT LEAST NOT FOR US.

AMERICA. FREE AND BRAVE. IS THIS THE HOME WE
FOUGHT FOR?



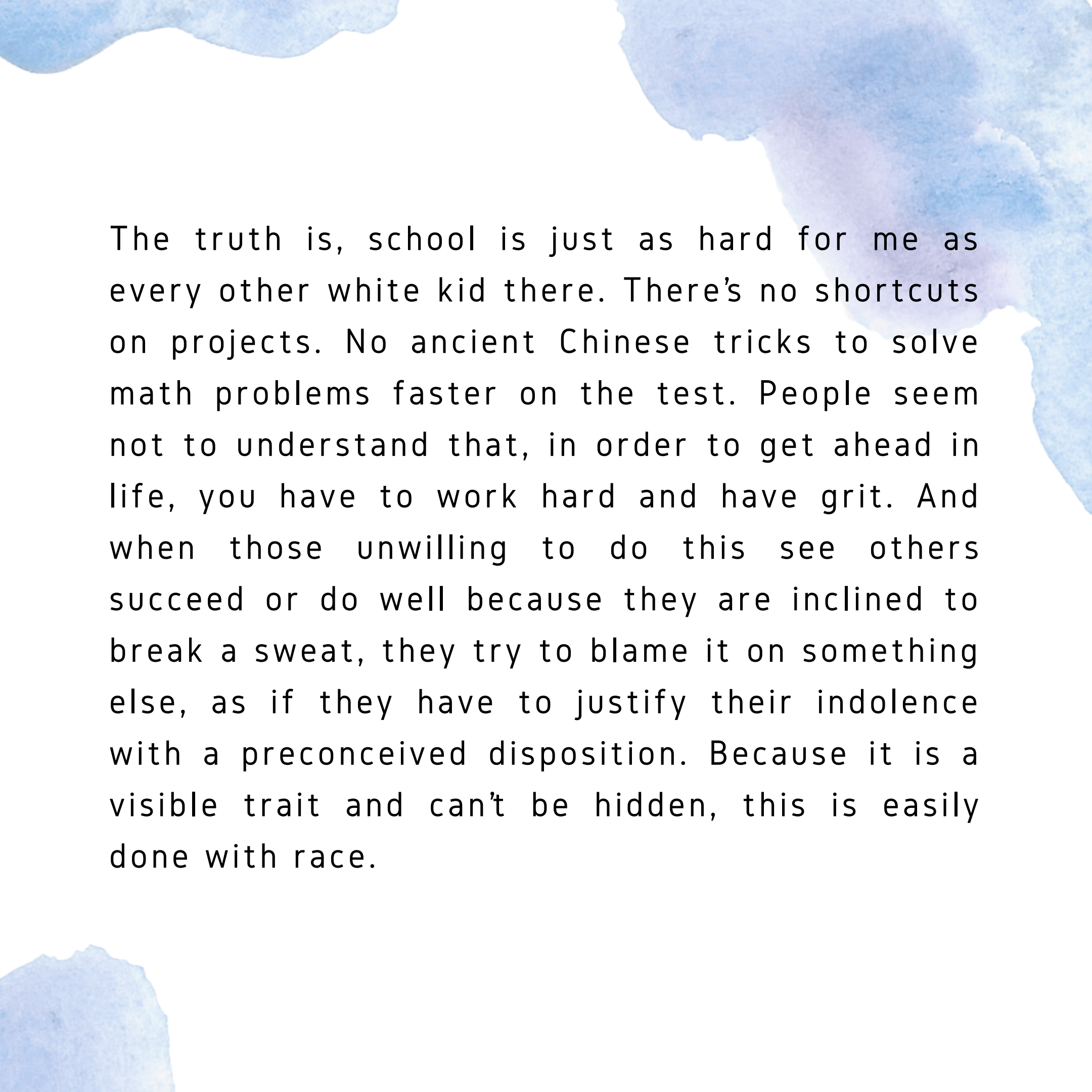
My name is

SHIVA


RAJBHANDARI

and my dad is from Kathmandu, Nepal.

I have a 4.45 GPA and am at the top of most of my classes. When I talk about school with my friends, it always seems like I am the outcast. I share my ideas and people tell me, "shut up, Asian," always in a joking manner, but not without some hurt intended. I bellyache about teachers or agonize over exams and people tell me that I have no right to complain because my academic struggles don't even compare. If I come to my friends with an 'A' on a hard test, I get no pats on the back. It's simply expected from people of my skin tone and hair color. It's as if, because of my heritage, people assume that things must be easier for me; that of course I'm smart, my dad beats me if I don't get 100% on every test.


The background of the page is decorated with soft, watercolor-style blue washes in the top-left, top-right, and bottom-left corners. The text is centered in a black, monospaced font.

The truth is, school is just as hard for me as every other white kid there. There's no shortcuts on projects. No ancient Chinese tricks to solve math problems faster on the test. People seem not to understand that, in order to get ahead in life, you have to work hard and have grit. And when those unwilling to do this see others succeed or do well because they are inclined to break a sweat, they try to blame it on something else, as if they have to justify their indolence with a preconceived disposition. Because it is a visible trait and can't be hidden, this is easily done with race.


A decorative blue watercolor splash is located in the top-left corner of the page, extending downwards and to the right.


The truth is, when people undermine someone's hard-earned successes with a racist comment, they're not making themselves look any better. Instead, they are highlighting their ignorance and negligence. The civil rights movement was more than half a century ago, and yet xenophobia and jingoism still remain prevalent in even the most liberal communities in America. In the wake of many global leaders turning to nationalism, their behaviour has somehow become normalized.

But really, regardless of race, we all share the fault in creating this bias. We've all justified our accomplishments and genius with a comment about race. It's far too easy, when someone asks "how are you so smart?" to quip back, "I'm asian." But while this is the facile answer, it makes us no better than others who undermine our work using race. It only reinforces stereotypes and normalizes bigotry. Being a part of a certain race does not make it ok for us to partake in racism against it. Quite the opposite. Whether for humor or to fit in, internalized racism is a significant culprit in anti-Asian-American sentiments. When people see that these words do not hurt us and that we ourselves endorse their use, they think it is okay to speak them.



We need to stand up for our heritage. Call xenophobia out. We need to be proud of our accomplishments and dissent when others undermine them. Also we must take pride in our heritage and stop the internalized racism that goes against it.





It's time we free ourselves from the shackles of prejudice. We are Asian-Americans and America is the land of the free.

Photos from my last trip to Nepal.



Everyone there is normal - not exceptionally smart.

Photos from my last trip to Nepal.




Photos from my last trip to Nepal.



Photos from my last trip to Nepal.





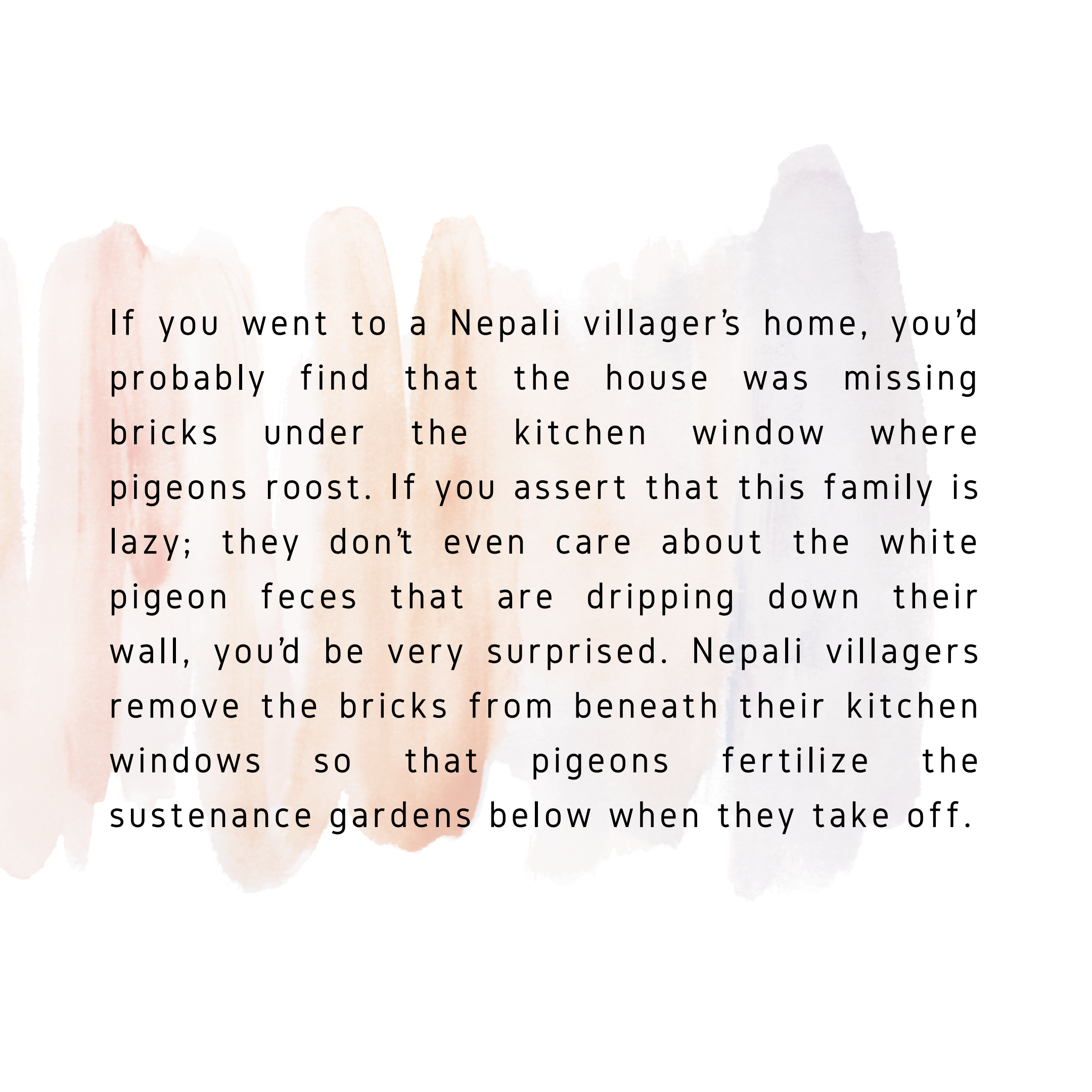
In 2017
my aunt,
Luxmi
Shrestha,
contracted
Emphysema

