

STORIES THAT SHAPE US

Narratives of Intergenerational Resilience and Chinese Canadian Families



FRED CHOU | CARMEN HUANG | MIKAELA CHIA | WENDY MA

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and Chinese Canadian Families**

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University of Victoria

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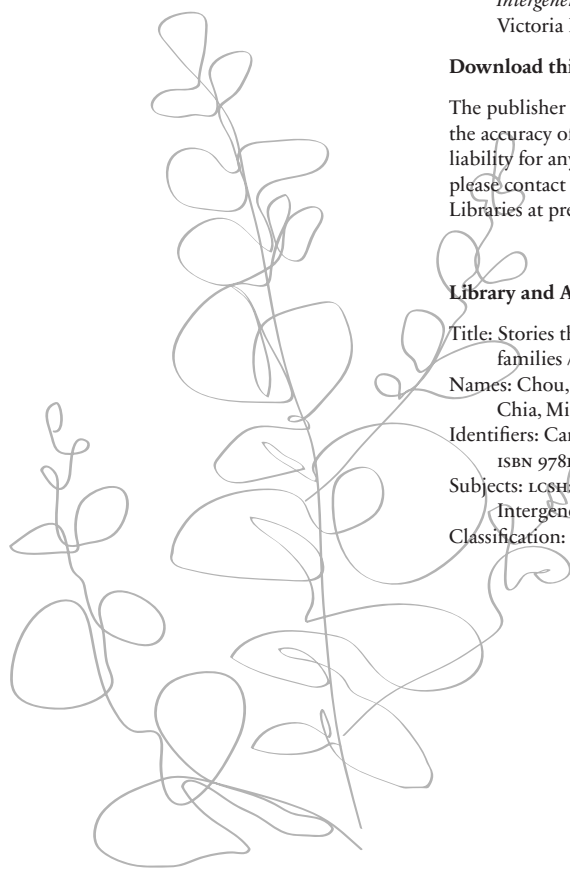
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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Fred Chou: Conceptualization (*lead*); supervision (*lead*); funding acquisition (*lead*); methodology (*lead*); project administration (*lead*); investigation (*lead*); formal analysis (*equal*); writing - draft (*equal*); writing - review and editing (*equal*).

Carmen Huang: Supervision (*supporting*); formal analysis (*equal*); investigation (*equal*); project administration (*supporting*); writing - draft (*equal*); writing - review and editing (*equal*).

Mikaela Chia: Investigation (*equal*); project administration (*supporting*); formal analysis (*equal*); visualization (*equal*); writing - draft (*equal*); writing - review and editing (*equal*).

Wendy Ma: Investigation (*equal*); project administration (*supporting*); formal analysis (*equal*); visualization (*equal*); writing - draft (*equal*); writing - review and editing (*equal*).

The content of the stories presented in this book were based off direct quotes from interviews with the participant storytellers (pseudonyms: George, Audrey, Alex, Samantha, Cecilia, Isabelle, Eleanor, and Emma) and adapted by the authors with permission granted by the participant storytellers. Written contributions from Alex, Isabelle, Eleanor, and Emma are included in the Reflections section of the book.





INTRO DUCTION ION



OVERVIEW

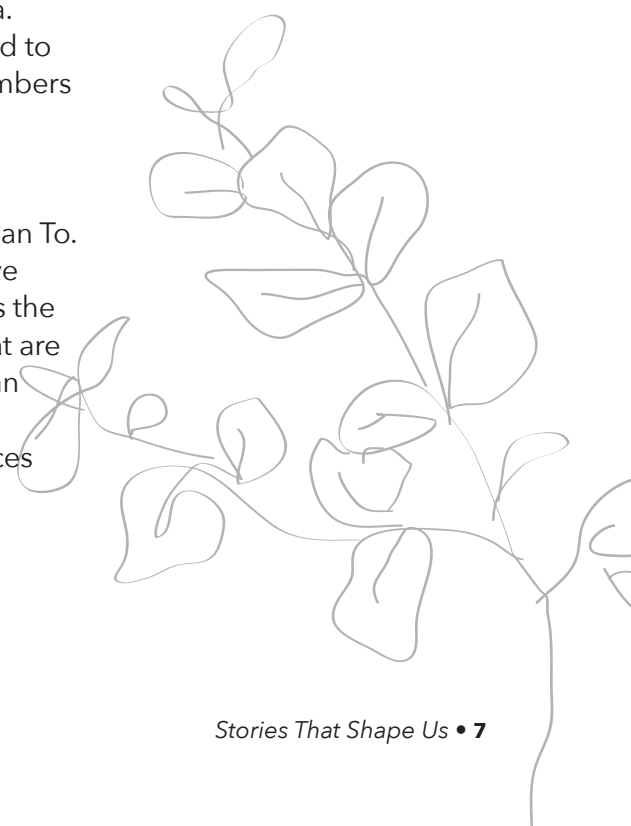
This book covers stories of intergenerational resilience in Chinese Canadian families, how these stories were cultivated, and reflections from the researchers and participants involved in this project. Together with four family dyads, individual and family stories were developed using a collaborative research process. The stories presented here are holistic and written in a manner that strives to honour the voices of the participants. Not only were these stories imparted to us as researchers to witness and co-develop, these stories were also shared within the family dyads—a process of witnessing that is represented in this book.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FUNDING

We acknowledge the Lands in which we have had the privilege to conduct this project. For the research team, we presided in different locations during this project. These include the unceded traditional Territory of Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples, also known as Victoria, British Columbia; the unceded traditional Territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaɣ (Tsleil-Waututh), also known as Vancouver, British Columbia; and the Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded Territory of the Mi'kmaq People, also known as Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

We acknowledge individuals who have contributed to this project. These include former research team members Xinyu Zhang, Irene Mai, Brian Yan, Macayla Yan, and Vincent Ng; the project grant co-applicants Dr. Marla Buchanan and Dr. Catherine Costigan; and project collaborators Dr. Grace Wong-Sneddon and Dr. Nathan To. We acknowledge the participant storytellers who have dedicated their time to this project and have given us the privilege of sharing these deeply personal stories that are part of the fabric of resilience in the Chinese Canadian community.

Lastly, this project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant # 430-2020-00163.



