

By My Side

Like any child, I hated going to the doctor's when I was younger. I hated standing next to my mom at the check-in counter that I wasn't tall enough to look over and I hated sitting in the pediatric waiting room as I listened for my name to be called. I always had that same uneasy feeling when a stethoscope roamed my back or when a Popsicle stick peered above my throat. It's no surprise that each time I visited South Cove, I would immediately race towards the TV (which had Nickelodeon on 24/7) before my appointment and then to the front desk for stickers afterwards (my favorite were the classic Barbie ones). Back then, those were the only parts of the doctor's office that I liked.

This past year, my senior year of high school, I took a class called Asian American Literature where we read memoirs, novels, and poems written by Asian American authors. It was the first time I had ever learnt about the Asian American identity and history at school. Before this class, I had never completely understood the hardships that families endure to be able to come to and live in the United States.

In Asian American Literature, we read a book called *The Barbarians Are Coming* by David Wong Louie about Sterling, the son of two Chinese immigrants. Sterling struggles with becoming a father, holding a job, and the confusing balance between his Chinese and American identities. Throughout the novel, we learn that he and his father Genius have more in common than what Sterling believed. We went back in time with Genius during his narrative to when he left his wife and family in China to immigrate to America. Genius opened a laundromat and he was stuck behind a counter all day. When work ended, he would eat dinner by himself in the back of the store. He spoke no English and listened politely as customers shouted at him for

ruining their clothes, unable to do anything but repeatedly apologize. Once Genius had made enough money, he sent for his wife and daughter to come join him in America; only then was he able to be with his family again.

When I read Genius' story, I noticed many parallels in his struggles that I never really recognized at home. My mom and dad came to America as adults without knowing a word of English and lived in the projects with their two daughters. Only my dad had a job at that time so my mom would look after my sister Sharon and me. As we grew older, my mom found a job that required her to work until the evening when all the other kids' parents would already be home and my dad still worked as a waiter despite his aching back.

Genius' story sounded unbelievably difficult and he was only a character in a book I was reading for English class. My parents were the real deal and their journeys seemed impossible. However, it was the communities like Chinatown that helped my family to where we are today, to something that felt unimaginable from the beginning; sending their first child to university. Moreover, it was the community at South Cove that stayed by our side the entire time. It was the nurse who reassured my sister and me that everything was alright while our dad was getting his check up. It was Dr. Zhang whom my mom called when I had a fever at midnight and she had no one else to turn to. It was where some of the most important people in our lives watched my sister and me grow up from goofy babies to bickering teenagers. We still cringe when we get our flu shots every year but I bet Nurse Lü finds it better than how we used to cry.

It's the people who are there for you at some of your weakest and strongest moments that are a few of the most influential people in your lives. So even if I hated going to the doctor's when I was a child and I still wince at the sight of a needle, I will be forever grateful for the

community at South Cove. They were there with me a few months after being born into this world and a few months before I head off to college. I know I will strive to be as hard-working and kind-hearted as they are because South Cove is the type of community that helps make the little things possible.