SHIVA RAJBHANDARI

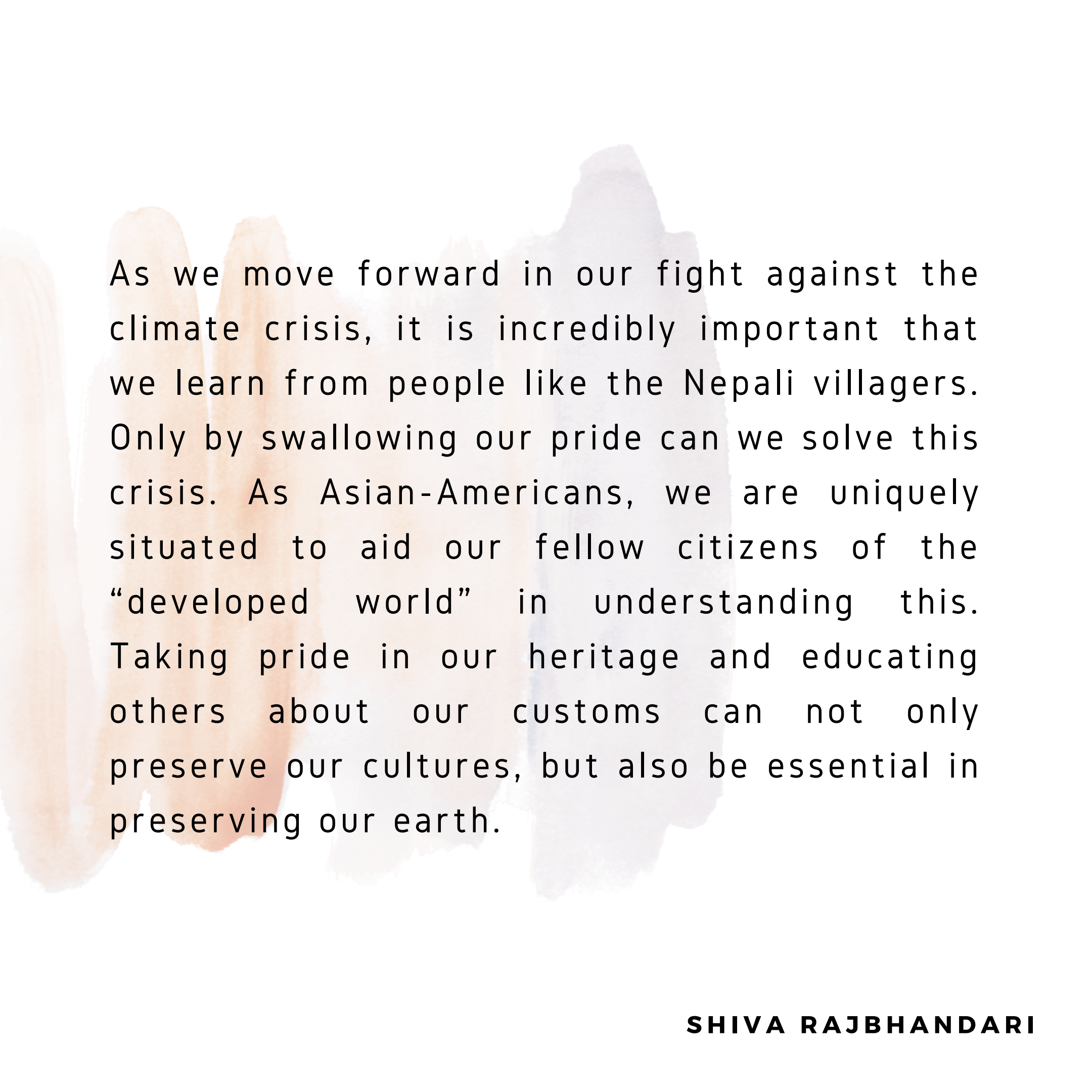
In 2017 my aunt, Luxmi Shrestha, contracted Emphysema, a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, caused by air pollution. Several months later she passed away. Luxmi ninni lived in Nepal, one of the world's poorest and most polluted countries. In her lifetime, she saw Nepal go from a pristine mountainous place, to a dump with grey air so thick that you can chew on it and water as brown as me. In Nepal, people don't question whether or not humans are causing the massive ecological breakdown. They don't pay heed to the less than 3% of scientists who disagree on the facts. In Nepal, they see the effects of global warming everyday when they step outside.

The sad fact about the climate crisis is that it affects those least responsible the most. The bottom 50% of the global population by wealth is responsible for less than 10% of carbon emissions, yet those people are most vulnerable and are hit first by the effects of global warming. Fossil fuel execs and politicians on both sides of the aisle who have failed to address this crisis, on the other hand, will likely never see the full extent of their decisions as they are too old or too rich.

It strikes me how, in the United States, we think of Nepal, like many other Asian states, as a Stage 2 country. When I tell people about my heritage, they most remark about the many humanitarian crises that are taking place there. Some tell me about how they contributed to the American Red Cross after the 2015 earthquakes. Others boast or grumble about the \$170 million the U.S. government gave in foreign aid to Nepal. It strikes me that, in the so-called “developed world” we pride ourselves in the contributions we make to the “developing world” and lift our noses at the suggestion that we might have something to learn from them.



If you went to a Nepali villager's home, you'd probably find that the house was missing bricks under the kitchen window where pigeons roost. If you assert that this family is lazy; they don't even care about the white pigeon feces that are dripping down their wall, you'd be very surprised. Nepali villagers remove the bricks from beneath their kitchen windows so that pigeons fertilize the sustenance gardens below when they take off.

The background features abstract, painterly brushstrokes in shades of orange and purple, creating a textured, artistic backdrop for the text.

As we move forward in our fight against the climate crisis, it is incredibly important that we learn from people like the Nepali villagers. Only by swallowing our pride can we solve this crisis. As Asian-Americans, we are uniquely situated to aid our fellow citizens of the “developed world” in understanding this. Taking pride in our heritage and educating others about our customs can not only preserve our cultures, but also be essential in preserving our earth.


SHIVA RAJBHANDARI



i am cheyon

I have three names, they are **Cheyon**, **Cheyon**, and **Cheyon**. While on paper they are clearly the same, each is pronounced a little differently. One is my birthright, the other rhymes with crayon, and the last is my attempt when introducing myself in French.


The pronunciation, however, isn't the only thing that causes them to be so different, attached to each is a distinct piece of my identity, and while the person I am today is a combination of all three, I can't help feeling I frequently live in the discomfort between them.