DESIGN AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The way this book is designed is meant to reflect our process of engaging in this project and our encounter with the respective participants (henceforth known as storytellers) and their stories. Not only do these stories centre on the voice of each storyteller, but each story is also thematically designed to connect back to the storyteller's mannerisms and their story content. Visually and organizationally, we wanted this book to creatively represent the told stories and our collective engagement with the concept of intergenerational resilience. As a collaborative project, we incorporated our voice both implicitly, in the way the stories are co-developed and presented, and explicitly, through the sharing of our process and reflections in response to this project.

The book involves four sections: Introduction, Stories, Reflections, and Invitation.

The **Introduction** provides an overview of the project, its context, and how this work was conducted, as well as information about the participant storytellers.

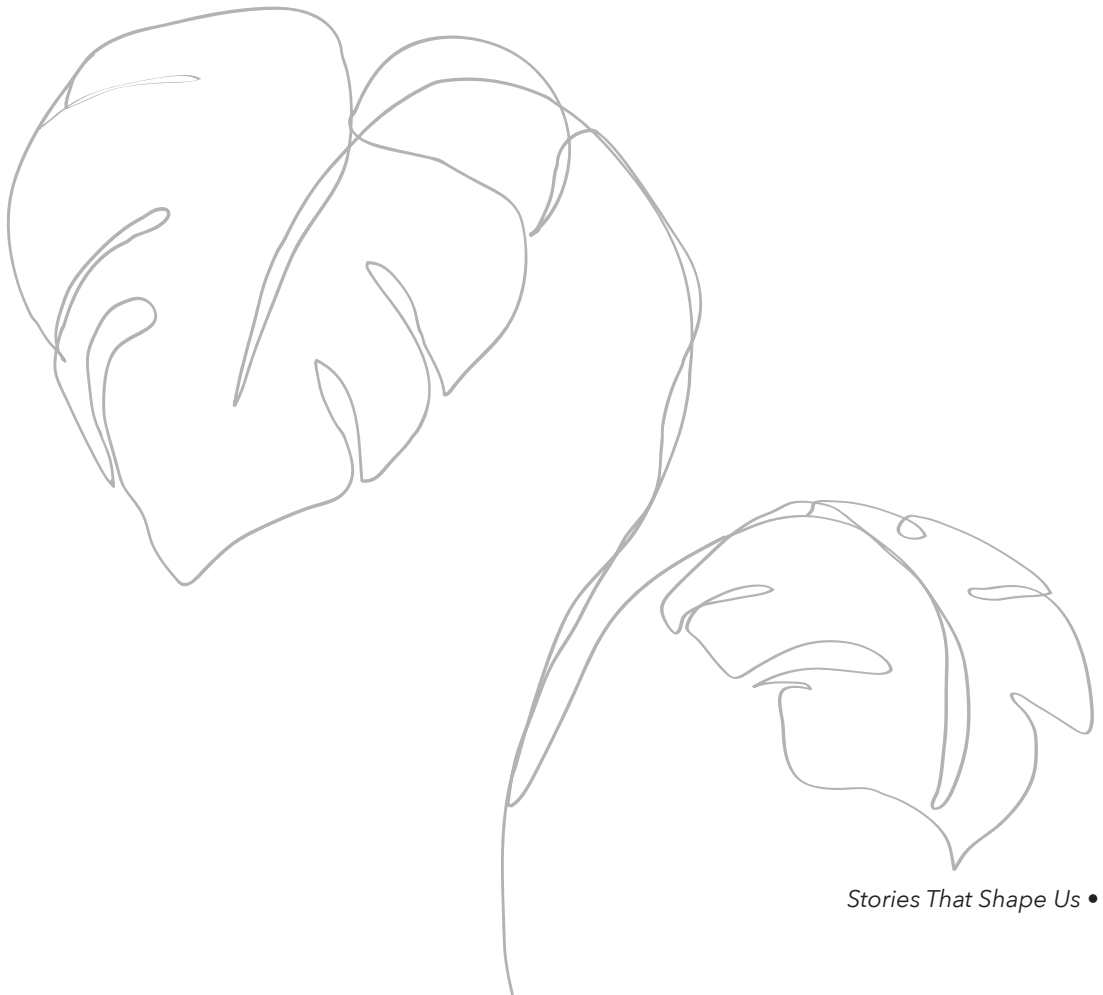
The **Stories** section presents stories from each respective family dyad, along with a representative piece of what we witnessed when members within each family shared their stories with one another. The stories and witnessing are divided by family units. The storytellers were invited to shape their section of the book, including the content and how that content was presented. All of the members reviewed their respective sections and gave permission for their stories to be shared in its current form.

The **Reflections** section offers reflective responses from both storyteller and researcher in relation to engaging in this project. Storytellers were provided with an opportunity to offer a response piece; some shared post-project reflections and provided pictures, while others opted not to contribute a response piece. Researchers shared the personal impact of the project and its stories; our responses took the form of poetry, visual arts, and written reflections. The topic of intergenerational resilience is meaningful to all of us as members of the Asian diaspora, and each of us engaged in the topic in our own unique way.

Lastly, **Invitation** is the final section of this book, which aims to bring closure of sorts to this work. This section is "of sorts" since the idea of generational resilience

transcends a singular book or individual narratives. The invitation section invites you, as the readers, to continue this work of storying intergenerational resilience, whether through reflections about the stories presented or perhaps through your own familial stories of resilience. Here we include guides for developing your own intergenerational resilience story.

Welcome to *Stories that Shape Us*.



About the Researchers



DR. FRED CHOU

Dr. Fred Chou (周敏浩) is an Associate Professor in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria and a Registered Psychologist in British Columbia. He is a second-generation Chinese Canadian with ancestral roots from the Guangdong province. His research interests include the mental health of Asian Canadians, intergenerational trauma and resilience, and youth mental health literacy. As a community-based researcher, he specializes in using participatory and narrative research to facilitate tangible solutions and elevate under-represented voices.

“This project is personally meaningful to me as it builds on work that I did during my doctoral studies which examined stories of Chinese Canadian intergenerational trauma. For me, intergenerational resilience has always been a part of the Chinese Canadian narrative and my own narrative—it is ever present in banal and tacit ways. Though there may not be the grand remembrance of these stories, in ways that it deserves to be, I know the resilient efforts, lessons, and subtle acts of care that my parents and grandparents are forever a part of me, through my own patterns and the way I understand my own narrative. I see it manifest in the ways and care I pass on to my own children. It is a gift to have this opportunity to provide space to these important narratives that are a part of our community.”



