My Father: A Journey to the

Land of Opportunity

Thirty-One Years Ago, My Father Dreamed of a New Life

And Decided to Act

By Steve Yeh

My father sits on the white sofa, seeming confident yet calm about the interview. Through his eyes, hardships can be seen. These adversities seemed to have softened his eyes over the years. His white t-shirt and khakis outfit defines him as a firm believer of simplicity, though his black-rimmed eyeglasses contradict so, bringing out my dad’s wittiness and bold character. The sunlight peers in through the paned window, bringing in just enough brightness for the lights to remain off.

A modest man, my father was born on the island of Taiwan in 1956. The United States-backed Chinese Nationalists fled to Taiwan after defeats by Communists led by Mao Zedong. The Nationalist set up a martial law. Under the martial law, citizens were suppressed of their freedom of speech, “military courts convicted thousands of civilians of sedition and other crimes” (Associated Press). Also, military censorship limited economic freedoms as well as individual freedoms. The martial law was lifted in 1987, five years after my dad immigrated to the United States.

My dad joined many other Asians who also immigrated to the United States. Asians “for the most part, have far higher professional and educational qualifications than most earlier groups” (Barringer), they immigrated because of “accelerated modernization” (Barringer), meaning there were not enough professional worker positions. Many Asian immigrants faced hardships such as racism, discrimination, and ostensibly being “out of place in American society”. These forms of destitutions can be found daily, from racist remarks to violence. Immigrants from every corner of the world who come to America every day have to be courageous to fend off these hazards of life in order to flourish and lead a successful life. My father did just so.

My father came to the United States, also known as the Land of Opportunity, for one reason, opportunity. He, with a stoic demeanor, said he “came here to study geosciences particularly seismology because here it is more advanced, academic environment is more advanced.” My father studied at SUNY Binghamton for a master’s degree in geosciences.

During his trip, he “didn’t know what to expect once the plane landed.” In fact, my father eagerly said, this was his “first trip on an airplane… the experience was new.” On the plane, though, my dad already felt homesick.

My dad faced his first adversity when he came out of the airport in New York City in the middle of the frigid winter. He said, hesitantly, “I had to drag heavy luggage in the snow. I didn’t know people used boots in the snow; I only had leather shoes. That was my first day, already very hard.” Also my dad passed by the homeless, they “shouted at me but I [my father] didn’t know what they meant so I walked quickly. I was too tired to deal with that.” Asian-Americans in the United States “are hobbled by less blatant but more pervasive barriers of language and culture” (Dugger). Asian-Americans are seen as “unaggressive, having poor communications skills and limited English proficiency” (Dugger), which makes Asian-Americans, like my dad, easier to target, especially on their first day in the United States.

My dad expected these things to happen, racism and discrimination. He also expected a lot of new opportunities in America, such as more jobs. My dad expected “that there would be a lot of new things to learn.” He, additionally, was interested in the American lifestyle.

However the many pros, my dad also faced more cons. One was that he only had $6000 to live off of. SUNY Binghamton didn’t give scholarships to foreign students in the first semester. My dad said that he didn’t know if he should’ve continued at the time because of severe financial limitation. He decided that he would continue; he studied very during the second semester. My dad was awarded the scholarship for his academic achievements in the second semester.

When inquired about my dad’s time at SUNY Binghamton, he said with one big grin that he didn’t graduate. He said though he “studied pretty hard… there was a course [I took] taught by a professor from England. I could hardly understand her accent so I didn’t get a good grade for that class. Because of that, my dream to go to a top tier institute for PHD couldn’t be realized.” My dad decided to start working instead of “pursuing a higher education”.

My dad thought his decision was “a logical one”, to quit grad school and start working. He said that sometimes in life “you have to change tracks”. By that, he meant that sometimes things aren’t ought to be and things just have to be let go of for someone to forward with their life. My dad said that if he could have his time back he would’ve tried more things, both in academics and daily life. He said everyone should, everyone should “try as many things as possible”. “Because”, my dad said, “life is supposed to be good.”

After the interview, my dad appeared to be light-hearted, though not exactly to the point of elation. He gets up off the sofa, stretches and asked if the interview was over. Then, my dad smiles, content to be over with the telling of his story of the journey to the land of opportunity.

Works Cited

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