

Visions of Unity 2023

Red

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I hate the color red and the generalization of words because when all my friends had a dad, I had a father.

I remember the muffled sound of my mother throwing white porcelain dishes against the wall when she found out my father cheated on her, while I sat on the floor eating com-va-trung. I recall the faint sounds of police sirens in the distance as my parents argued and threw objects at each other, as I covered my baby sister's crib, afraid one of the items would hit her. I remember the knocking at my door and the handcuffs on my mother's hands as they tore her away from her baby. Begging them to stop, my mother's wrists bled bright red.

She always said her favorite color was red, I found that prominent when she dressed me in red aoi dai (Vietnamese dress) to prepare me for the Vietnamese new year. I didn't like red, I liked purple but we did not have that luxury.

My father's favorite color was green, for luck he said, so why does he continuously hit my mother until she no longer has fair porcelain skin, but red?

My father took us to Chuck E. Cheese once, and when it was time to leave I begged to stay as he pulled me by my pigtails home, where my smile quickly faded when I heard the clinking of his leather belt. With no compassion, he burned my skin red.

After church, we'd go eat as a tradition, only this time my father announced his departure. That was the last time we went to Marie Calendars, it was the last of many traditions.

His leaving left me alone, an American with no heritage, an American who only spoke her native tongue because her parents only argued in Vietnamese. Born in America yet unable to speak fluent English broke my inner child. I was bullied for my Vietnamese accent, and poor English pronunciation, and when they found out I had no father, they only laughed more. It developed my hatred toward my own culture.

My teachers threw me into ELD programs, because I was not, "standard". Forcing my Viet tongue back in my throat, acknowledging that if I wanted to be in America, I had to taste its alphabet. But in less than a year, I had relearned the entirety of my alphabet and was able to join back with the rest of my classmates. I was no longer a foreigner, and the only thing I had to give up was my native buds.

Growing older, I realized I did not need a father figure, and that his absence was a persistent desire to continue traditions. The deficiency of a father figure left an empty void in my heart but still, I discovered that replacing this hole with discovering new traditions and embracing my native tongue was all I needed. Volunteering and service filled the void my father left when he disappeared and taking his position as a father figure led me to become a leader to others in my community.

Despite everything, his abandonment and abuse taught me the most valuable lesson in the world. He taught me independency, most importantly, forgiveness. My father was damaging but I saw him as a didactic dad, what others saw grey, I saw a rainbow of opportunities. I assimilate like a prisoner in a cell, unwelcomed by society. I choose to see a prism, not a prison, and the light shining through leaves me with an array of colors providing perspicacity, lighting my desire for service coming from a place of empathy. I no longer hate the color red, I still choose to call him my dad. So, I dedicate this to my father, who taught me to be optimistic, and to my dad, have hope to make new traditions, and cherish the old ones.

I love you, Dad.