CARMEN HUANG

Carmen Huang (黄嘉雯) is a second-generation Chinese Canadian born to immigrant parents living on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh). She is a Registered Clinical Counsellor and a BC certified teacher. Her personal and professional experiences inspired her to foster collective healing and to address issues of identity, power, and privilege through listening and storytelling. Carmen is committed to creating safe spaces for individuals and communities to share, be heard, and grow together.

“This project holds a very special place in my heart. From the participants, to the research team members, to all the stories that I have been so privileged to witness, I am forever grateful for everyone’s vulnerability and courage to be a part of this journey. Intergenerational resilience and

trauma have always been a part of my family story though there have been limited opportunities to hold space to acknowledge these experiences. Yet it is undeniable that the experiences of my ancestors live in me, and I have been granted the privilege, thanks to their sacrifices and endurance, to make time and space to listen and understand our intergenerational stories. These stories may not always come in traditional written or spoken narratives; they may be a feeling, an observation, a connection, or a delicious family meal. I still have lots to learn, and I hope to pass on the strength for future generations to continue this important work.



MIKAELA CHIA

Mikaela Chia is a second-generation immigrant settler currently living on the ancestral and unceded Coast Salish Territory of the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. As a Peranakan woman, she has ancestral roots in Singapore, the Malay peninsula and Southern China. Mikaela is passionate about co-creating spaces that honour the voices, stories, and lived experiences of people and communities in the ways that they feel most heard and safely witnessed. As a Clinical Counsellor and in research, Mikaela centers her work in identity, intergenerational resistance, racial trauma, and the power of collective healing and liberation.

“*My story is inseparable from the stories of my parents, of their parents and those who came before them, and of the generations that will come after us. I cannot begin to express how much *Stories that Shape Us* has been a balm for my own longings. To know and connect to my own heritage and roots and the stories of past and present, both told and untold. These stories, and the spaces that we got to carve out together, have been a medicine for me. They have been a space of coming home (both familiar and as if for the first time). I will carry them, alongside the people and voices that I have had a privilege of bearing witness to, with me throughout my life. To our storytellers, to this team, to our ancestors—thank you. Thank you for trusting us with the sanctity of your stories, reflections, and families; for your vulnerability; for the ways you live out your stories; for your words; for your heart. Thank you for bringing me closer to home—for inviting me into a space where I could land and where I felt I could simply get to be, together.*”



WENDY MA

Wendy Ma (馬凱怡) is a second-generation Chinese Canadian with ancestral roots from Toisan, Guangdong. She is a Clinical Counsellor practicing on the the stolen, traditional territories of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh). She is passionate about contributing to the destigmatization of mental health in the Asian diaspora and works with clients to reclaim their cultural identity and unique stories of intergenerational trauma and resilience.

“This project is immensely meaningful to me because it marks the beginning of reclaiming my cultural identity. It marks when my resentment towards my Chinese heritage transformed to grief, and then to honour. The identity, values, and beliefs I live and breathe each day are deeply rooted in my history, and there is so much I still have yet to discover. During a time of loss, hurt, and struggle, this project and members of the research team supported me. When I felt lost about who I was, I found answers here in this space. When I felt misunderstood by people who viewed me from only the perspective of half my identity, I learned to recognize the nuanced meanings behind their actions that showed they cared for me. I found strength from my past generations that empowered me to overcome the challenges and violence systems place on my people, and I am gifted with the privilege to use this strength to help others who are also feeling lost and robbed of their rights to be proud of their heritage. Who I am today is inseparable from Stories that Shape Us.”

The Stories that Shape Us Project

The *Stories that Shape Us* project started in 2021 and wrapped up in 2024. The project aimed to address the following question: What are the stories of intergenerational resilience in Chinese Canadian families? Consequently, the purpose of the project was to understand the connection of intergenerational resilience to the Chinese Canadian narrative, as well as to preserve family histories through the development and sharing of stories. As researchers, we felt this work was an important direction on which to focus our efforts as there have been movements in public discourse recognizing the role of intergenerational trauma as it affects individuals and communities, especially in racialized communities. Yet, we also understood that these narratives are not just about trauma, since resilience is a constant force woven within trauma. Instead of solely focusing on trauma, we wanted to shine a light on the vestiges of resilience and to affirm that resilience is ever present in the Chinese Canadian diasporic narrative.

WHAT IS INTERGENERATIONAL RESILIENCE?

Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to or overcoming life challenges that can include internal and/or external demands.¹ Successful adaptation can include how one copes, views the world, and accesses social resources, while life challenges can involve adversities that individuals, families, and communities encounter (e.g., trauma, racism, hardships). Intergenerational resilience refers to the transmission of resilience from one generation to the next. It is essentially the flipside of the coin to concepts such as intergenerational trauma (the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next) or the intergenerational transmission of stress.

1. American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Resilience. In *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Retrieved April 29, 2024, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>

Intergenerational resilience is about the ways in which resilience can extend beyond the individual to have a systemic and relational impact. It is a generational response to adversity and trauma whereby lessons, worldviews in relation to hardships, and coping mechanisms from one generation get passed onto future generations in subtle, banal, and, at times, explicit ways.

We focused on resilience for two reasons. First, pragmatically, we recognized that trauma is not necessarily a widely accepted concept in Chinese communities.² Second, in consultation with community stakeholders, it was identified that focusing on resilience may be more invitational and accessible for members of the Chinese Canadian community interested in sharing their stories, especially when these stories were connected to painful and adverse events.

