

Who I Am

“Do me a favor. Go back to your country.”

A decade later and those words still don't fail to gall me. An old White man felt the need, almost compelled, to tell me that after hearing my dad suggest that I “đi chơi trên cỏ đi”, or “go play in the grass” in Vietnamese.

I was 7 in West Haven Park, and the Sun had just risen.

“This is America. Learn English.”

I wanted to tell him off... wanted to say that America was founded by immigrants. That America is a salad of many peoples. That America is meant to be a better place for my parents and all foreigners alike.

Unlike some people, I think before I speak (some people clearly have no filter). I thought about what could happen next: he could start chasing us. I know I can run, but can my elderly father do the same? My mouth opened, yet no words came out.

I'd always known that my parents weren't born in the same country as me. Their thick accents told me that, but I never thought much of it.

After all, I loved having my parents read to me as a kid. In fairy tales like cái câu chuyện của Tấm với Cám, or the Vietnamese version of Cinderella, the letters and words within a story changing into sounds fascinated me. It wasn't just for me to learn how to read; I secretly wanted them to sound more like me. From my young perspective, their voices could be difficult to understand.

Well, they still can be difficult to understand. Despite having to talk on the phone for them for various tasks, from scheduling doctor appointments to even telling Visa that our credit card was used by an identity thief (some people try to make us feel bad about our identities, while some are trying to steal them- aren't people just great?), I'm still proud of being the child of immigrants. Proud of being fully Vietnamese. AND fully American. It just means I get to experience more cultures.

So when, I see the ongoing xenophobia and Sinophobia, which has led to a resurgence of Yellow Peril, that has resulted from the national pandemic, I know from my personal experiences that the Asian-American community and all marginalized communities are strong and can not only survive, but THRIVE in the face of adversity.