

“Two Lives as One”

Walking through the door of my home opens the overpowering smell of kimchi and sambap. The smell of garlic and meat sizzling on the pan is welcoming after a long day at a hectic high school. I drop my lunchbox off at the kitchen filled with a half-eaten sandwich and some fruit. My mom makes dinner with several different dishes. The sight of all these different side dishes makes my mouth drool in anticipation. I set up the table with small saucers and some bowls filled with rice. Tiny plates litter the table with various sauces like gochuchang and samchang. The plates look like huge buttons with multicolored hands waving at me, saying “welcome home”. This is the culinary culture my mom grew up with, the side of the family that we connected with often.

It was hard to admit that I have two different cultures and identities inside of me. Being born in America to Korean parents, creates two different cultures mixing together. At school I’m the all-American high schooler who does cheer, enjoys shopping with friends, and PB & J sandwiches. But at home I’m helping my mom make kimchi and various other Korean dishes. I’m used to the pungent smell of garlic, ginger and fish sauce that wafts its way towards me. I open the window to get rid of the smell every time. Sometimes my Korean culture peeks through my American high school life when the smell of kimchi-bokkeumbap that I brought for lunch, permeates the cafeteria. It was hard to embrace who I am as a second-generation Korean American.

When I took road trips with my cousins, we’d stop every hour or so to get food and snacks. Walking into In-N-Out we could hear the sizzle of fresh French fries and meat patties with cheese oozing off the top, the smell of sugar and various toppings at Fro-Yo shops, watching cheese being pulled from a grilled sandwich in local restaurants. Eating buttered popcorn at the movies and potato chips at their house was always fun. It’s a stark contrast from what I would eat at home with my parents. In a way, it’s refreshing having a change; almost comforting. I feel a sense of belonging here too.

It's my birthday now and the celebration is a combination of both my cultures. Throwing the party at home, my dad is grilling hamburgers in the backyard and my mom is making bulgogi in the kitchen. Hanging out with a few friends, we start baking my birthday cake. The smell of rich chocolate batter, has us sitting right in the front watching it rise and bake. Placing the dishes on the table, once again it’s been littered with buttons of side dishes all waving back at me. I’ve realized that there doesn’t have to be a choice between my two cultures. I don’t have to choose between my Korean and American side. I can both equally embrace both with no barrier between either culture. This is my home.