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TYPE

MEMOIR
NARRATIVE

GENRE

GRADE 12

”Boston’s Chinatown is my home, but it is in a crisis.”

When I was young, I learned about gentrification and its negative impact on my neighborhood. I used to play with my friends on Albany Street, which were Chinatown’s hills, but that was out of the question when the company One Greenway decided to build apartment complexes overtop. Knowing other parts of my community’s foundation could be stripped away, I felt embarrassment and shame when associated with Chinatown, the neighborhood I have grown in. And yet, I had no time to process these frustrations as I dealt with the uncertainties of starting high school. I was a fish out of the water, stepping out of my comfort zone and meeting new faces from different neighborhoods, schools, cultural identities, and racial backgrounds. Eventually, I searched for comfort in a familiar face, my best friend, to ground myself.

She encouraged me to learn more about Asian American history, culture, and heritage, as well as

contemplate how to give back to the community that supported me throughout my life. I was naïve and oblivious to the vast availability of resources, such as the Josiah Quincy Elementary School, Red Oak childcare center, South Cove clinic, and Ming Supermarket for years now. I decided this should not be the case anymore, and so I took steps to explore various organizations making up Chinatown's infrastructure.

I reached out to the neighboring organization, the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA), which taught me the history of, and their role in, progressive social movements within Chinatown. CPA started protests, which fought against large property management companies not associated with the local neighborhood. While Chinatown is small, it has its methods to defend its community buildings. In addition to exploring CPA, I joined the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center's youth leadership program, YouLead, which fostered self-confidence and leadership.

In YouLead, I practiced public speaking and magnified my newfound voice, previously hidden behind insecurities about being associated with Chinatown, by creating interactive workshops on Chinatown air and land pollution, impacts of social media, and youth empowerment through the arts. I was consistently empowered to bring youth together because I recognized how my actions within a larger team could make an impact. I was coming to terms with who I am as a young Chinese American woman and what I represent: the community of Chinatown.

With heightened anti-Asian racism targeting this fragile community during the pandemic, I joined a group of Asian American students to co-write a petition addressed to school superintendents to condemn the racism. During class discussions, there was a stigma to avoid associating COVID-19's origins with China, which could easily lead to anti-Asian rhetoric. The week leading up to mandatory school closure caused tense anxiousness, which overshadowed my chance to voice my feelings. This situation changed once the petition was in the Boston Globe as my school administrators contacted me immediately to discuss how to achieve necessary transformations. As a result, I have a larger platform to share my narrative about how I have come to where I am and about the history of discrimination against Asians in America that prevails in today's society.

Having done all this, I realize there is nothing wrong with being Asian American. Although Chinatown is subject to gentrification along with other dangers, such as air pollution and poor resident health, there exists a secure support system for it. I am now proud, more than anything, of being a resident of the neighborhood because I am more in-tune with my identity. I will continue to advocate for this tender community I have come to love so dearly. My goal is to be able to return the support my mentors, program coordinators, friends, and family gave me by addressing and fighting against various social and environmental issues that present themselves as threats to Chinatown. Chinatown is my one and only home, after all.