The concept of resilience is not without critique, especially in minoritized and racialized communities. There has been movement in challenging the concept of resilience (e.g., “don’t call me resilient”) with terms such as “forced resilience” (forced response to problematic conditions that pathologize the individual in those circumstances) and its association with toxic positivity.^{3,4} These positions identify how it can be problematic to label one as resilient without addressing the broader systemic issues that position an individual to have to be resilient in the first place. Looking at it only from a resilience standpoint runs the risk of simplifying the actual complexity

2. Chou, F., Buchanan, M., McDonald, M., Westwood, M., & Huang, C. (2023). Narrative themes of Chinese Canadian intergenerational trauma: Parental experiences. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 1-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2022.2160431>

3. Harnisch, H., Montgomery, E., & Knoop, H. H. (2020). Forced resilience: Conceptualizing resilience in life-threatening adversity. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.546>

4. Srivastava, V. (2021, January 27). Listen to ‘don’t call me resilient’: Our podcast about race. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/listen-to-dont-call-me-resilient-our-podcast-about-race-149692>

of the adversities individuals and communities face, which can sugarcoat issues that are systemic in nature.

Though these positions are important to recognize, we come from a dialectical position. That both is true. That there is both a messiness to the human condition and systems in which we exist, and there is an existent strength in how that is navigated. The concern of only taking a critical position can be nihilistic, while taking a naïve position to resilience reinforces problems with toxic positivity. Nonetheless, the concept of resilience resonated with the storytellers, and it served as a mechanism to share the challenges, acceptances, and celebrations that make up their individual and family narratives. In a sense, coming from a resilience perspective actually presented a more holistic picture of trauma and adversity and, perhaps, made it more accessible to present intergenerational adversity/trauma and resilience as an interwoven and holistic narrative.

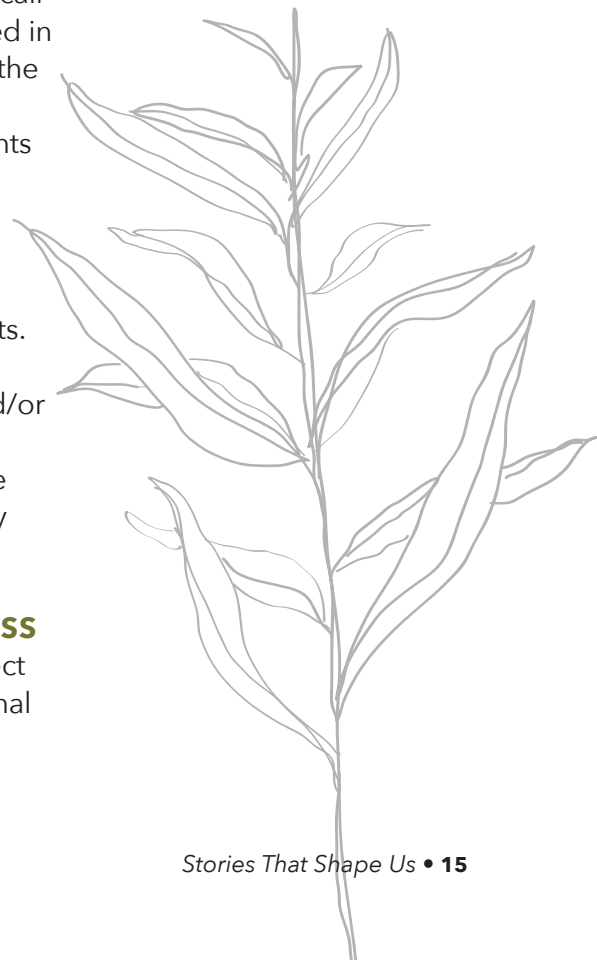
CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

The stories are situated from individuals who resided in Greater Vancouver and Vancouver Island. The original call out for the project was for individuals who were situated in British Columbia, as the project was conducted out of the University of Victoria. The study was geared towards recruiting family dyads (parent and offspring participants over 19 years old) who identified as having Chinese heritage (including multiracial individuals).

To take part in the study, the parental participant (storyteller) needed to have experienced hardship or adversity in the exposure to potentially traumatic events. For our team this was defined as pre- and/or post-migratory trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and/or race-based stress. Both the parent and offspring participant (storyteller) also needed to identify how the parent adapted and coped with the hardship/adversity and how that may have influenced the offspring.

METHODOLOGY: THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The stories were developed as part of a research project that aimed to understand the stories of intergenerational resilience in Chinese Canadian families. The project



utilized a Collaborative Narrative Method,⁵ meaning, participants were seen as storytellers and collaborators who worked together with the research team and were consulted throughout the project, including story development, and ultimately, the creation of this book. This method involves several stages with each having varying degrees of collaborative participation.

STAGES OF RESEARCH

Stage 1: Setting the Stage

The initial stage involved consultations with an advisory committee and community stakeholders.

Stage 2: Recruitment

The recruitment process involved working with the community to identify individuals who could share stories about intergenerational resilience. Four family dyads (eight storytellers) volunteered for the study.

Stage 3: Co-Constructing Narratives

After the storytellers were identified, a round of initial interviews were conducted. These interviews were typically 1.5 to 2 hours long and conducted separately with each family dyad member.

Stage 4: Transcription and Translation

The recordings from the interviews were transcribed into English (and any Cantonese or Mandarin were translated into English).

Stage 5: Interpretation

The narratives were then read according to four interpretive readings. The purpose of these readings was to highlight how the position that one takes as a listener



5. Arvay, M. J. (2003). Doing reflexivity: A collaborative narrative method. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers In Health and Social Sciences* (pp. 163-175). London, UK: Blackwell Press.

can shape one's interpretation. The interpretive readings included:

- reading for content (the narrative that the storyteller is providing);
- reading from the narrator's position (listening in to the narrator's voice);
- reading for the research question (identifying what is shared about intergenerational resilience); and
- reading for power and culture (identifying how power and culture shapes the told narrative).

Stage 6: Writing the Narratives

After the interpretive readings were completed, drafts were written up based on the original transcripts and areas of emphasis identified through the interpretive readings. The structure of the stories were both chronological and thematic.

Stage 7: Collaborative Verification of Narratives

After an initial draft was completed, the storytellers took part in a second interview where they were presented with a draft of the story. This was read during the interview and we discussed their experience hearing their story. During the discussion, the storytellers had the opportunity to change and modify their story and the researchers asked additional clarification questions. Storytellers were then given their story to review and revise. Changes made by the storytellers were prioritized and several revisions were made before the stories were finalized by the storytellers.

Stage 8: Family Sharing

Once the story was finalized by each member of a family dyad, a family sharing interview was scheduled. This sharing process involved storytellers following a structured sharing process for sharing their stories with one another. This was recorded and a copy was given back to the storytellers. Afterwards, storytellers debriefed each other and the research team.

