

I wake up almost everyday to a middle-aged Chinese woman hysterically screaming. The woman is my mother, and behind the veneer of screams and threats to leave me if I am not ready within five minutes, lies a self-sacrificing, iron-willed, and hard-working woman striving to provide a fulfilling life for her children.

My mother is a peculiar little woman with beautiful hands, hands with wrinkles like the creases of great oaks. On days like these, when the clouds above release raindrops the size of baseballs and people wake up freezing and exhaling foggy breath, my mother can be found standing near the stove. One hand rests on her hip and the other is slowly stirring a steamy soup as she stares deep into her cauldron, half-amused with her eyes squinting, as if she is waiting for something to happen. It is on days like these that I notice the dark folds that line my mother's hands and the folds speak to me.

My mother's weathered hands tell tales long forgotten, concealed by the hard-working woman who brings a ubiquitous sense of love and permanence to her family. As a child, my mother lived in Thailand, along with her family of ten. Her childhood was marked by a strong desire to learn, though she accumulated only four years of formal education before her parents could not afford any more. The rest of my mother's early years are buried in the shadow that followed World War II.

The strong-willed woman who tells me about her past began a new life in a foreign land at the age of twenty four, where she assumed an American name, Susan. In Kansas City, Missouri she lived as a housekeeper for a kind Jewish family while attending school. One day my mother found herself unable to continue her schooling: she was pregnant with my half-sister, Jennifer. Not long after my mother divorced her husband at the time and moved to California with her newborn daughter where she met my father. Eight years later, I was born. However, after a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with my father, my mother divorced her second husband and took on her greatest challenge yet, supporting two children as a single-parent. All my mother's past trials: struggling with English, abusive husbands, monetary issues, seemed to melt away in the face of this latest challenge.

I learned in my freshman biology course that with much time species slowly adapt to their surroundings in order to survive. My mother's adaptations however, occurred instantaneously. She was forced to become a self-reliant individual, constantly motivated by her two dependent children. From that defining moment in my mother's life, all of her subsequent actions can be characterized as selfless and supportive. The needs of my sister and I were always put before those of that small Asian lady whose unimpeachable character seemed larger than her.

I became very driven in school. My mother exercised a great deal of influence over me, as she frequently recounted her past and stressed the importance of education. To my mother, education is priceless; it is something not to be taken for granted. My mother has been waiting almost seventeen years for me to go to college and now I am about to realize it.

In college, my mother says, I will learn lessons in life. These are not courses listed in the catalog; they are obstacles I must face to become successful. My mother has already learned many lessons in life, as well as my older sister. As the youngest in my family, now it is my turn, and the reality of it all strikes me on days like these, as I stare deeply into the folds and bones of my mother's hands.