

Like a duckling waddling close to its mother, I trailed a few steps behind my father, each with a load of groceries in flimsy plastic yellow bags. A young girl and an old man walking in the sweltering heat of summer; that's invariably how strangers saw us.

The realization that we don't look our actual roles first struck me in the seventh grade. My friend and I were strolling home, chatting about the events that transpired that day. As we approached my apartment, we spotted a hunched figure that I knew was my dad. He sported his raggedy cleaning clothes that clung to his brown skin and an olive green cap to cover his bald spot. He lugged a hefty black garbage bag to the curb, but stopped as soon as he saw us, plopped the bag down and gave us a warm smile and a wave.

My friend inched closer to me, cupped her hand to my ear and whispered,

"Is that your grandpa?" I was dumbfounded. I gawked at her for a solid few seconds before giving a little chuckle and replying,

"Oh, no, no, no, that's my dad!"

I was slightly amused, partially offended, and downright intrigued. To think that somebody thought that my dad was my grandpa? It was funny at first, but then the realization hit full on: my parents are old. They are twice the age of other parents, evidenced by the gray hairs sprouting on their heads.. I felt they were admirable, but this admiration was met with the revelation that the older they are, the sooner they will go.

These thoughts ran rampant in my mind as I parted ways with my friend and stood in front of my dad. He was like a gentle giant with welcoming arms and an unmistakable smile. I looked into the cloudy whites of his eyes and the walnut brown of his irises thinking about him, my parents, and the future that stood in front of us all.

In that moment I vowed to live wholly, to be diligent in all ways, but also to live for even the most seemingly mundane moments in life. Between school and dinner I focused fervently and foremost on schoolwork, but also allotted a certain amount of time for drawing or playing the piano. I wanted to learn beyond the curriculums that tethered my mind and earnestly fulfill my aspirations as an artist. Born into a family of farmers, nurses, and accountants hailing from the Philippines, I couldn't resist breaking the mold. I dove into my work, lost in a sea of my imagination, and would only resurface when I realized the sun's rays creeping out the window.

When my mom arrives home from work and my dad is done cooking dinner, I often give a little homemade piano recital in our cramped family bedroom where the piano awaits. I try to make this happen each and every day. The day my uncle died, my father asked if I could play Amazing Grace. He sat near the window with watery eyes roaming the outside world, ears fixated on my performance, mind scavenging for memories of his beloved brother. This moment was a culmination of everything really; I forever want to impress them, entertain them, honor them, and remind them of how much they matter, how much they are loved. When the song ended, my father turned back to meet my eyes. I knew that he felt my intentions and that, no matter how many days we have together we will live them with love and mutual admiration.