Stage 9: Across Narrative Analysis

Though outside of the scope of this book, the stories were then analyzed using a cross narrative thematic analysis. This analysis will be presented in future research venues.

Stage 10: Dissemination

Lastly, the storytellers were invited to take part in shaping the formation of this book. This meant that they were provided with the opportunity to contribute response pieces after they shared their stories and images that they wanted to include into their story.

BOOK DEVELOPMENT

The process of developing the book was part of the project's collaborative endeavor. The origins of the book came in the form of a zine, a self-published magazine that is produced through noncommercial means.⁶ As a self-publication, zines do not have to follow a particular format, and we originally felt this approach would be a way to honour the sanctity of the stories and the storytelling—each story and the process of its sharing held a deeply unique space and character that we hoped to capture, not only through text, but through visual displays of images, quotes, fonts, and spaces that a zine format permitted.

Halfway through completing the zine, we received approval to publish the stories through the University of Victoria ePublishing Services. As a research team, we decided to pursue both directions. The informality of the zine, and its roots in underground spaces, served the aspiration of creatively representing underrepresented voices and, was itself, part of the research process; the formality of a book publication elevated the intergenerational resilience discourse in the community and broadened its accessibility. Both the zine and the book are outcomes of this project and include the same written material. As the zine was completed first, this book draws its structure and visual inspiration from the zine while incorporating original artwork and design.

6. Matthias, M. (n.d.). Zine. In *Britannica*. Retrieved on November 25, 2024, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/zine>

Meet the Storytellers

These storytellers took part in this project and graciously shared their stories of intergenerational resilience.

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of our storytellers, we used pseudonyms throughout this book. Each pseudonym was carefully selected to avoid revealing identifiable information, and locations, affiliations, and specific details were removed to ensure anonymity. The published stories in its current form were approved by the storytellers. Images provided by the storytellers were included in their stories with their permission.

GEORGE & AUDREY

Father & Daughter

George (he/him) is the father of Audrey. At the time of the project, he was retired. He identifies as being from the Canton region of China and has resided in Canada for several decades. He decided to take part in this project as his daughter had asked him to, and he wanted to be supportive of her. George saw this also as an opportunity to share his story with his daughter.

Audrey (she/her) is George's daughter. Working in the art industry, she was in her 30s-40s at the time of the project. She identifies as Chinese Canadian and was born and raised in Canada. For Audrey, taking part in this project offered a way to learn more about her family's story and to connect with her own personal and professional interests.

ALEX & SAMANTHA

Father & Daughter

Alex (he/him) is Samantha's father. He was in his 70s when he took part in the project. He is retired and formerly



worked as an engineer. He identifies as being Han Chinese and was originally from Hong Kong and moved to Canada in the 1970s. He found out about the project from his spiritual community and jointly wanted to take part in it with his daughter.

Samantha (she/her) is Alex's daughter and was in her 40s at the time of the study. She identifies as being Chinese and Korean Canadian and was born and raised in Canada. She works in the field of education and wanted to learn more about her own family history.

CECILIA & ISABELLE

Mother & Daughter

Cecilia (she/her) is Isabelle's mother. She was in her 50s when she took part in the project and was working as a public servant. Her family has resided in Canada for multiple generations, and she was born and raised in Canada. She identifies as being Chinese Canadian. She took part in this project as she saw this as an opportunity to preserve her family stories.

Isabelle (she/they) is the daughter of Cecilia. At the time of the study, she was a student working in the education field in her 20s. She was born and raised in Canada and identifies as being Chinese Canadian. They, like their mom, saw this project as an opportunity to preserve parts of her family story.

ELEANOR & EMMA

Mother & Daughter

Eleanor (she/her) is the mother of Emma. She was in her 60s during the project. She is retired from a previous career in business and was born and raised in Canada. Eleanor identifies as being Chinese Canadian. She took part in this project as her daughter invited her and she wanted to be supportive of Emma's efforts.

Emma (she/her) is the daughter of Eleanor and was in her 30s when she took part in the project. She was born and raised in Canada and identifies as being half Chinese and half Caucasian Canadian. Emma took part in this project as she was invested in learning more about her Chinese heritage and Asian identity, and it aligned with her professional efforts in equity and diversity.





