

Our Voice, Our Stories

As a daughter of two Vietnamese immigrants, I've learned a lot about my heritage through stories. Stories about incredible journeys, stories about sacrifices, but most importantly, the story of my parents' escape to this country. At the time, war was raging in Vietnam, which was being overrun by North Vietnamese communists. My mom's story of crossing over the ocean, fearful of storms, starvation, and death is inspirational. Through the duration of the entire trip, food and water was scarce, and hundreds of refugees were cramped on a small boat. The joy of finally arriving on land was short-lived, as they had to spend months in unsanitary refugee camps, waiting for an opportunity to go to a new land of freedom. When they finally made it, the challenges did not end. My parents had to overcome language barriers, lack of education, and a new set of customs.

What I can never understand is how society still cannot accredit people like my parents for their struggles. For an immigrant family that has lived here for over 40 years in America, a country harboring over 47 million immigrants, how can we still be treated as foreigners? It is not uncommon for us to enter the public sphere, wondering who will call us "ching chong," and who will be quickest to blame us for the "chinese virus," while blatantly disregarding the value of heritage. It is truly appalling how many Asians are typecast every single day.

Even I have a story to tell. I still remember the day my class went on a field trip to the Smithsonian museum to collect rocks. We took a short break to eat lunch, and I took out the Phở my grandmother spent hours making. When I started eating sliced beef, I was immediately crushed when another classmate pointed at it and asked, "Is that dog?" I didn't come home with rocks that day; I came home with an empty stomach and tears running down my face.

This country has experienced xenophobia for far too long. Now is the time to make a change and say *we matter too*. We need to realize the true pandemic of today is the mistreatment of this nation's residents, who were once called immigrants or refugees. The cure to end this prejudice is to voice our opinions and put the discrimination to rest. This world's technology and medicine is evolving, why can't we?

I am proud to be Vietnamese. This country is called the land of the free, known for its diversity and cultural acceptance. We are people who deserve to be heard and understood. Asian Americans won't be silent any longer. And to the boy that asked me if I ate dog, I forgive you, because I believe that this country can change. This starts with our voice and more importantly, our stories.