

WRITING

How The Time Has Come to Be

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TYPE

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My first day of kindergarten, when I was five years old, was the first time I remember my brain working. It was a typical day in San Francisco: foggy at eight in the morning, with my mom driving and my older sister and I fighting in the back of the car as always. Still, things felt different in a way I simply could not explain. Considering I was only a child, things seemed so blank in my mind; things just made no sense and made me start to cry, but to this day I still don't know why.

All I wanted to do was have fun when I was a kid—the good old days, as I would say now as a high schooler—but it was not all fun and games. I was very afraid and, just to put it straight, I did not want to be there after the things my sister told me; she made it seem like school was awful.

When we got to school, my sister got out of the car and went her own way to her friends. But I didn't have any friends; I was new to the school and had to

make friends independently. Most kids considered school a second home—not by heart, but by chance, since we all got put in school at one point—but it was different for me. I went in with my mom and told her, “Mommy, I don’t want to go.” The place scared me to death; my fight or flight instinct had created a consciousness in my head and it was telling me that school seemed like a crazy place.

As I walked up the stairs with my mom, I heard kids and parents talking to each other, but I could not understand a thing. Most of the kids spoke Chinese with their parents. But when they saw me, things were not so inviting. I didn’t feel like I was a part of the Chinese community at that school; they looked at me in ways I could not understand at the time. Over the years, I concluded that they stared at me because I was not as Asian looking as them; I was browner because I had a Chinese mother and a Mexican father who was not there.

My teacher was a Japanese-American woman in her mid-fifties who explained to me what was really going on. She told me what we were going to do that day. I wanted to know what happens at school. She explained that all of us students were going to introduce ourselves. She was my first teacher, and, at first, I was a bit nervous and scared, but my mom was by my side— or at least I thought. Mom had actually left, but my teacher came up to me and said, “Hi! What’s your name?” I told her Kaleo and she said, “Well, it is nice to meet you, Kaleo. My name is Mrs. Ogi.” I thought, I dunno . . .

should I trust this lady? Eh, I'll give it a shot, I guess.

And suddenly it was 8:40 a.m.—time to go to class—so all the parents started to leave. Mrs. Ogi brought all the kids to her classroom and we stood on a colorful rug that seemed magical to me at the time. She said, “Alright, everyone, settle down. It’s time for your first day of kindergarten.”

At that moment, I felt like everybody else was a robot: all the kids had lined up and listened, but my brain could not comprehend the instruction to do that and all the kids looked at me meanly. Then I got the memo, but, damn, it made me feel so odd. I thought to myself, Why did I have to be so different from those around me?

Then we got to play in the yard. By lunch, all I wanted to do was go home.

That is until I sat down with my first-ever friend.

His name was Nathan. I had never had a friend like Nathan and I don’t think I ever will. Things were just different when I was younger. Nathan made me see kindergarten with a much clearer view—made that make sense in my tiny head—and, I mean, it was kindergarten—who am I kidding? How could a class like kindergarten be hard? But for me, it was the hardest thing in the damn world. It felt like I was plunged into the hardest challenge a kid could face. I was so used to things being easy—no assignments, no annoying students, no bullcrap, and no random questions. But when I was around too

many people or kids my head blanked out and I struggled. Throughout school and my entire life, my mom had to figure out what was going on with her son. Like when the teacher called and said, “Well, your kid is not like every other kid. He is different.”

But my mother was determined to get me the help I needed to be successful in life. I just need help processing my thoughts—or need more time than other kids. Needing more time to process made me fall behind on assignments and other academics. It made me feel distant from the class and those around me. It made me think I was unstandardized—almost not human.

This feeling stuck with me through elementary school and most of middle school. Then I had some click in my mind where I just knew that I had to change things because I didn’t want to feel like this forever; it had affected my life to the point where I felt like I had nothing left to motivate me.

Freshman year of high school something clicked in my mind; I was gonna change something now that I was somewhere new. I wanted to be regarded as able to do something with my life. And that’s exactly what I did: I’m now in my junior year of high school and soon gonna be a senior. I know I’m still young and have a lifetime ahead of me to grow, but I know that this time—the part of my life that I explain in this story—is what makes me who I am today. I am Kaleo Valencia-Chin: Valencia from my father, and Chin from my mother.