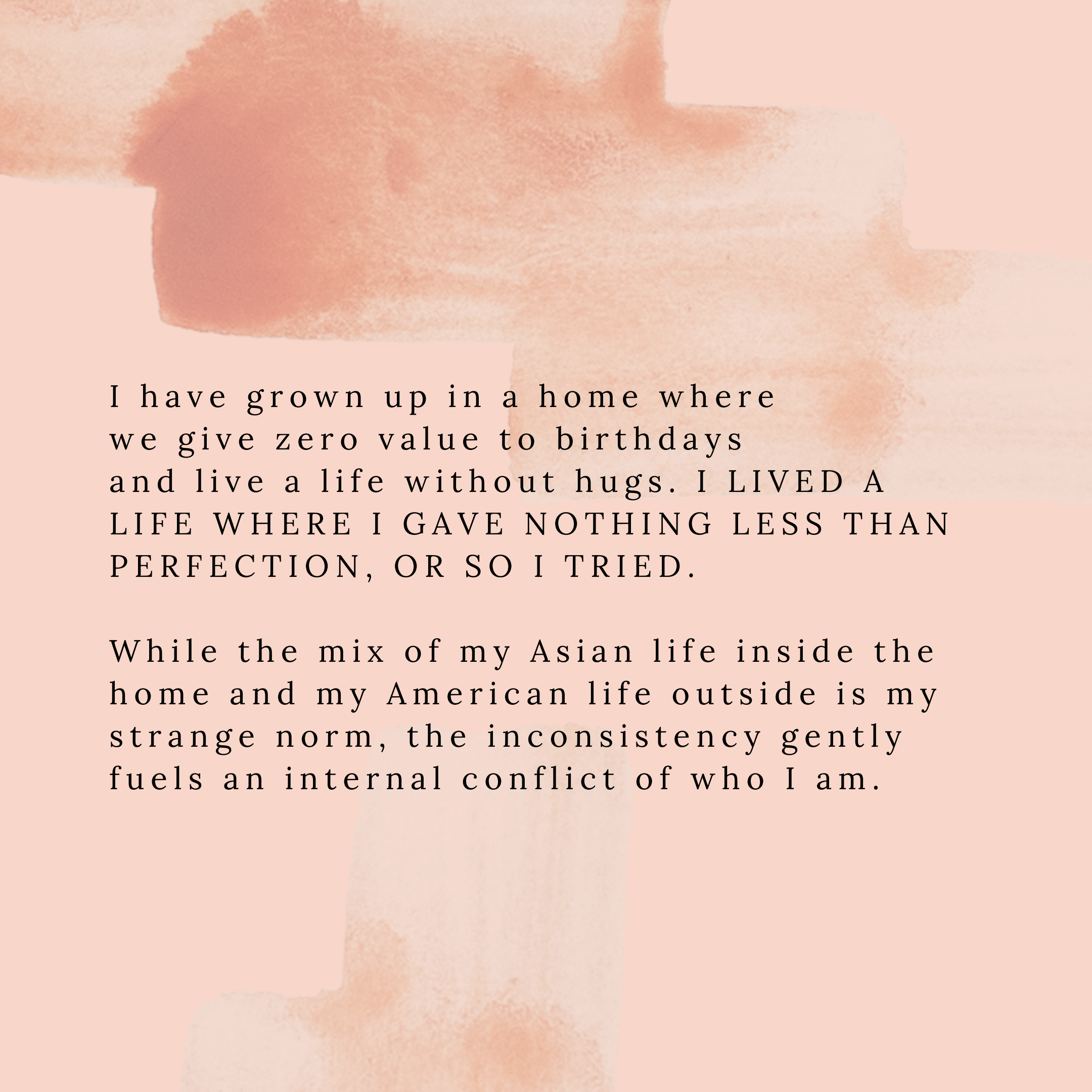


My family pivots between two vastly distinct cultures:

American and Korean.

We enthusiastically watch american football and regularly eat PB&Js. However we always remove our shoes before entering the house and eat each meal with a bowl of rice.





I have grown up in a home where
we give zero value to birthdays
and live a life without hugs. I LIVED A
LIFE WHERE I GAVE NOTHING LESS THAN
PERFECTION, OR SO I TRIED.


While the mix of my Asian life inside the
home and my American life outside is my
strange norm, the inconsistency gently
fuels an internal conflict of who I am.

There are days when my heart yearns to be more Korean, to be skilled at the piano and be overly concerned with my skin. Every time I un-fluently speak Korean it feels as if I'm **missing** a very important piece of me, a piece that fully comprehends the language and culture and can speak to my grandmother without hesitation or embarrassment.

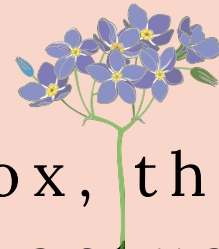
However, it's possible that I'm just trying to forcefully fill a spot that is actually not **empty**. Perhaps it's filled with the times I fully embrace my American pride and rebuttal negative comments to defend the land of limitless possibilities. In these times I'll reply, "I'm American" to those who question where I'm from. Or maybe the piece is filled from my time in Belgium.

When I left to study in Belgium, I not only left my family, but I also left my religion, friends, languages, hobbies, Korean/American meals, and my 2002 forest green Subaru Outback, but more bluntly, I left my life.

Living in a new country that couldn't even figure out which language to label signs with had me especially feeling "lost." And yet, though I was roaming aimlessly, I was free of my previous life, giving me the freedom to find one, or rather, to be whoever I pleased without cultural background OR influence... so I thought.



I'll never be fully Korean, American,
and/or Belgian, I'll never be fully
immersed in the depths of one, single
culture, and I'll never not be a foreigner,
because the only identity that truly
represents me is the uncertain,
unbalanced, undefined mix of my cultural
experiences.



I know, it's a strange paradox, that the lack of knowing who I am is actually who I am, but simply put, I believe one's uncertainty of who they are doesn't strip them of identity, rather can provide them with one, regardless of the many name pronunciations they have.

HER OWN KIND

Di Bei

The girl rushes into the studio twenty minutes late for the first dance class of the semester. She pants and stammers that she just arrived on campus yesterday, and it takes her forever to find the right place. She says sorry in broken English which makes her apologies humbler than they already are, over and over again until Professor Stella gestures for her to stop.

Dani fixes her gaze at the mirror, continuing her *port de bras* without the slightest sign to acknowledge the girl's existence, but the girl glances around the room and shuffles toward Dani, standing behind her at the barre by the window and clumsily imitating her moves.

Plié. Dani takes a deep, annoyed breath. *Grand plié*. There are certain territories in the studio. Only the advanced dancers can claim the window barre, leaving the barres in the middle of the room for the newbies out of solidarity. This is Dani's junior year in Rosemary College's dance program. She started out at the center and worked her way up to the side, and she hates it when random girls walk in and assume they can be like her.

The dancers switch to the left side, which gives Dani a good view of the girl: chubby, slouching, with long and frizzy hair all over the place—she doesn't even have the common sense to tie her hair up for a dance class. On the girl's feet are a pair of grandma black liners. As they bend forward for a good stretch, the girl almost sticks her saggy ass in Dani's face.

Barres, then center floor. Dani marches to her usual spot and the girl follows. Why can't she leave Dani alone? The room feels unbalanced with both of them on one side. The dancers *tendu croisé devant*. In the mirror, Dani sees the girl stretching out the wrong foot. The girl tries to make an inconspicuous adjustment and ends up tripping over her own leg.

“Lovely, dancers,” says Professor Stella.

Dani can only assume that Professor Stella is selectively blind because the girl’s posture is nowhere near the word “lovely.” As the music proceeds, the girl changes her strategy: now she holds her arms in a deliberate flappy way like she expects people to believe her ugly moves are due to laziness instead of incompetency. Her half-hearted commitment reminds Dani of chipped nail polish. Dani never allows for chipped nail polish. Once a single nail starts to peel, she removes the color from all of her ten fingers.

“Beautiful,” says Professor Stella. She gives the dancers a water break. As the dancers scatter around, the girl shoots a tentative smile at Dani, which makes Dani turn her face away.

“I’m donating my blood next Monday,” Dani says to Eva.

“Really?” Eva asks. Eva the devout blonde has been trying to trick Dani into Sunday Service forever. She has casually mentioned three times to Dani that the church offers free meals.

“Yes, I’ve been thinking about it since you went last time.” Dani hopes Eva will accept this answer as a compromise even though she has failed to set up Dani and Jesus.

“I’m so happy for you.” Eva hugs Dani and stains Dani’s top with sweat.

“Dancers,” says Professor Stella, “let’s do *chassé*, *balancé*, *pas de bourrée*, and *chassé* across the room, and then end with any leap of your choice. Two at a time.”

The dancers quickly line up. Dani goes with Eva and finally sheds the girl who is hiding at the end of the line. After finishing the combo, Dani leans on the barre to watch the girl stumble across the floor. Something about the girl’s disoriented limbs makes Dani recall a remote afternoon from kindergarten when she held a magnifying glass over a garden ant. The burning smell filled her pumping little heart with a serene sense of accomplishment.

Rosemary College is located in a predominantly white town in Virginia, where the nearest ethnic restaurant that attempts authenticity is located half an hour away and is called Andy Chang, which, as the name implies, is a knock-off of P.F. Chang. Being blue is one of the few things that Rosemary College can be proud of, especially since the campus lies close to a ridiculously rich Christian university. With the mission to train champions for Christ, the university president urges his students to carry concealed weapons to end those Muslims before they walk in. “Only the bad Muslims,” the president clarifies. “There are still good Muslims – good, moderate Muslims. You know what I mean.”

