

TRANSCRIPTION

Meej mom.

After my grandma died when I was in second grade, yig laug Vam Xeeb and phauj Thoj became our grandparent. The people we would ask for advice, our wealth of knowledge. They were our living history.

When my uncle, yig laug Vam Xeeb, and his wife, phauj Thoj first stepped foot on American soil, they faced language barriers, challenges, hardships, no jobs, no home, no family, just a bit of government funds to rely on besides themselves.

The first thing they needed to do was to find ways to make money. They made money through small jobs, but there were still difficulties they had faced. They had little to no knowledge of English. They used their eyes and ears to learn from others to survive in this world. They had observed the world around them to gain the knowledge they had needed to survive.

After these months of hard work, hardships, and learning, there were many lessons they had learned along the way. These lessons would help yig laug Vam Xeeb and phauj Thoj help their own family members when they came to the United States. One of these lessons yig laug Vam Xeeb told his family members was to save money; to not spend all of the money you have earned. Even if you didn't earn much from a job, save some money. yig laug Vam Xeeb was firm on this. The money you saved will help you later in life when you are in a bad situation or other necessities. Through yig laug Vam Xeeb and phauj Thoj hardships, they had paved the way for our family to live in the United States.

Yig laug goes on about meej mom. Meej mom basically means *legacy and reputation*. He says we should uphold our grandfather's legacy and reputation. If we do not live up to this reputation and legacy, we would corrupt it. However, by living up to this legacy and reputation, we need to be a good person, and possibly be a person who does well in school or in other ways. This

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could lead to upholding the reputation and legacy of our grandfather. As we uphold our grandfather's meej mom, we can also enhance it. Our grandfather's legacy and reputation will become our generation's legacy and reputation that we will transform.

Our grandfather's meej mom, and our generation's meej mom, will be passed onto our own children as they grow older. The older generations have kept this legacy and reputation going, but along with this, they want us to do better than their generation here in the United States. Our parents, aunts, and uncles wanted us to aim higher, get a good education, a good-paying job, basically a better life than now.

Even now, I still think about this lesson. I took this lesson and reflected on it. This has brought even more motivation to do good in school, to aim higher, and to do what I wanted to do as a student, as my own person, as a Hmong American.

Even though this lesson has brought more motivation within me, I am still questioning what I want to do in life. I am a hard-working, diligent, A-student. My teachers think I will have a bright future ahead of me, and see that I am a great student. However, my future in itself is undecided since I do not have a solid goal or career I want to pursue. My only long-term goal is to complete college. However, I do not know that; I may want to strive for a career in medicine or healthcare or in science. I enjoy learning many things in school. I also like learning about things I do not know that much about. I am very conflicted about my future and goals, as well as being conflicted about myself.

What I am conflicted about myself is my identity, including finding out about who I am as a person. I know I am a Hmong American, a girl or young woman, a friend, a best friend, a student as stated above, and so on. Nevertheless, I still find myself questioning who I truly am.

From when I was a child, my parents would always push me to do good in school. I would do some extra work outside of school that would be about math and English, or in other words ELA.

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They would give me some pages to work on in a textbook of my grade level at that point in time. I would complete those pages, and have my parents or older brothers check them over. I never questioned why I did this, but this was for my own benefit to do good in school as a person who grew up in a Hmong household.

Throughout my childhood, I would do good in school because my parents wanted me to. My parents also wanted me, as well as my siblings, to be doctors. The reason behind this idea was they wanted us to live a better life than them and their generation, including the present as well. However, this would require going to college as the first step. This motivated my parents to push us to do even better in high school (a.k.a. getting A's), to join at least one club like debate or forensics, and join a sport. This would help me and my siblings to get into any college that we would want to attend.

Although I never really wanted to be a doctor, as my parents wanted me to pursue, my parents had brought valid points to consider. Being a doctor would provide me with lots of money to provide for myself, or even my own family one day. I could potentially give up what I may want to do for a high-paying job, but a career or job should be something that you can enjoy doing besides some of the downsides. This turmoil is still running inside me today on a career I may want to pursue.

