

Remote

I pick up the remote control, flip through the channels, and count off the characters.

One geeky sidekick whose glasses lay atop his large, angled nose.

Two simple-minded shop owners who speak with the same broken English that my grandparents have struggled to leave behind.

Three caricatures. The comedic relief whose awkwardness is overlaid by laugh tracks. They all look like me, and they have never had a story of their own.

This must be why the people at school giggle amongst themselves with their hands together in prayer, nodding side to side and grinning like fools. I fail to see the humor in the familiar way they drum their d's like a tabla, imitating Apu from the Simpsons but reflecting my relatives and loved ones. Flipping through the channels, these are the jokes that they see. Confusion bubbles up inside me, but all I can manage is a small laugh. This is what I have learned.

When my father immigrated to America over 20 years ago, he counted. He counted down the days, working as a hotel dishwasher to pay for engineering school and dreaming of moving to the heart of innovation and technology. He left behind security for hope. There are unfathomable sacrifices that every immigrant has made for the future of themselves and their children. These sacrifices cannot be brushed aside. My father's story wasn't written out for him, but he picked up a pen and set to work.

I asked him one day, now that he has raised us in the Bay Area and works as an engineer, whether he feels prejudice. Whether he even has to think about his accent. I didn't expect him to say yes. He recounted the investors, associates, and superiors who turned him down, seeing him primarily as his race, completely remote from his credentials. Does his accent make him stupid? Is he unintelligent for learning a new language by himself, for moving across the world and working as hard as he can? He told me it's okay, that he just picks himself up and moves on to the next person. This is how he survives. This is what he has learned.

Even when living in the Bay Area and knowing that TV portrayals are a stark contrast from the people in our lives, these stereotypes still sting us in a million little ways. However, equality is no longer a remote dream. Acceptance must be the story we write every day, the narrative that drives our future. The next generation will see us when they flip through the channels. We can help them recognize that they span beyond the control of others' expectations, into arts, innovation, and vivid colors. We count, and we need them to know that they count, too.