Dani's college holds a well-mannered apathy towards the fact that the Christian university has a monopoly on the town, and that the university is swallowing the college piece by piece: last year the university made an offer for the apiary when the college downgraded Environmental Studies from a major to a minor, and this year the 130-acre area of the dying Equestrian program. Meanwhile, Dani and her schoolmates keep their spirits high knowing the core value of a liberal arts education is that neither money nor power matters. What matters is that the college voted for Hillary instead of Trump, and Dani will never forget the tears, curses, and collective breakdown on election night. Professors canceled classes the next morning and students woke up in the afternoon with massive hangovers, all grieving the fall of the United States. The defeat dignified Rosemary College, attributing its decline to something more tragic and heroic than school policy or teacher quality. When the college dining hall switched to a cheaper food provider that also cooked for the local prison, there were not many protesters among the students because they knew they were suffering along with the rest of America. They chewed the cold pizza and the undercooked pasta and carried the freshman fifteen with silent patriotism.

After finishing her floppy omelet for breakfast, Dani hurries over to the dance studio and tries to hold in a greasy burp while rushing down the final few stairs. There is the girl again, standing in front of the door and struggling with the knob. She turns around at the sound of Dani's footsteps and says, slightly out of breath, “门是锁的。”

The four Chinese syllables catch Dani off guard. It takes a whole second for her to respond. While Americans always assume Dani is Japanese or Korean, her own people still spot her, speaking the mother language in her face no matter how fluent Dani's English is. It feels like being tagged in hide-and-seek. Four syllables are enough to turn Dani into "it." Dani steps forward in silence. When she holds the doorknob in her palm, Dani can feel the moist warmth left by the girl. The trick is that you have to press the knob real hard before turning it left. Dani opens the door and walks straight in, without holding it for the girl behind.

But the girl, oh the girl, fails to pick up on the most obvious hint. She follows Dani inside and speaks again in Chinese, in a room full of white dancers,

“我叫张诗雅，你叫什么？”

So that is the girl's name: Shiya Zhang. Dani wonders if things will be better if the girl goes by a name like Sakura or Seo-yeon, with an easily recognized Japanese or Korean origin. But no. The girl could have come from any other East Asian country – Vietnam, Singapore, or Thailand – yet she comes from China, and there is no disgust purer than the disgust Dani feels for another Chinese.

Maggie winks at Dani while stretching her legs on the floor. “You found yourself a language partner?” Maggie is the short and clueless brunette in the dance program. She trained in ballet for thirteen years and still gets yelled at by Professor Stella for leaving the rubber band on her wrist during dance concerts.

“Everyone on campus is my language partner,” Dani replies

“What were you saying to Dani?” Maggie asks the girl. The girl opens her mouth, but Dani snaps at her before she gets a chance to be a part of the conversation.

“We speak English when the majority of people in the room are native English speakers,” Dani says in a volume loud enough to make the girl blush. “It is a basic rule of etiquette.”

Dani wonders if the girl even knows the meaning of “etiquette” with her poor English, but the girl shuts her half-open mouth like a goldfish.

“Do you have an extra rubber band I can borrow?” Dani turns back to Maggie and asks, knowing perfectly that she has brought her own band in her pocket.

Maggie proudly shows her wrist to Dani. “Anytime.”

“Thanks, love,” Dani says. She has never called Maggie “love” before, intending to save it for a significant occasion. Now that she announces it and Maggie does not seem to fully appreciate the honor, Dani conceals her annoyance by turning to Eva, who is doing leg swings by the barre to warm up.

“Eva! Quick question: should I eat breakfast before the blood draw?”

“Eat breakfast for sure! And water, lots and lots of water. Stay hydrated.”

“I always wanted to donate blood,” says Maggie with a dreamy tone. “Last time I went, they told me I’m too tiny.”

“Maybe you will grow a few inches before graduation,” Eva says. “That’s what happened with my cousin. You can still grow after puberty.”

“You know what we should do?” Dani says abruptly. “Black Leotard Friday. On Black Friday we all wear black leotards.”

“That sounds fun!” says Maggie.

The girl sits next to Dani, nodding and forcing a smile. Dani knows the girl must be hating and admiring her at the same time. What is most pathetic about Chinese people is that if you can't win love from the Caucasians, you can't win respect from your own race. While the girl keeps her mouth shut, Dani goes on and on like a radio that refuses to be turned off.

“Have you been outside of the United States and Canada in the past twelve months?” asks the thick-shouldered nurse sitting in front of a computer.

“Yes,” Dani answers. Does that make her blood unsanitary?

“Where have you been?”

“China. I went back home over the summer.”

“Which part of China?”

“Beijing.”

“Is that b-a-e-j-i-n-g?”

“B-e-i, not Bae.”

“The nurse types on the keyboard with two index fingers.
“Your height?” she asks.

“One hundred seventy centimeters, about five feet seven.”

“And your weight?”

“Fifty-two kilograms. I don’t know how much that is in pounds.”

The nurse turns to the man sitting nearby. “How many pounds is fifty-two kilograms, Alex?”

“I duuno. Yo Julie, how many pounds is fifty-two kilograms?”

Someone pulls out a phone and says, “That’s like 115 pounds.”

“One hundred fifteen, Teresa!”

“Ok, ok,” says the nurse sitting in front of Dani.

How about some privacy? There is no need to broadcast her weight across the hall, but clearly none of the crew thinks Dani would mind. One hundred and fifteen pounds at five feet seven. Light enough for the American South. Not enough for China.

Back in China Dani never donated blood. Study abroad changes people, bringing out the virtues Dani had never shown before. Nowadays she pushes her roommates to recycle trash and addresses her friends as y'all. She drinks pumpkin spice latte and drops her shrinking clothes at Goodwill. Nurse Teresa leads Dani to a bed and tells her to lie down. Dani feels cold when the plum-colored blood is drawn from her left arm, but in a couple of weeks she will get a rewarding email notifying her where the blood has been received, in Richmond or in Charlottesville. She likes the idea that her genes are out there invading America one needlestick at a time.

After the draw, Dani heads to the studio wearing a red bandage on her elbow like a gallantry medal. She runs into Jake Miller on the staircase and walks straight past him. They dated during her freshman year, briefly, but by the time they broke up he had already coaxed Dani into going down on him, and two years later he still looks at her in the same unscrupulous way when she put her mouth near his zipper.

Dani shakes her head like she's shooing a fly. She needs a distraction from the negativity, and as soon as she walks into the locker-room, Dani pinpoints her target. It is the third week of school and the girl has finally learned to avoid eye contact with Dani. While Dani adjusts the straps of her leotard, the girl tries to start conversations with the other dancers, but her tongue gets lost in her own accent and she falls back into silence. The duller the girl appears, the livelier Dani feels, like the soil is only fertile enough for one of them to blossom. As the girl shrinks into the corner, Dani does an impression of Professor Stella which cracks up the entire room except the girl, who pulls out a phone to make herself look occupied.

This is what the girl gets for trespassing. Before her arrival, the only student with a Chinese surname other than Dani was Lisa Liu, who was made in America and who carries on her legacy by ordering from Panda Express three times a week. Lisa narrows her scope of activities to the computer lab where she pulls all-nighters to play League of Legends, thus leaving the dance studio to Dani. In fact, Dani was the only minority in the studio. There was once an African American dancer in the program but she did not last long. By midterm she was missing half of the classes and rehearsals, and after that she never showed up again. Dani was not bothered by the black dancer's disappearance; she likes being the one and only diversity girl, sliding across the large and bright dance room in silk ballet slippers. When the dancers do their barre routine by the window, Dani is paler than most of her classmates under the sunlight, and in unison they cast long and lean shadows on the wooden floor.

Now the girl has shown up and taken away the uniqueness of Dani's skin. In her retaliate research, Dani spells the pinyin for Shiya Zhang on social media but finds nothing. It is not until days later that Dani figures out the girl has registered with her English name. Sapphire, that is the ridiculous name the girl has given herself. In Sapphire Zhang's Instagram bio, she puts a Chinese flag and an American flag side by side. Red flag next to the Stars and Stripes. How desperate. Three weeks in the United States and the girl cannot wait to mark the country in her life.

In each dance class, Dani giggles and gossips more often than ever, and on some days she does not even mind the girl's existence. After all, what is the point of a performance if there is no audience? Whenever the girl is around, life is pouring out from every cell of Dani. Her dimples deepen and her eyes lighten. She wonders if she has grown half an inch because she seems taller in the mirror, or maybe it's because she pushes her chest out more these days.

She gets herself into a relationship—Christopher Klein from the swimming team. He has messy straw-colored hair and the nervous laughter of a high schooler. Dani has been flirting with him for a while and now they are Facebook official. He waits outside the studio to escort her. They hold hands until they are out of sight of the dancers, then Dani finds a way to let go of his surprisingly soft and sweaty palm that does not meet her expectations for masculinity.

