

WRITING

Bridge Between Worlds

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TYPE

MEMOIR
NARRATIVE

GENRE

GRADES 11–12

Growing up as a first-generation American, I’ve always been a vital link to my parents. Since I knew both English and Vietnamese, I was always the translator in the house. When it came to field trip slips, documents, advertisements, etc, I was the one to go to. My grandma would ask me questions like, “Can you flip the camera on FaceTime for me?” “Why is my phone not receiving phone calls?” “Can you play YouTube on the TV?” After I clicked a simple button, she would tell me I should be an engineer, which I found humorous.

My parents and grandparents were born in Vietnam and had to flee due to the Vietnam War. The stories whispered by my grandparents painted a vivid picture of hardship and sacrifice, of a homeland left behind in pursuit of peace and opportunity. My grandpa was a high-class general for the Southern side and was imprisoned for twenty years after the war ended. At my grandma’s house, you can see all his awards and

army photos hung up on the wall to the left of the hammock. I remember as a kid he would show me and my sister the bullet wound in his stomach. It looked like a second belly button and was funny because he had a big stomach and my grandma would make fun of him for looking pregnant. After he was released, my family sought solace and opportunity in America and settled in San Francisco.

My dad started off as a factory worker and my mom went to school for nails and never got a real college education. They ended up making a fairly successful nail salon together where my dad manages the salon while my mom works as a nail technician/manager. I remember as a kid if my grandparents couldn't take care of me, I would be taken to work with them for a few hours. My mom would introduce me to her customers, make me say, "Hi," and take me to the back to play by myself. I kind of miss it now because I haven't been to the salon since I was little.

As my parents poured their hearts into building their business ten to eight every day, I was basically raised by my grandparents, which is how I know how to speak fluent Vietnamese. A pro from being raised by my grandparents is constantly being offered amazing food. My grandma knew my favorites and would regularly ask me in advance if I wanted it the next day, like spring rolls, Th?t Kho, or chicken wings. I recollect once in elementary school, I didn't eat lunch and was starving, but when I went to my grandma's house I had the best Ph? of my life. The hot broth made me feel heart-warming and it

was very filling. The aroma of home-cooked delicacies, the warmth of familial bonds—these became the cornerstones of my upbringing, grounding me in a rich tapestry of culture and identity.

As my parents weren't around as much and my grandparents didn't know any English, I had to teach myself everything from a young age, like cooking. One time, I didn't have food at home, but I had some ingredients. I googled how to cook pasta alfredo and cooked for myself and my little brother. This gave me a spark in cooking. I remember my aunt let me help her cook mac n cheese and steaks, so I went to Safeway and bought the ingredients to cook steak. I let my mom taste it and she loved it. Now, occasionally, I will cook steak for my parents and siblings if they buy the ingredients. When I got to high school, I was basically living by myself. I would come home to an empty house every day, where I had to cook, clean, and take care of my brother all alone. I didn't want my little brother growing up like this, and my sister and I were about to head out to college. I wanted him to cherish his childhood, so I often took him out, even if it was just going to the park and playing soccer.

Sometimes I would see families going out for dinners or see my cousins regularly traveling and envy them. I never blame anyone because I understood why my parents worked so hard and kept it to myself, but I felt alone most of my childhood. Some days, I never got to see my parents. I would come home alone by bus and at night and my

parents would come home but not greet me or anything. They would go straight to the shower and go to sleep. I had to mature from a younger age, but it has taught me to be independent and that I can always rely on myself.

Despite being raised by my grandparents and not my parents, I learned to be grateful for my parents' hard work. I enjoyed being raised by my grandparents because they spoiled me, gave me so much freedom, and I was fed my grandma's delicious food. While it has taught me how to be independent and has shaped me to be who I am today, if it wasn't for my grandparents, I never would've truly come to understand and cherish my Vietnamese heritage. Without their guidance and influence, I wouldn't possess the ability to express myself as a Vietnamese-American or fully appreciate the rich tapestry of traditions that form the foundation of my identity.