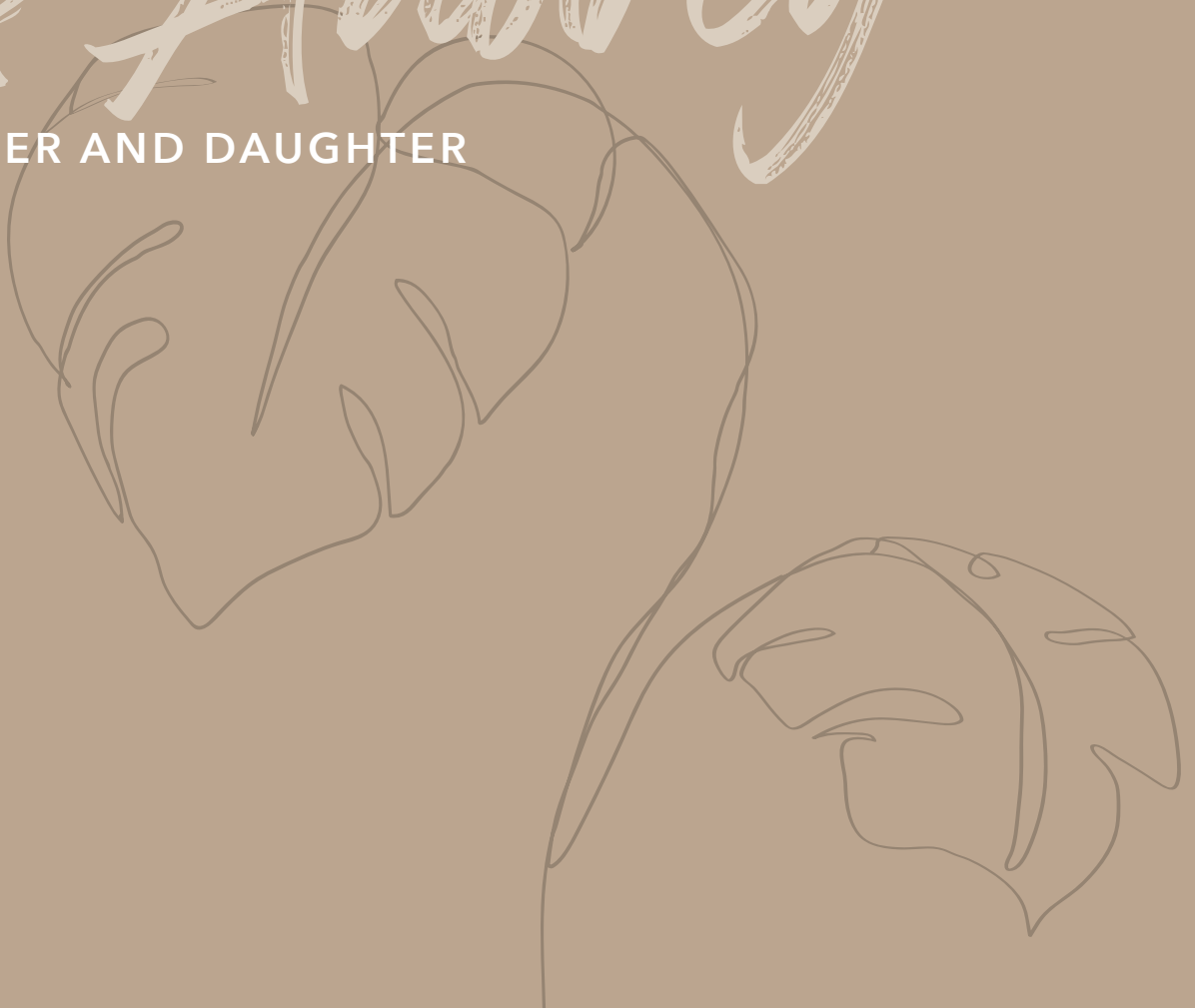
STORIES

IES



*George
& Audrey*

FATHER AND DAUGHTER





GEORGE'S STORY

If I didn't persist

THERE IS A BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTO from the 1950s of me standing with my cousin's daughter, and behind us were planters and shrubs. I don't remember who took it, but I remember being in a small district on the outskirts of Hong Kong. To me, the photo represented freedom because I was no longer in China. It was the beginning of better times. If we don't get our lives documented, the next generation may never know what it was like or appreciate the differences between the past and now. I hope that they appreciate the freedom we have, the choices we can enjoy, the things we can achieve, and the times we should appreciate instead of squander.

Things weren't always easy for me, but I carried on. If I didn't persist, I may not have the life I have today.

We should cherish the people around us right now because tomorrow may never come.

PERSISTING IN HONG KONG

Between the mid 1940s and 1950s was an extremely difficult time for my parents. They were persecuted. Almost on a daily basis. I've been told about it and didn't experience the physical hardships myself ... but I know that my parents did.

My mom didn't tell me the exact details; there are an untold number of innocent people who took their own lives due to the ongoing persecutions because they own land. I know my dad got very sick and he almost didn't make it. Beyond that, I don't know much more.

I was kept from the knowledge of what was happening, so it wasn't much of a trauma for me, but it was a time of tribulation and poverty. I wasn't aware of what was going on. I was too young and they didn't let me know. Most of the time, they were not home. They had to work in the commune farm, and it was just myself and my two younger siblings left alone. There was no electricity, natural gas, plumbing, toilet, washroom, or central heating. My parents had to buy or gather branches as fuel to cook. We had a brick hearth as a stove for our cooking and one tiny window in the kitchen for day light; my parents drew water from the river to drink and wash.

Sometimes we'd eat plain rice mixed with lard, dried olives, and, if we were lucky and had money, we'd have meat. Without the financial aid from our relatives in Hong Kong, we probably would've had nothing to eat or wear. Food and movement within China were restricted and controlled.

The whole country was traumatized during the land reform period ... My father had inherited the properties from my grandfather, who had worked in Australia as a farmhand; my grandfather went through a lot to buy properties. I was told by my sister that my grandfather was harassed by locals in Sydney; he took up martial arts to defend himself and eventually resolved the issue. If he didn't do that, he would have never been able to send money home and to build a future for his family. He did it for himself, but

he also did it for family; we might not have the life we have today without his sacrifice.

At the time of the land reform, most of my father's properties were confiscated by the ruling party. There were only a few children who stayed in China, some had already left the country, and my two eldest siblings got married. During those years, my siblings and I were not allowed to do any schooling. We had no place to go and no place to play. We had no friends either...it seemed like we were either being boycotted, or maybe just avoided...we were just left alone. Nobody



actually came to see what was going on or to help out. Local people weren't very fair at the time, in fact, they were actually the people who did all of the persecution and were supervised by the officials. The first nine years of my life there were hard.

New Year's was the only happy time I can remember. During that occasion, local people set up shops on the main street. I can still see the live carps kept in fresh water and baked goods in the form of piglets, placed inside a small bamboo cage and hung from a stand.

It was a total surprise when I was told I would go to Hong Kong. There was no discussion. I don't know whose idea it was exactly, and I don't know why they chose me. I was the middle child of five siblings at home. My other three siblings had already

left, and I guess they didn't want me to experience the same thing they were going through ... I guess they wanted a better life for me. The person who took me to Macau wasn't a family member. I had never met him before. We traveled by bike, spent the night in Macau, and the following day, my eldest aunt picked me up and took me to Hong Kong. I still remember the culture shock the first time I stepped on a double-decker tram; I felt motion sickness.

When I landed in Hong Kong, I didn't really know how I felt ... whether I was excited or troubled, but we were living slightly better off in Hong Kong. My aunt's family wasn't really rich. My cousin supported us with food to get by. I was asked only once to line up for canned food at a church. They had a small child plus they had to look after me. It must have been difficult. I think my aunt paid for my elementary schooling, and I had to learn a new dialect, different from the one I spoke at home, but still, I had a better time than that year at the district in Hong Kong because I was able to get short-term education. After that, about a year later, they asked me if I would like to go to Australia. I didn't hesitate about going to Australia. It was my aunt, the youngest of the two, who paid for my journey to Sydney; I met her for the first time when I arrived there.