By the end of September, Professor Stella adds *fondue* to the barre routine, and on foggy autumn mornings the pronunciation always makes Dani think of fondue with a sensation of cheesy and melting warmth. When the class is over, Dani makes a curtsy to Professor Stella, who stops Dani and says, “You feel like a different person from last year.”

“Do you prefer this version of me?” Dani asks, tilting her head to the side.

“You seem happier. I wonder what happened.”

“Finally got over my jet lag, I guess.”

On Saturday night Chris takes Dani to a secret society dinner and then the after party in the dorm of a ginger called Trish. Dani is surprised to see the girl sitting sheepishly in the corner. She frowns at Chris. “I thought this party was exclusive?”

“It is, Babe,” he promises. She can smell the alcohol in his breath.

“Then why is she here?” Dani asks. Chris replies with a blank stare.

It does not take Dani long to figure out that the girl is Trish's roommate. She had no idea a party was happening and came back from the library to find a crowded room with three people making out on her bed. This answer satisfies Dani. She comes back to Chris and grabs the beer can out of his hand. "You've drunk enough for tonight."

She forces a reluctant nod from Chris and then turns her eyes back to the girl. The girl, however, is not sitting alone anymore. Jake Miller appears out of nowhere and tells her his favorite joke, which involves three chicas and one bartender. His attention encourages the girl to chuckle and flip her hair in a way that sickens Dani. She stares at them unconsciously until Jake turns around and then it is too late for Dani to take her eyes back. Jake puts his arm around the girl's chair and shoots Dani a smug smile: watch how predictably easy it is to hook up with a Chinese.

Why did she ever date him? Dani knows she should not be too harsh on her younger self, considering back then she had just turned eighteen and had landed in the United States with a head full of white knight fantasies. Their relationship ended when she peeked at Jake's phone code and found out he was texting Lisa Liu. It did not shock Dani that Jake was texting another girl. What irritated her was the fact that Lisa did not text back. Now Lisa could always look at Dani with loving sympathy, thinking her virtue was the only reason Dani got to keep her cheating boyfriend.

Oh, Lisa Liu! Why did it have to be Lisa Liu? Dani wished Jake had texted any other white girl – even Marie Roberts with eyes too far apart that give away her imbecility – to prove he did not have a yellow fetish. But seeing him and the girl, Dani has to admit there is something wrong with Jake, or else why would he specifically go after yellow girls if he could get around with his own race?

In the corner of her eyes, Dani watches Jake handing a bottle with an indiscernible dark color to the girl, who chugs it down to win his approval. When the girl wipes her mouth on her sleeve, she looks like she is about to vomit but manages to squeeze out a smile. Jake laughs. He whispers something into the girl's ear which makes her face flush even more, then he helps her stand up and she staggers out of the room after him.

Tick tock. Dani's eyes move between the clock on the wall and her phone screen like a ping-pong ball. Chris is sprawled on a pink pouf with his eyes half-closed. He smacks his lips impatiently when Dani gives his shoulder a nudge, so she walks out of the room on her own. All she need is a quick peek. Hopefully she will not come back to find Chris throwing up on that cotton candy pouf.

She does not see Jake and the girl anywhere in the hallway or in the closest restroom stalls. At the end of the hall there is a door leading to the parking lot, and Dani pushes it open. Outside is the quiet night with moths flying around the lamppost.

Before she turns back to the hallway, slight noises catch her attention. Something is happening at the far end. Dani debates if she should walk through a chilly parking lot for her curiosity. Finally, she moves in that direction, wishing that she had brought her jacket.

There they are. At first Dani cannot tell what is happening but then she recognizes two figures struggling in the darkness: one is holding the other down in an empty lot between a Volvo and a Jeep. The one at the bottom turns her head at Dani who freezes under the streetlight with a ghostly pale face.

“救救我!”

Help. The girl is crying for help. Dani stands there, terrified, until Jake turns his bloodshot eyes towards her and hisses, “Fuck off!”

Dani does what he says. She backs off into the shadow and starts running, all the way until she reaches her dorm and locks the door. After catching her own wrist to stop it from shaking, Dani calls the RA and reports a party that has gone past the quiet hours. If the girl was someone else, Dani would have called the police, but what has the girl done to deserve Dani’s wholehearted rescue? No one forced the girl to party, drink, or follow Jake into the darkness, just like no one forced Dani to put her tongue in a place she did not want. The choices are theirs alone.

Five minutes later Dani dials the RA's number again. The same voice answers her, "We are on it." When she dials for the third time, no one picks up. Dani goes through every single Snapchat and Instagram and even dying Facebook account of people at the party for updates. Selfie. Selfie. Selfie captioned "lit" with flame stickers. Selfie. The campus Wi-Fi signal gets funky and Dani is stuck on the picture of Trish sticking her tongue out and cleavage spilling out of her low-cut top. When the Internet finally refreshes and Trish's fake barbell tongue ring is out of sight, Dani finds a Twitter calling the RAs bitches so she assumes the party is done, twenty-four minutes after she fled from the parking lot.

Dani wonders if the girl was a virgin twenty-five minutes ago. Now will be a good time for the girl to regret not working hard in the dance studio. Better to break her hymen while doing splits than saving it for Jake. Then Dani realizes she is thinking out loud, the same sentences again and again like rehearsing a monologue for audition. She does not stop. Hearing her own cruelty drives away her shivers, warming up her throat and stomach like a cup of instant coffee.

She hears no rumor over the weekend. Monday comes and the girl is missing from the dance studio. When the class is over, Professor Stella stops Dani on her way out.

“You don’t look well,” Professor Stella says.

Dani is relieved that Professor Stella does not mention the girl’s absence like Maggie did, as if one Chinese is supposed to know another Chinese’s whereabouts. She almost denies Professor Stella’s observation, but this elderly woman with long, thick silver hair has the distant and sympathetic eyes of a retired horse. It occurs to Dani that all of the faculty are mandated reporters. If Dani happens to confess, they are required to pass the secret along to people in higher positions. Dani wonders what will happen to Jake Miller: will he be sent to jail, or at least expelled? She has never expected that she could use the girl to get rid of Jake before. This exciting possibility tickles the inside of her stomach.

“I’m concerned.” Professor Stella adds. Dani thinks of all the likes a #MeToo hashtag can harvest these days. It would be nice to step out and defend someone else. She can have the same sense of participation but no shame or scars.

“I saw something,” Dani says, forcing a shiver into her voice. “Something terrible.”

The next morning Dani receives two emails. One of them informs that her blood ended up in the neighboring city that has Andy Chang, meaning some lucky guy over there can both enjoy authentic Chinese blood and half-authentic Chinese food. Slightly disappointed that her blood does not reach out as far as she would like, Dani closes the tab and clicks on the second email. It was an electronic response from the Dean's Office, saying that a report of suspected sexual assault has been received and further investigations will be conducted.

In the following week, the girl has vanished from the dance studio, but Dani still runs into Jake on campus, either when he plays pool in the lounge or when he smokes on a bench with the stoners who write unpublished poems. Dani sends a follow-up email to the Dean's Office and receives the same response that the investigation is ongoing, until Dani demands a meeting in person because the curiosity is killing her.

A meeting is arranged with Dean Connor. She is a grey-haired woman with a round belly and thin limbs like a ceramic teapot, lovely in a plain way. When Dani enters the office, she notices that across from Dean Connor's table there are two armchairs. The girl curls up in one of them like a rag doll, and the empty chair is apparently meant for Dani. As Dani takes her seat, she gives the girl a quick once-over. The girl's face is paler and rounder like a fermented dough. Is it possible for someone to put on weight in ten days? Does the girl expect the extra fat to protect her like an armor?

Dean Connor eyes Dani up and down through her crystal-rimmed glasses.

“Morning, Miss Wen. How's your week been?”

Dani nods briefly. She almost gives Dean Connor a smile but remembers she needs a bitter face for this occasion. Seeing that Dani has no intention for small talk, Dean Connor clears her throat.

“Miss Wen, you will be relieved to learn that no damage was done on Saturday night.”

The sentence from Dean Connor sounds so strange. It takes Dani a moment to translate the words into her mother language.

“What do you mean?” Dani asks.

“We have contacted Miss Zhang prior to this meeting.” Dean Connor gestured at the girl. “She verified that Mr. Miller had her consent.”

The girl makes no reaction at the mention of her name. She sits still in the armchair like she is falling asleep in a tedious physics class.

“What do you mean by consent?” Dani asks.

“Well, it means permission. Approval. Go-ahead,” Dean Connor says.

“I know the definition in English.”

“Oh. Okay. What was your question then?”

“It can’t be consent,” Dani says. “I saw it with my own eyes. He raped her.”

Dean Connor slowly shakes her head, half-smiling, like she is afraid to startle Dani with sudden movements.

“According to Miss Zhang’s statement, nothing has happened against her will.”

“She was crying for my help,” Dani says.

