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ANTH 4980

4 May 2024

Senior Thesis

I wanted to do a collage because when I was around ten years old I started making collages out of my mom's old magazines. Once I got into high school I got too busy to really have any other hobbies besides swimming, water polo, and reading so I thought I would take the opportunity to revisit something I once loved.

The bottom left represents my life as a baby. It shows the people I am surrounded by and the significance of their impact during my upbringing. As you follow the path up the collage to what I'm choosing to call my middling years, it consists of late elementary, middle, and high school. It shows the sports and instruments I played as well as my friends and family. The last section of my collage is the upper right hand corner, it's who I am now.

I grew up with divorced parents who got back together. Unusual is an understatement. My mom, Jacque, was born and raised on Guam. Our family lineage goes all the way back to the indigenous tribes and Spanish settlers. My dad, Jim, was born and raised in Los Angeles County, CA. I am the first generation Chamorro to be born and raised in the states on my mom's side and second generation California-born on my dad's side. Growing up, my mom kept our Chamorro heritage and culture alive in everyday things like language and food. She's also the reason I fell in love with anthropology. Instead of saying "Godmother" or "Godfather" I have always said "nina" and "nino." When referring to spice we always say "pica" rather than "spicy" or "hot." As

a child I didn't learn the English terms for body parts, I only knew the Chamorro words. My dad never questioned it, in fact I think he enjoys the language, but not as much as he enjoys the food.

A lot of Chamorro culture is centered around food, not only what you're making, but the entire social process. I remember hearing stories about the parties at my Nana's house, my great grandmother, and the food was always the most important component besides family. It doesn't matter the gender, everyone is taking part in cooking the meal, especially if it's for a holiday. In my family, since we're so far from Guam, our big celebrations are Easter and Thanksgiving. We would go down to San Diego the day before and spend the entire day, and well into the night, cooking and prepping all the food for the next day. The day spent cooking and prepping is filled with stories from my family's childhood on Guam, they're how I learned about different legends, practices, and more of the language. The food we cook together is a reflection of the hardships still found on Guam and a symbol of connection in our family. For example, chicken kelaguen is a common dish on Guam. It's really simple but is tedious. My dad is in charge of grilling the chicken breasts, my siblings, cousins, and I are in charge of kamyoin the coconut (grating it on a kamyoin), and chopping the chicken is everyone else's job. My mom and older cousin are always the ones to assemble the dish and add the finishing flavors. Each of us has a part in the dish, sharing the labor.

Another aspect of my life that had a huge impact was sports. I played all kinds of sports growing up, but the only sports I ever truly felt like I belonged were water polo and swimming. My name means mermaid, so it's fitting that I spent a large portion of my life in the water. I've always struggled with making girl friends but sports gave me "an opportunity to meet other people, communicate, and socialize," (Mihai, 2021, p 20). Without sports, I probably wouldn't have made girl friends. Swimming taught me how to be competitive, race against myself, and

only rely on others when necessary. Water polo taught me what it was like to be on a team, to have a family outside the one you're born into, and to trust others.

Growing up I always had really long hair. There are only two times I ever drastically changed my hair, once when I was around ten and then again just a few years ago in 2022 at the age of twenty. My entire life when someone asks me what my favorite feature of myself is I always respond with, "my hair." It holds memories and connections to people, places, and even feelings. Helen Holmes describes hair as having the ability to "disrupt the 'coherent self' and the ability to feel in control," (Holmes, 2023, p 92). Those two times I changed my hair, I was grasping for control. I am a control freak. Since high school I've gotten better, but there are moments in life that make you lose all control and those were two pivotal ones in my life. The first, when I was around ten my parents, who had been divorced since I was four, got back together and decided to move us from San Marcos, CA to San Clemente, CA. I was moving away from my Girls Scout troop, my friends, and my basketball team. In a moment of panic and no control, I asked my dad to take me to cut my hair. I cut around sixteen inches off. The next time, a few years ago I had already been talking about maybe chopping my hair off and I was overcoming a horrible depressive episode, so in order to feel like I had agency in my life, I cut it off. I cut around 14 inches off this time. It felt like a weight lifted from me, like all the things I was working through just got a little easier. Further into the book, Holmes talks about the idea of the half identity and cut hair retaining some essence of its owner's being while being detached from it is seen as contaminant(2023). The hair I cut off contained the essence of fear, uncertainty, pain, sadness, and anger. The act of me cutting that hair and releasing that material part of myself allowed me to step into who I am today.

Another form of materiality that makes me who I am are books. When I was young and struggling with dyslexia my mom made me read everything as practice. When her and my dad would fight, no matter the age, I would pick up a book and disappear into a different life. I found peace in the pages of books and in the lives of the characters. I got so used to always reading out of physical books that I refuse to use anything other than the physical copy.

There are many more aspects of my life and who I am but these are the biggest pieces of me: my family, my hair, and my books. I've struggled to know who I am, and now that I do, it's a battle to accept every piece except those.

References

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