The first thing my aunt did was measure me for a wool suit—it was my very first gift from her. The freighter to get to Sydney was the worst trip I've ever had—I was in a bunk with a room full of people, I got seasick for the first three days, and I couldn't hold down any of my food. During the ocean voyage, I would go on the deck and watch flying fish jump in and out of the ocean.

The day I arrived in Sydney I was fingerprinted by immigration. By then, the Gold Rush and head tax days were over, but I

guess they wanted to continue restricting foreigners from entering the country. There wasn't much racism in plain sight, but on paper it was obvious. I was able to get in as a student because my aunt applied on my behalf for a student visa, and so I began my life in Australia while my parents were still in China.

I was enrolled in school, but I didn't learn a thing because I couldn't speak or read English. It was very traumatic.

There was no such thing as ESL back then, so teachers didn't make any effort to instruct or interact with me. I couldn't converse very well and was picked on by other kids, and I don't quite remember why. I was totally ignored. And so it was very difficult to learn, and school continued to be difficult as I moved on from elementary and was transferred to remedial school. The only thing they taught us how to do was crafts and life skills. During this time, I was living in Sydney with a group of boys, who also didn't help me either. It was very isolating and lonely at the time.

One of the recreational activities I had was go-carting downhill. I saw other children playing with their carts, and I decided to duplicate their carts out of wood. I went to an automotive repair shop, got four-wheel bearings, hammered them into the front and rear axles, and tied a rope to the front axle for steering. I often raced my wooden cart down the street to relieve my stress and boredom. Looking back, it was dangerous racing down a hill that fast with my shoes as brakes, but it was my form of recreation and stress-relief. I found a way to manage my frustrations and stress.

PERSISTING IN AUSTRALIA

The only other form of entertainment I had was watching Western movies; I can't remember who gave me allowances, but it

cost 25 cents. I didn't have access to the radio, but I can still hear "Volare" playing in my mind. I heard it every weekend from the Italian community centre across the street. It was the only music available to me.

My next-door neighbours were kind. Even though they barely knew me, the mother gave me a Hawaiian shirt and her son spent a day with me at the beach. They had a daughter who wanted to marry her boyfriend. It's a story similar to Romeo and Juliet's—a tragedy that ended with them committing suicide in a vehicle because their parents



objected to the marriage. That was the first time I recall feeling grief. I couldn't understand why she had to go and take her own life; it's an experience I can't forget, along with their kindness.

After spending a year or two in remedial school, we moved into a different district. My aunt rented a place that was infested with bedbugs, and we stayed there for several years. I had to transfer from remedial school to a regular high school—my first co-ed school. I applied for a student bus pass at the Department of Education so that I could travel to school by bus for free. The Department of Education kept tabs on me, and I had to report to them every year.

I was friends with my neighbour's kids, who ended up being my only two friends

during this time. I had no toys, so they shared their toys. We played hand ball against a wall and pedalled a scooter or roller-skated on the street. That was the only fun I had in that district, until I hurt myself. The school required students to have uniforms, but they were expensive. I was delivering papers at that time, and my boss was kind enough to pick me up when I overslept. I went shopping and found myself a jacket, tie, and shirt that matched the school's uniform. I bought a shoehorn from Woolworth's store to replace worn-out heels on my shoes. That was my first school uniform.

Despite that, I excelled in metal work, woodwork, drafting, and did well in math but failed the remaining subjects. I spent the next two years studying, finished school, and managed to receive a state certificate of New South Wales. I found myself taking long walks and swimming at the beach I lived by to relax during this time. I taught myself how to swim by practicing the breaststroke at night. These long strolls and nightly swims became another source of stress-relief for me.

I was placed in academic courses and learned geography, math, and social studies ... but it was hard to understand, so I would sit there, listen to the teacher, and try to figure out what was going on. It was extremely difficult. There were only two Asian students during that time, and I was one of them. The rest were all Caucasian, but I had no problems with the student population. Unfortunately, because of my lack of comprehension, I didn't make any headway. The system made no attempt to assist students who required help. But I don't feel any animosity towards the system because that's the way it was at the time.

During that time, I often relieved my stress by taking long walks from my district to the city. Occasionally, I'd go to the park. There's a

museum there that I visited several times. After three years, I managed to pass grade 10, which was enough for students to graduate for the job market during the 60s. However, when I finished, I moved to another area of Sydney and transferred to another school to finish grade 11 and 12. At this time, I found work on weekends waiting tables. The school environment there was similar to a college, where there were more lectures and less interactions between the students and teachers. Again, I had trouble comprehending the material and making friends because I couldn't understand English very well, let alone the grammatical terms used in English class and the Shakespeare plays.

After finishing high school in the mid 1960s, I applied for art school in another part of Sydney. The application involved making a drawing of my choice, so I drew a female figure sitting on the beach with a beach ball. The school week consisted of 4 days of learning to draw and paint. The last remaining day of the week required me to travel by bus to a different district for sculpturing lessons. The instructors were interactive, and they didn't ignore me.

That was the one year that I enjoyed being in Australia. I did well in school, the art class was small (with seven girls and three boys), I made friends and got invited to their friends' party. I went camping with them during the summertime. We camped for a couple of days without any actual camping gear, eating canned food and enjoying each other's company. There was another occasion when I drank with some art school friends at a park. I wasn't totally isolated or lonely; it was a memorable time.

By the time I finished my first year of art school, my parents had migrated to Canada. They wanted me to join them, and so I did. Had I been notified earlier of the scholarship

I was being offered, I might've considered staying and finishing art school before coming to Canada ... After all, I felt comfortable in my last year. But if that was the case, I might not have had the life I have now in Canada.

PERSISTING IN CANADA

In the late 60s, I boarded a plane at Sydney's Mascot airport and travelled to San Francisco. I met my eldest sister's family in California and then flew to Vancouver three days later to join my parents; I was 20. When I first landed in Vancouver, I hadn't decided what to do as a career. So, the first thing I wanted to do was find out whether I could go back to art school. I went there and made an appointment with the art school, and the first thing they inquired about was my art portfolio. I had just left Sydney, and I didn't have any art to show; it was all left behind. I was disappointed at the meeting.