“Were you crying for help, Miss Zhang?” Dean Connor asks the girl. The girl shakes her head like a sudden twitch.

“Would you say that everything happened under your consent?”

The girl nods.

“There,” Dean Connor says to Dani. “You can take it off your mind now. Everything is good.”

Dani does not move. She must have a stubborn look on her face because Dean Connor continues with the sugarcoated kindness adults give to kids.

“Anyway, thank you for reaching out. It is heartwarming to see girls like you two looking out for each other.”

Dean Connor sends them out of her office. When the office door is closed, Dani steps aside for the girl to pass because the empty corridor does not feel big enough for both of them, but the girl does not rush through. She turns around and speaks to Dani for the first time in English, “Mind your own fucking business.”

That night when Dani lies in bed, her lips still tremble with all the sharp comebacks she could have made to the girl. Of all the words – in Chinese or in English – she could have dropped, Dani chose silence. The word “fuck” stupefied her like that Saturday night when Jake told her to fuck off. It is not that Dani can’t curse. Cursing in a second language is much easier than in her native tongue. What catches her is the truth in that word. When Dani sits up in bed and flips over her pillow to the cooler side, she realizes the girl will never admit the rape. It was her first month abroad and she was having fun with a white fuckboy at a secret society party, which itself is some kind of achievement. As for Dani, instead of being a righteous witness, she is an overreacting goody two-shoes – the most typical fresh-off-the-boat a Chinese girl can be.

Dani knows she should let it go. The girl has dropped the dance class, and Dani has successfully defended her territory, but there is a third person who knows what Dani saw. One morning in the dining hall, Jake Miller sits two tables away from Dani. He turns in her direction and licks the raspberry jam off his middle finger. Dani pushes her plate away. She can't swallow anymore.

She has stopped having sex with Chris. In the darkness Chris smells like Jake, doggy and sweaty. Dani tries closing her eyes but the girl is with her. The girl is lying on Dani's bedsheet. She does not cry for help anymore; she just stares and breathes and exists. Her small, squinty Chinese eyes haunt Dani until those eyes become her own. And someone is on top of the girl. Someone is on top of Dani. She screams and struggles and pushes him off her.

She hears Chris falling on the ground.

“What the fuck?” he moans. Dani opens her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she says.

Chris accepts her apology. He leans forward to caress her but she shakes him off.

“What’s wrong?” he asks. “You don’t like the sex?”

“I’m not in the mood.”

“Oh, is your period coming?”

“Yes. Sure.”

Chris picks up his shirt and leaves, thoughtfully closing the door behind him. After he is long gone, her sheet is still stained with his Caucasian smell. Dani heads to the laundry room. While leaning on the humming tumble dryer to wait, she stares down at her hands. She remembers Jake commented on how soft and hairless her hands are, and she wants to peel off her own skin.

How could it happen? How could Jake haunt her two years after the break up without even touching her? Dani wonders if witnessing the rape is more visceral than experiencing it, because the girl can take her time in the stage of denial, but Dani's brain does not care enough to lie. What Dani saw is a fact, and by acquiescing the fact she empowers Jake Miller.

She has two years left in Rosemary College to bear with his unscrupulous eyes. Winter, then Spring. Bright colors will return to trees like migrant birds. Callerys will blossom along the red brick paths, five-petaled white flowers filling the air with the smell of semen. If Dani twists her ankle or bruises her toenail in pointe shoes, as long as she leaves it alone, the pain will go away like it has never happened, but Jake will always be here, his existence making each second true again. Dani remembers the university speech about concealed weapons. She holds out a finger gun with one eye closed. In her mind, Dani replays the night when Jake tells her to fuck off and she answers him by pulling the trigger again and again, until he lies still, his imaginary blood spilled over the white porcelain floor tiles.

She feels better now. The dryer beeps and she reaches for her sheets. As soon as Dani opens the dryer, he resurrects. His vicious smell ambushes her.

At first Dani is sitting against the wall outside Dean's Office with her head buried on her knees, but passersby keep checking on her since she is in a universally acknowledged breakdown position, until Dani has to pull out a phone to stare at. 9:17AM and Dean Connor appears at the other end of the hall with a steaming mug. Dani lifts her face when Dean Connor comes closer.

"It's you!" Dean Connor says, trying to hide the fact that she can't recall Dani's name. While reaching into her purse for the office key, Dean Connor asks, "How have you been?"

Not well. As long as Jake Miller is around, Dani will never be well. She was going to ask Dean Connor for a reexamination on the sexual assault report, but she realizes it will come to the same dead end, with the girl denying and Jake walking away without consequences.

No. He must disappear at any cost.

“I lied.” Dani says it like she has rehearsed many times. “I lied about that Saturday night. He did not rape her.”

Dean Connor stares at Dani with focused eyes and a half-open mouth.

“It was me.” Dani continues. “It was not her. It was me. He raped me.”

“Do you know the consequences of making such a serious accusation?” Dean Connor asks.

Dani takes a second to think of the girl: her dark hair and her blurry face. Instinct tells Dani that even if the girl will not testify what Dani now claims, the girl will not bother to contradict her. It is the least amount of understanding between girls of Dani's own kind: to keep their mouths shut when justice is done at their convenience. Dean Connor repeats her question and Dani nods, like it is the last thing she can do before tomorrow arrives and takes her by force.

The top half of the image features several watercolor brushstrokes. There are three strokes in shades of orange and yellow, and three strokes in shades of green. The strokes are irregular and have a soft, blended appearance, suggesting they were created with a brush. They are arranged in a roughly circular pattern, with some strokes overlapping or being partially cut off by the edge of the frame.

Kachin Identity: Unashamed to be me

- JAN JAN

“Are you Chinese?”

“No.”

“Japanese?”


“No.”

“Taiwanese?”

“No. You’ll never guess.”


“Wait, I know! You’re Asian!”






Wow, ok. No matter how many times people try to guess my ethnicity, they will never get it right--*and that's ok!* I completely understand, and actually love making people play this guessing game to find out my country of origin because it's funny to see when friends begin to struggle after listing all the Asian countries they know and run out of options. Which country could my parents and family possibly have come from?

It's always a rare occasion for any friend to correctly guess that my family comes from Burma (Myanmar), and even more rare to pinpoint my ethnic identity--no one I've met for the first time has ever been able to do that before, by the way. It's not their fault either. I don't blame anyone because even many of my own Asian school friends don't know that my ethnic identity exists, let alone know what Burma is and where it is located the majority of the time.




The image features several watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, yellow, and green, arranged in a pattern that suggests the layers of an onion. The strokes are layered, with some overlapping others, and have a soft, textured appearance. The colors transition from a light yellow-orange at the top to a vibrant green at the bottom, with some darker orange strokes on the right side.

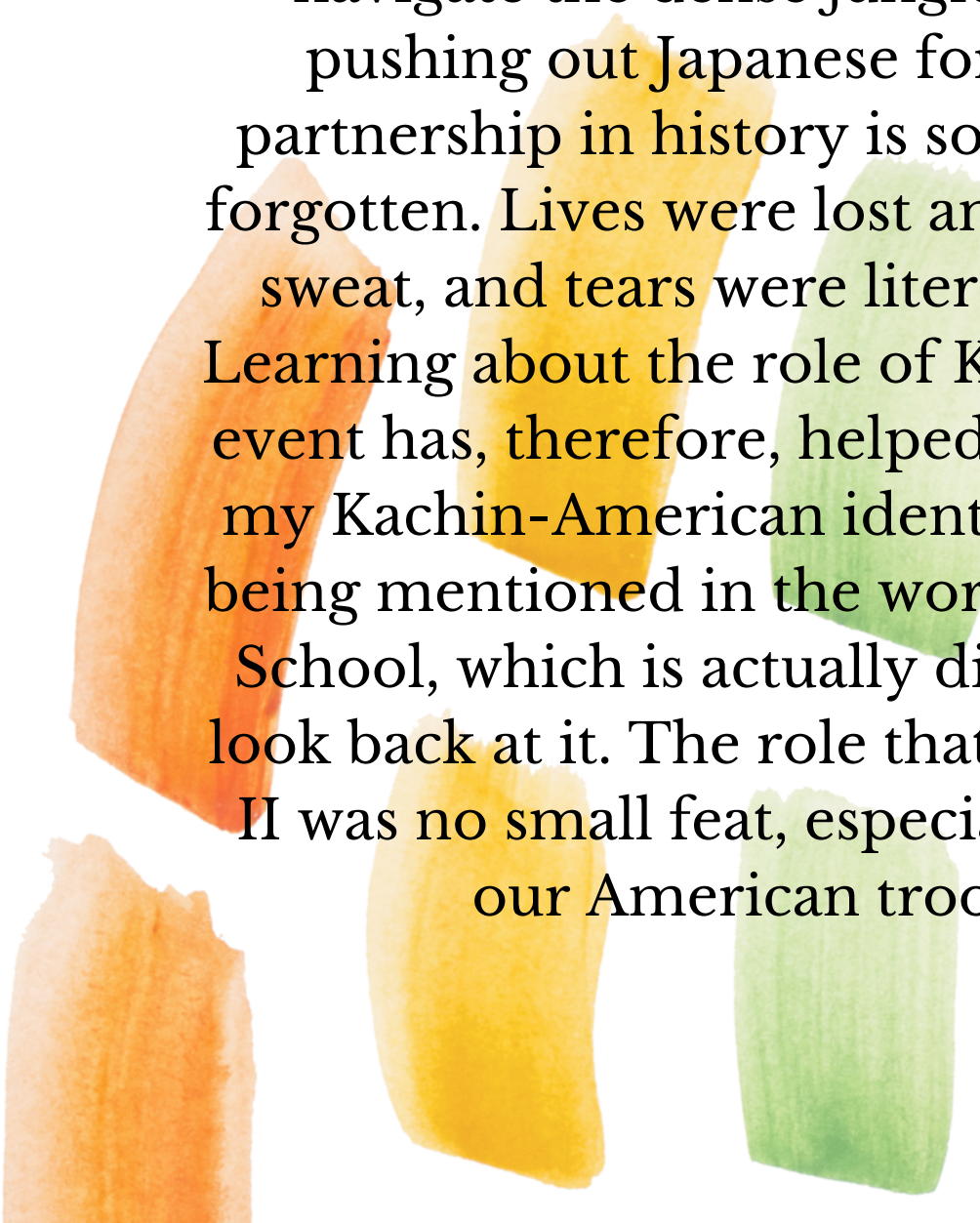
Yes, I am an Asian whose roots come from Burma, but there's so much more to it than that. Telling others about my ethnic identity is sometimes complicated because it's like having to peel an onion. There's just so many layers to peel, one after another.

