

America wasn't created with the mindset for everyone to have equal opportunities, however, through continuous efforts led by minorities, the 14th amendment included the citizenship clause, and paved the way for a new wave of migrants to come to the US. Among these people were my parents. Their journey wasn't easy, but their fight to start a new life is deeply admirable. Personally, immigration hits very close to home since I grew up in the suburbs of Tigard, however, my passport boldly reads 'Bharat ganrajya', meaning the Republic of India.

Immigration has always been an ongoing struggle throughout American history. During the 1900s large companies were looking for cheap labor which led to an influx of immigrants to have immigrated to America (6, Immigrant Factory Workers). Nativists started protesting how Asian immigrants were wrongfully "stealing jobs", and that led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This legislation would finally be replaced by the Magnuson Act (1943) which would allow 105 Chinese immigrants to enter yearly. The Magnuson Act would reflect similar ideologies that are written into modern-day immigration quota laws (2, Bier, David J.). When I was young I remember asking my father about the countless forms that we had to fill out yearly to renew our documents, because only a certain number of people are granted green cards a year. According to green card processing information from 2018, immigrants originating from India had to wait an average of 14 years to get a green card (2, Bier, David J.).

Our family moved to Portland when I was about one year old, under a H1B visa that was issued for approximately 3 years. Around 2008 we applied for permanent residency, where my father had to prove that he was not taking the job of another qualified citizen, and then applied for the I-485 to apply and process our request (15, Visa Bulletin). By 2009 we had applied for a green card. I had gotten my biometrics rechecked twice before our family's application was finally considered in 2019 (15, Visa Bulletin). I still remember the wave of relief over my

father's face when the refreshed webpage said that we finally got our green card. As infuriating as the process was we were glad that we could finally apply for citizenship.

As I took the time to get to know the struggles my parents faced, I realized that we all had different experiences. We moved to Portland because my dad was offered a civil engineering job at a local firm. While his transition went smoothly and his colleagues were quick to accept him into the workforce, he quickly started feeling out of place in social conversations, where everyone eagerly talked about the "*wrong type of football*". Eleven years later, however, I would catch him yelling at the screen every Saturday about how the Seahawks have a weakening defensive line. He was willing to learn the social and cultural traditions of the Pacific Northwest, however, he still kept up with the scores for the Mohun Bagan matches at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata.

My mother, on the other hand, had to quit her job teaching when she had me because she wanted to dedicate her entire time to raising me, which she did while still maintaining our culture. She refused to let the culture die out and continued making make-shift pandals for puja and she was persistent in raising me "Bangla". Assimilating to the culture was a challenge to my mother, and she believed strongly that we shouldn't have to change our culture simply because we were in a new country. She recalls getting 'grossed out' looks when she sat down with the teachers when she volunteered at different elementary schools. To the few people that asked her about her culture, she proudly explained her roots. At the same time, my personal experiences always came from a place of never fitting and I had similar experiences with my peers. My first memory where I knew I was different was in first grade, where I excitedly opened up my lunchbox with an omelet my mom made with vegetables and spices. A boy came up to me with a look of disgust on his face and said, "Eww, that smells weird," while he was eating his omelet

that was light yellow from the hot lunch line. I remember coming home crying, asking to buy hot lunch from then on, content with eating cold french fries and frozen blocks of strawberries. I continued getting snide comments about my skin color and identity throughout school and it was until my so-called best friend told me to "go back from where I came from" that I realized that this wasn't something most people face. These were the first instances I experienced xenophobia and discrimination that many immigrants, unfortunately, face in our country.

As I grew up, through learning from my mother, I realized that I shouldn't have to hide my ethnicity to please others. Eventually, I felt a need to stand up for myself, especially when I first began correcting people when they were mispronouncing my name. I began to think like my mother and refused to assimilate into a country to fit in. Many immigrants like my family have to deal with this kind of inequity, discrimination, and xenophobia that impacts everyday life. Some immigrants end up losing their own culture to assimilate, but I was lucky to have a mother who made sure we never lost ours. My family and I are part of the 47 million immigrants currently living in the US that are promised certain unalienable rights and we should not have to assimilate nor apologize nor for bringing in our different cultures (2, Bureau US Census). Immigrants make the US more diverse and are an integral part of this country and it's unjust that they are often unwelcome in American society.

I would like to say that we, like all other immigrants in the US, definitely make a cultural impact in our community as immigrants. My mother crochets hats that she donates to local winter drives annually. She helps children at the local YMCA daycare with puzzles and teaches them any material that they don't understand on their homework. She shares her altruism and her culture with pride. My mother has always taught me to be unapologetically myself and continue voicing my opinions when there is an injustice occurring. This influenced some of my decisions

in life, and it inspired me to get involved with local grassroots political organizations to help fight against systemic oppression. My father is a notable figure in engineering and he's been a speaker at conventions in Atlanta. He's also trying to help others when he can by donating and volunteering for local organizations. He has always stressed the importance of helping others when we can and always checking the privilege that we have. I was involved in robotics since I was a child, and this year I was allowed to lead and organize some outreach efforts. I took the time to organize a gratitude card drive to thank nurses and healthcare workers for their hard work during COVID-19. Learning to be kind and speaking up against injustice were two lessons that helped me navigate my journey when it came to finding myself, as well as contributing to benefit my community.

As a child of immigrants, I want to be able to help others who have gone through similar immigration experiences as we have. Minoru Yusa is known for speaking out against the unjust treatment of Japanese Americans during WWII and has been most notable in helping his community. However, one of the notable points from his story, is he didn't just talk, but he also put his words into action as he went as far as committing acts of civil disobedience to protest (3, Youtube). What he did was so courageous and when he was receiving his medal of honor, Barack Obama said that his work, "is a call to our national conscience" (1, Youtube). I want to follow in those footsteps by using both my words and actions.

I am always willing to listen to people's stories and help them in any way I can from the struggles that they are facing, especially because I have faced similar challenges as a child of immigrants. I would befriend any newcomers so they feel less alone in this new unknown environment and share how it is important to keep and share pride in one's culture. Everyone's story is unique, and the more unique narratives we have about immigration shared in the public

eye, the less ambiguous the entire process may seem. The current xenophobic comments are from misunderstandings and portraying immigrants as the 'other person', but it's important to be open-minded and friendly. Every newcomer deserves to feel welcomed in this land of immigrants and to do so we all must build stronger communities that welcome diversity; we need to be willing to listen to each other's stories in order to do this as my parents have shared theirs with me.

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