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TYPE

MEMOIR
NARRATIVE

GENRE

GRADE 12

“‘How was it?’ I asked.”

“Terrible! You can’t imagine how awful it was,” said my friend.

“What’s wrong? Tell me!” I urged him.

“My dad just broke a glass and tossed it over the table. My mom is crying and calling for a Vietnamese shaman to chase the ‘spirit’ out of my body,” he sighs.

“A shaman? Wow, that sounds really bad. But why a shaman?” I asked curiously.

“Mom thought being gay is because a spirit is following me, but the worst part is that they both think being gay is a disease! This family is messed up!” His face turned red as he grew furious.

Joey, my friend, came out to his family as gay and his parents reacted with aggression, a conflict that is still present today. Joey’s story is not happening just because of an ordinary conflict in a family, it

demonstrates something more serious than that, which are the beliefs of many parents in Vietnam. This story left a fear in me that if I came out to my family, I would receive the same reaction.

During my childhood in the countryside of Vietnam, where there are only rice fields, rivers and tombs between the houses, I noticed people's traditional thoughts on different genders and sexualities. In superstitions, people who are part of the LGBTQ+ communities are seen to have a spiritual flaw; However, in recent years, the cities of Vietnam have begun to show respect, acceptance, and inclusivity to the LGBTQ+ community. When I moved to the United States, I felt the open-minded beliefs and acceptance that I had not experienced in the Vietnamese countryside. The US has many opportunities for LGBTQ+ people and offers them a chance to live their true lives.

Although the US is more open, my mother still has a traditional perspective about the LGBTQ+ community. After listening to Joey's story, I hesitated for years to talk with her about different gender and sexualities. I decided to ask her indirectly about my friend's story, to see what she thought. At the beginning, she seemed uncomfortable when I mentioned homosexuality and her answer was, "M? không thích m?y ng??i nh? v?y, kì l?m." I don't like people like that, it's weird. That disappointed me and stuck in my head for years later. The conversation created a distance between us and I hid myself.

When I started high school, I met caring adults who encouraged me to be myself. I felt courageous when I learned about LGBTQ+ events. At the same time, I was thrilled to receive support from teachers and students in the school. In my senior year, I had the chance to participate in my school's Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA). The time we spend together gives me a chance to further express myself. I love having a place like GSA, and having an inclusive space for LGBTQ+ communities is a factor that I am looking forward to in college. I would love to be a source of support and energy for those who need it, a role I intend to pursue in my own future career.

The more I grow, the more I learn to respect other peoples' perspectives. I respect my mom's perspective, and this helped me to learn how to handle difficult conversations with those whom I love. I cannot say that I have tried to have this conversation with her, but I am confident that in college I will gain the knowledge necessary to keep learning about putting words to my experiences. Belonging to two cultures is difficult, especially when one is not inclusive of who I am. My dream is to study the psychology of child development, because I want to be a companion to children throughout the confusing teenage journey. I want to help them to find their meaning of life while feeling included and respected by those they love.