

A Vietnamese American Smoothie
By Kerri Tran

America is the blender of the world. Everyone mixes together into an appealing smoothie. Part of the appeal is that people can be American while still holding onto their heritage. So why is it that I feel disconnected from my Vietnamese heritage, possibly the whitest Asian-American in the history of the world?

My mom is white. My dad, however, is an immigrant from Vietnam. This means I have dark hair and tanner skin but I have freckles, which aren't seen on Asians much.

As an American I'm a pretty normal kid. I dance and swim, I like to read. However, when my relatives come around, everyone else turns to stare. Generally, my Grandpa (Ong Noi) drives me to activities because he wants to. When I was in elementary school, he walked me to school, then waited until I went inside. One day, another student noticed him and asked me why there was a creepy old man watching me everyday in the mornings. I explained that he was my grandpa.

On the other side of my life I am isolated from family because I am so American. I don't speak Vietnamese so I can't understand half of what my grandma says and I tend to butcher my pronunciation when I try. I know little to nothing about Vietnam and the culture, which saddens me.

Whenever my relatives visit, all of them visit. Random great aunts scatter all over, jabbering in sharp Vietnamese and laughing. I like my relatives, but I can't actually understand them. My Ba Noi (grandma) always has to walk me around the room and she tells me what to say. I probably mess it up, which explains the roaring laughter that is flowing from my great aunts. My cheeks burn and I'm always grateful when it's time to leave.

My father immigrated from Vietnam at a young age. He doesn't like to talk about his childhood much. When I asked if I could go there he mentioned a slew of reasons not to visit Vietnam. "They don't have plumbing. The water and air are nasty there. Why would you even want to go there?"

This tells me that he lived in poor conditions, which might explain why he doesn't tell stories of his childhood or speak Vietnamese to his children. This has caused my disconnection from my Vietnamese heritage.

I don't want future children to face the dilemma that I face, of how to reconnect to a lost culture. My hope for the future is that all countries will provide basic needs to their people so that everybody will take pride in their country.

I would like to raise awareness of poverty in other countries, which should inspire people in wealthier countries to help. Then hopefully, the memories of immigrants won't be so painful that they can't retell them to their children. And I might just learn Vietnamese along the way.