And consider that is still undecided, I found that this had shaped me into the person I am today, as a person who does good in school, as well as influenced me to maybe consider a career in medicine/healthcare. I look towards my parents as a source of wisdom and experience that I can take with me along my path. A path that I will carve out based on my own desires and decisions, not based on what my parents want me to do. I believe that if I do what my parents want me to do, I may lose my way down my own path to what I want to achieve.

While the importance of education was focused on during my childhood, as well as in the present by my parents, I noticed as years went by that I hadn't learned how to speak or read or

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write Hmong as some of my Hmong peers can. I felt left out. Some of my Hmong friends would sometimes write in Hmong within our group chat. I wouldn't understand what they had written. But I look forward to when I will be taught Hmong when I get to high school. I would have been sent to a Hmong camp last year, where I would learn these things in the summer. Due to the pandemic, the camp was not able to run its program. However, the purpose of learning Hmong was that the culture could survive. Despite how strange my culture could be compared to American culture, it is still my culture. I should know of these things as well as the stories my uncle, yig laug Vam Xeeb had told, including other elders' and adults' stories. My culture and these stories are a part of who I am as a part of my memories and actions.

Even though I may not know who I truly am, and am I trying to find out who I am right now, in my childhood, I identified myself as Hmong American student. Yet, now, I have more identities that I can discover and identify. These identities are overlapping and intricate with one another to make up who I am today.

Somehow, these identities that make me who I am can endanger me even though I didn't do anything wrong. This reminds me of when my mother was worried about my elder brother when he goes out, or goes hunting. She always tells him to be careful and to not go hunting by himself. My mother was worried because of these things happening in society with Asian American hate crimes, or Asian American incidents or attacks.

I noticed that these Asian American hate crimes or attacks do not get as much publicity. As if it is saying this is not important when people get attacked, which is very important. As I reflect over this in my mind, the reason may be because as Asian Americans, society sees us as a "model minority." Being seen as a model minority, we are supposedly upper class or held up to high standards, and that we may have lots of money and a great life. Due to these reasons, the news may think that this is a small issue, or not as important, and in the end, influences the publicity of these Asian American hate crimes and attacks. I also believe that it could depend on your geography as well. When I visited New York City during spring break, I saw a report that an

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old Asian American lady was attacked at Times Square on a news channel. It may have been shocking to find that a person, particularly an Asian American, had been attacked at such a popular place.

These issues of Asian American hate crimes and attacks are worrying. There is a possibility that my family can be attacked, as well as myself. Even though I don't want to believe this might happen to my family or me, there is still a small chance that it can happen. I do not think about the possibility of this happening to my family since this issue seems like it would happen to other people instead of myself. But I find myself wanting to be more cautious, to be more wary of my surroundings as well as to worry about my family members and friends. Seeing that an Asian American was attacked in a public place like Times Square, it could technically happen anywhere, where there is some sort of secluded space within that place.

However, these worries are about the present. What about the future generations? What would be awaiting them in this cycle of hate and opportunities? I wonder if the United States, a place with a history of freedom, will be better than the present. However, it's our generation's job to make this world a better place—as cheesy as it sounds. We are the future, the next generations will hopefully grow up in a better but improving world where they would make a brighter future than we had.

All of these events, ideas, stories, and experiences has shaped me into who I am today, how I present myself, and how I think. They become a part of me as my inspirations, wisdom, worries, and my history. As I reflected on who I am today, over my identities, these identities are a part of me as they are my strengths, legacy, reputation, and who I am within this world. Everything your senses witness becomes who you are as your experiences, as your wisdom, becomes our memories and feelings that can be shared by everyone. As a Hmong American, I carry the past generations' legacy, reputation, stories, and history while thinking about my future and the future generations as people have done all over the world. We carry more things on our shoulders



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than you would think from seeing just the outside of us. My meej mom will be passed on to the next generations to come.

Thank you for taking time to listen to my story.

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