To start off at the surface of the onion, my national identity is American. Peel back the first layer, and I am more specifically Asian-American. But what kind of Asian-American? Peel another layer, and you'll find that I am a Burmese Asian-American. Burma is a country with over 135 ethnic groups, though. Which ethnic group do you belong to? Peel yet another layer, and you'll discover that I am a Kachin-Burmese-Asian-American. Within the Kachin ethnic group itself, there are further divisions of tribes that speak different dialects/languages and have slight differences in cultural dresses and practices. My maternal grandmother, for example, comes from the Maru (Lawngwaw/) tribe and my paternal grandmother has roots coming from the Zi tribe within her ancestral background. But before I get you even more confused, I'll stop here.






I just want to highlight that because Burma is so little known to the rest of the world, it makes “minority” ethnic groups like the Kachin even lesser-known. Despite this and because of this, I want to raise awareness about my heritage and culture even more now because it’s about the time that we all stand in solidarity. Kachins and all ethnic “minorities” within Burma, such as the Shan, Karen, Chin, Rohingya, Rakhine, and many more are being persecuted at this very moment. There are over 135,000 displaced Kachins in Northern Burma due to an ongoing civil war that has been running for 70+ years since the country’s independence from the British in 1948 (yes, Burma was also once a British colony during imperial times and even heralded as “the golden land” back then).




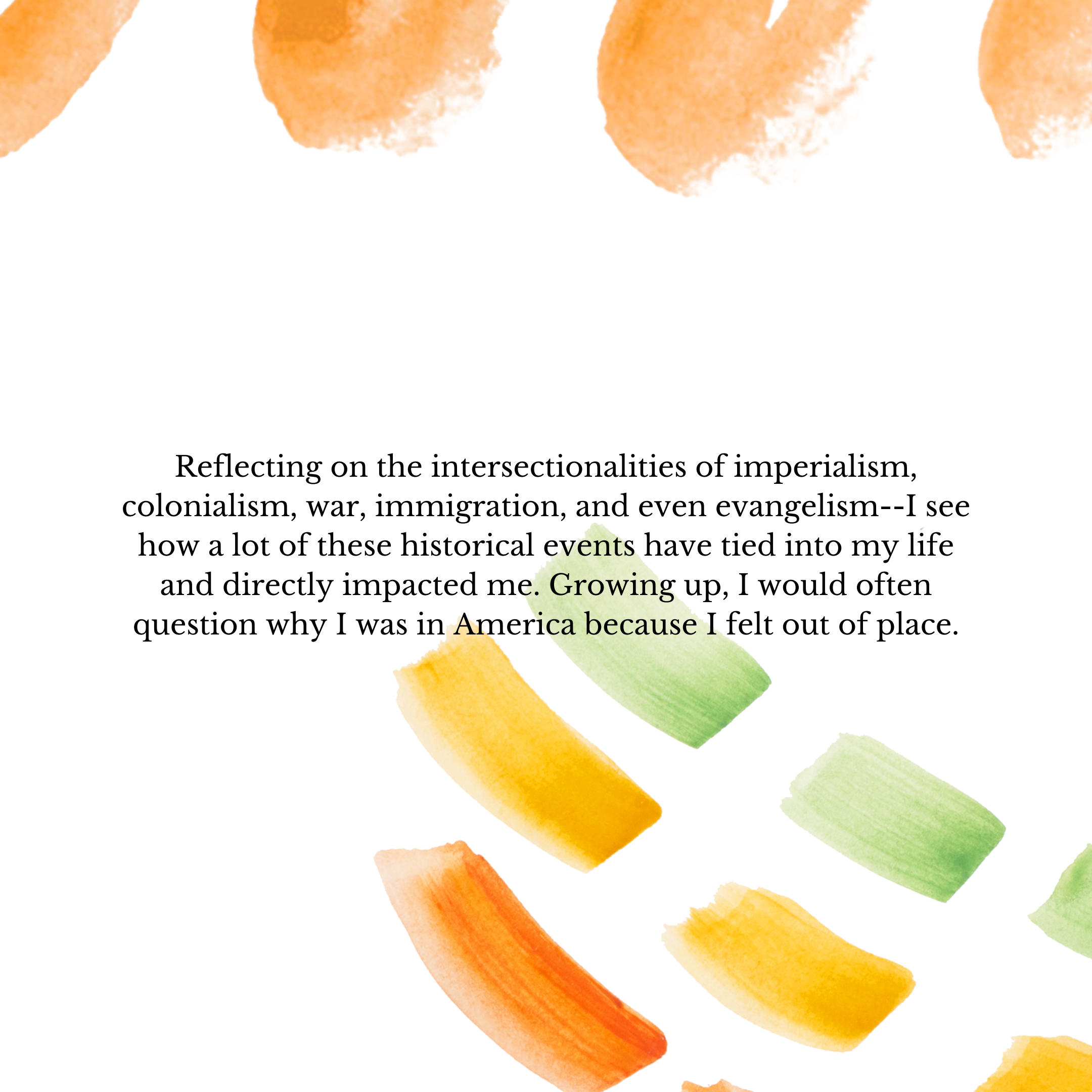
But what does this have to do with America? American soldiers benefitted largely from the help of Kachin jungle warriors in World War II. It was the Kachins who fought alongside American soldiers and the Allies, helping them navigate the dense jungles in Northern Burma when pushing out Japanese forces from the country. This partnership in history is something that should never be forgotten. Lives were lost and sacrifices were made. Blood, sweat, and tears were literally shed within this allyship. Learning about the role of Kachin soldiers in this historical event has, therefore, helped me to become more proud of my Kachin-American identity. I never saw Kachin people being mentioned in the world history books I read in High School, which is actually disappointing to me, now that I look back at it. The role that Kachins played in World War II was no small feat, especially because it is what allowed our American troops to receive victory.



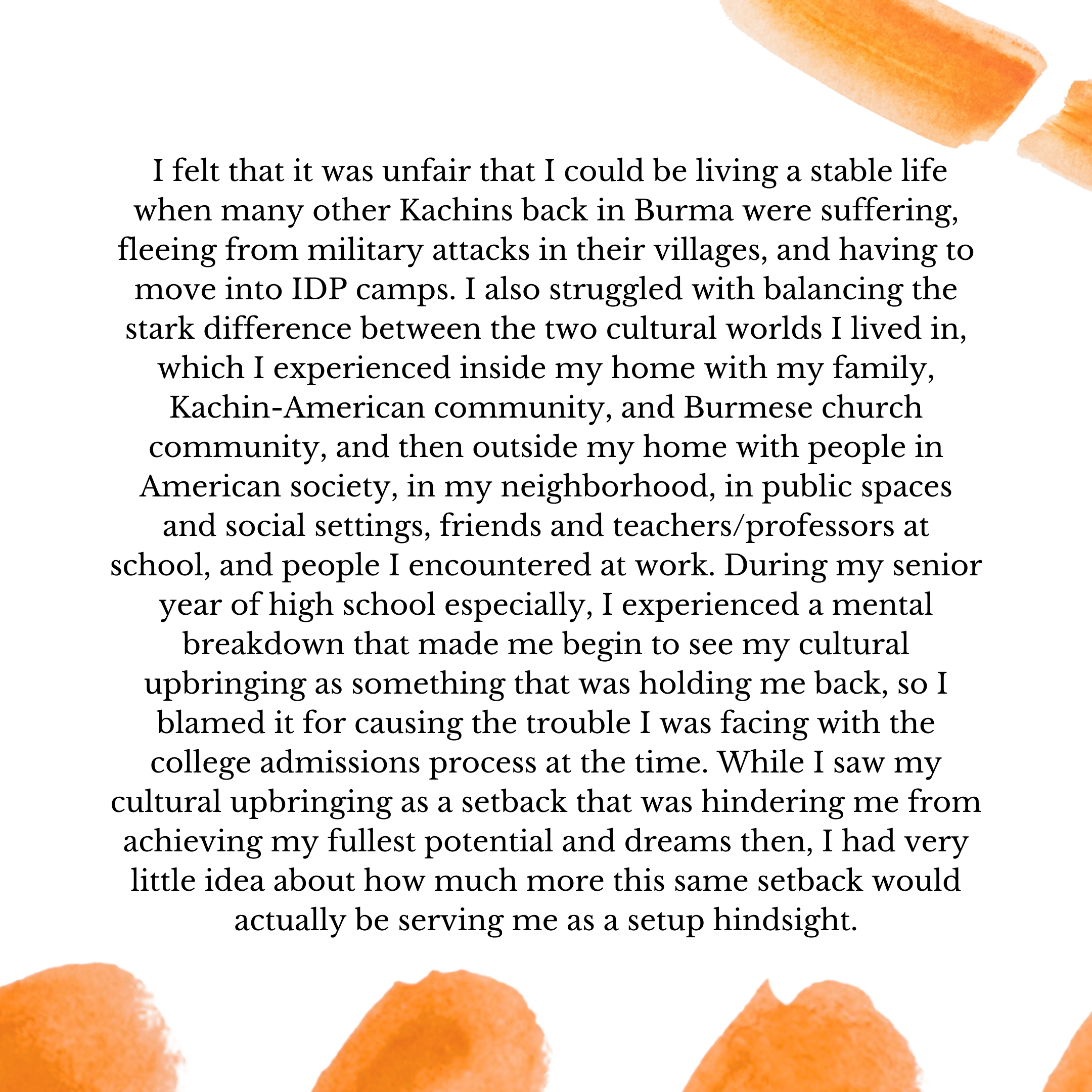
Another reason that more Americans should care is because of the long-standing relationships that have been established since the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries to Burma. They reached Kachin State, as well as many other areas around the country in Karen and Chin.

Due to this relationship and affiliation with Western contact, Christian leaders like Reverend Samson, a KBC (Kachin Baptist Churches) pastor, oftentimes finds himself targeted by officials in the Burmese and even Chinese government, who accuse him for being “*too close with Western people*”.




The background of the page is decorated with several watercolor brushstrokes. At the top, there are four large, overlapping strokes in shades of orange and peach. Below the text, there are several smaller strokes in yellow, light green, and a darker green, scattered across the lower half of the page. The overall aesthetic is soft and artistic.

Reflecting on the intersectionalities of imperialism, colonialism, war, immigration, and even evangelism--I see how a lot of these historical events have tied into my life and directly impacted me. Growing up, I would often question why I was in America because I felt out of place.




I felt that it was unfair that I could be living a stable life when many other Kachins back in Burma were suffering, fleeing from military attacks in their villages, and having to move into IDP camps. I also struggled with balancing the stark difference between the two cultural worlds I lived in, which I experienced inside my home with my family, Kachin-American community, and Burmese church community, and then outside my home with people in American society, in my neighborhood, in public spaces and social settings, friends and teachers/professors at school, and people I encountered at work. During my senior year of high school especially, I experienced a mental breakdown that made me begin to see my cultural upbringing as something that was holding me back, so I blamed it for causing the trouble I was facing with the college admissions process at the time. While I saw my cultural upbringing as a setback that was hindering me from achieving my fullest potential and dreams then, I had very little idea about how much more this same setback would actually be serving me as a setup hindsight.



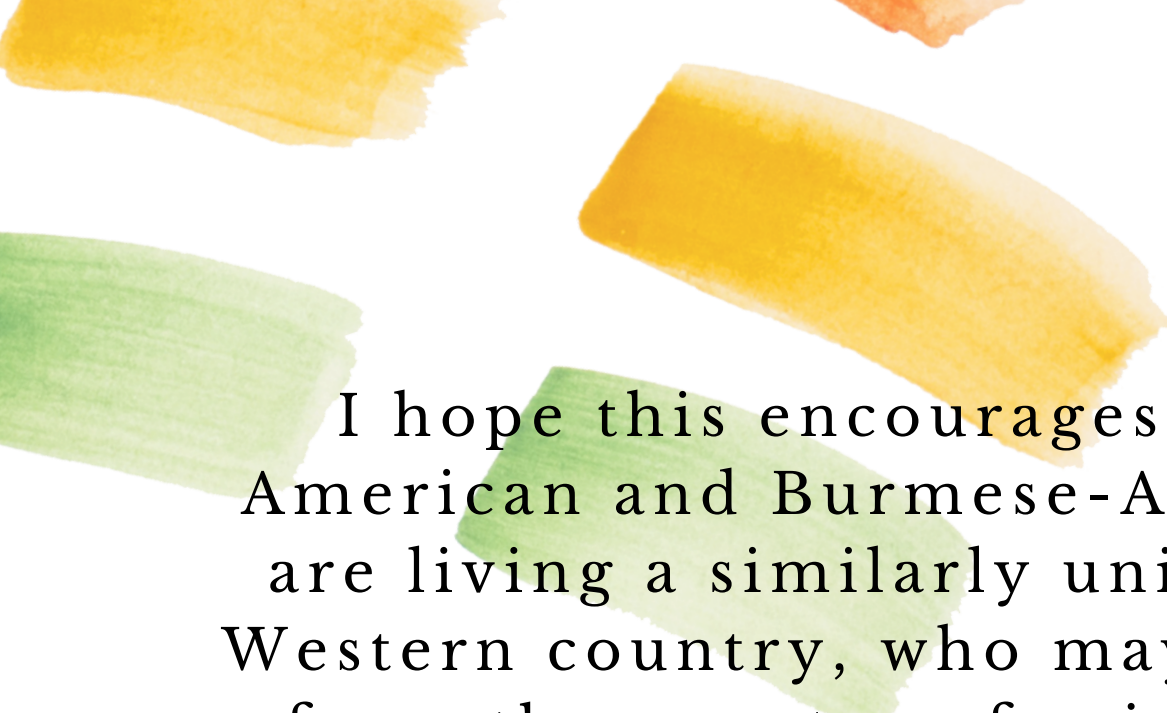
Today, I am proud to be Kachin-American. Coming to accept my identity has been a tumultuous journey filled with many ups and downs, but through it all, I am glad for everything. I praise God for paving this strange yet unique journey for me to travel on because it has presented me with so many once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that have truly determined the course of my next steps career-wise. A simple decision I made to donate my birthday money to IDPs in Kachin State when I turned 19 years old made me become more aware of the urgent needs of IDPs. A film screening and discussion event on a film focusing on the experiences of Rohingya and Kachin women (Thamee, Amae, Ama), which I attended in D.C. a few months later, brought the reality of Burma issues closer to me where I was, and opened my eyes to see how close these issues hit home despite taking place in a distant land on the other side of the planet.

I am so grateful for all of the experiences I have been able to gain with the work that I am slowly being drawn into within the sphere of activism, and always feel more inspired, encouraged, and enlightened to continue moving forward. Majoring in Global Affairs has also allowed me to learn more about and understand the people and causes I care for. Reflecting back on history and listening to stories from my own grandparents and parents helps me to better understand my time and place in the world, and actively work towards preserving memory, culture, language, and identity.





Doctor Ola Hanson, a Swedish missionary who translated the Bible for Kachins, actually predicted that Kachins would become extinct within 100 years from 1890, when he first came in contact with us. He cautioned that all of my Kachin customs, language, and culture would soon fade away from the face of the planet one day. It's been way past a hundred years now, and here I am in America, amongst a population of a few hundred other Kachins in the country. We're still alive, we've made it this far...



I hope this encourages all of my Kachin-American and Burmese-American friends who are living a similarly unique experience in a Western country, who may be feeling detached from the country of origin that either their parents came from or they emigrated from themselves. Let us never forget our roots and the struggles of our parents and ancestors. In the same manner that situational factors pushed us and our families out of Burma to seek a better life abroad, let's continue pushing towards a better future not only for ourselves and our families, but for everyone within our local communities and the Burmese diaspora community at large, in order to radiate massive change expansively for the country that is home to such delicate yet significant roots of ours.

-JAN JAN