I had a couple of dead-end jobs at the beginning. I went to a vocational school, and I took a six-month course in pre-automotive apprenticeship. I finished the course, and I found a job at a gas station in downtown Vancouver. I stayed there for about maybe a year. I was pumping gas and doing oil changes but didn't learn much about mechanical repair. So, I went looking for another job. Somehow, my boss got wind of it, and he told me, exact words, "before you get paid, I have to make money. If you were looking for another job, I think it's time you leave," so he fired me. I found another job at another gas station after, and I worked there for a couple of years.

During this time, my wife was in her prenatal stages. I didn't know what I was getting into when I got married. I didn't know how to raise children in those days, or whether I could afford to raise children. I didn't know



how to guide them. You don't know how your children are going to turn out or what they're going to do. I wasn't worried at the time, but I didn't know what I know now, that a lot of things can go wrong. It's a big gamble, but you try to guide them properly.

I know my wife did a lot of the hard work supporting them. She guided and nurtured them. I felt like I was just sort of standby in some ways, but I did what I could.

I didn't know much about raising kids at the time, I should not have isolated myself from them, and I still regret it. Like myself with my parents. I don't know if that was brought on by circumstances or, maybe it's just that I didn't try hard enough.

I was working, but I could have spent more time with them and helped them out with their homework. Unfortunately, I didn't do that during their school years, so I think I let them down a little bit. I had a lack of understanding for them. I didn't know how to express myself, I was too detached from them, and I just didn't know how to be a better parent. I can't really put blame on myself for being isolated and then isolating them from me, but there is no excuse for isolating myself from them. It's what happened, but it shouldn't have happened if I had known better.

In the mid 1970s, I went back to vocational school. I enrolled in a diesel mechanics course. It encompassed learning about large marine engines, truck engines, air brakes, engine brakes, fuel injection systems, and arc welding. When I finished this course, I managed to find a job at a local repair shop. I walked in, met the foreman, and he hired me on the same day. They were in the business of selling and repairing lift trucks. I didn't have any experience with forklifts, but he hired me anyways. Given the education I had, I was pretty lucky to find a well-paying job, and all

the co-workers and employers I had were pretty good. It worked out well, and I worked there for seven years and bought a house close to my work.

Unfortunately, servicing lift trucks and driving the service van aggravated my back, and I had to quit my job. I went back to vocational school again in the 1980s. I took a 12-month course on electronics. At the end of the course, the instructor announced that a telecommunication company was hiring. I got hired after I squeaked through the electronics test. During the next two decades, the company had four amalgamations. It was also stressful working there. I got hired in the summer, handed a pink slip just before Christmas of the same year, and it was then rescinded. Every two to three years, there was a threat of lay-off because I was at the bottom of the seniority lists. On top of that, I had to write tests to get pay raises. Changing careers has been stressful; it's a learning curve from pumping gas and mechanical repair to telecommunication. Looking back, I have no regrets about making this choice. I would not have gone into the two jobs that gave me life skills to repair things, not only mechanical but also electronic and technological repair work. In a way, I'm glad I actually didn't pursue a career in art.

FULL CIRCLE

It's as if I walked back in time to the 1950s when the land reform destroyed everything. The house hasn't changed very much since I lived there, since my parents lived there, and since the misfortunes happened. When my wife, daughter, and I went to China in early 2000s, my daughter saw firsthand what the living conditions were like in my village. Although the decorations and ornaments were different, there were no structural changes to my former home, except for the

covered-up water well in the courtyard and the removed heavy, black iron, wooden, horizontal, and sliding security bar gate used to protect the house's front door entrance. It was like a time capsule, reminding me that things are different now. Taking them to China was the only way to share my history, make an impact, and show them, really, what was going on. If I had just described my past to them, they probably would put it out of their minds. My daughter had an opportunity to see my history and, perhaps, appreciate things a bit more during the visit. She didn't really know what went on in my early years until the exposure she had in our trip to China. They were eager to go back, and I think Audrey was interested in researching her roots. But I was reluctant to take them back at the time because I didn't know what to expect also. Although the country opened up, I wasn't really trusting the government officials at the time. I was also reluctant because I didn't know how to get there and had no contact at all in my hometown. If my brother-in-law didn't arrange transportation and the driver, the trip wouldn't have happened at all.

My daughter wasn't aware of how the country was traumatized and what I went through. I'm not sure what kind of impact it had on her during the time she visited my place of origin. But I'm pretty sure if you show somebody the actual reality, they may have a deeper impact and understanding of what's going on. I think the trip may have been a turning point for her where she took a step back and understood a little more about my history. It was also a turning point for me. The land reform destroyed everything and, because of it, I was able to leave China and come to this country. It's a double-edged sword, and I came out on the better end of the situation but at a cost.

The turmoil in China has caused pain and suffering to too many people, deprived me of my childhood, the warmth of family life and culture.

Visiting China reminded me of the past and what my parents went through. Other than there being nostalgia, I haven't really given any thought to moving back to China. Moving back would mean reliving the times.

People have changed and moved on. It's not worth reliving my past, but it won't ever go away so it's important to talk about it. If I were to think about it, I would say that I was pretty lucky that I left the country. I was exposed to new cultures, new ideas, more opportunities, the art of growing Penjing and new skills.

In my younger days, I didn't know what stress was like, and my parents shielded me from the bad experiences they had. It might have looked like it was smooth sailing for me when I left China because almost everything was pre-arranged when I moved from China to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Australia, and Australia to Canada, but there were a lot of big years. It continued to be difficult, and it wasn't easy to make all these changes, but I did it anyway. I'm grateful for my parents and relatives. My parents didn't want me to experience the same situation they were going through, and I guess they wanted a better life for me. The most important thing is the perseverance my parents had—they survived the atrocities and the time that they had in China, which, in a way, made me more aware of what happened to them. It made me want to carry on, whether good times or bad times, whether in Hong Kong, Australia, or Canada. As things turned out, it wasn't too bad at all. If it wasn't for my relatives, I wouldn't be here today. They paved the way for my life here in Canada.

I think that if I were to do it all over again, I would have wanted to get help in my early days, and I would have considered staying in Sydney to finish art school; I probably would have become an artist. I might have turned out differently...

Yet, I don't regret it. I wouldn't have had a decent job or a family right now if I didn't persist. I'm glad I went ahead and made those changes. I'm glad I was able to show my offspring what it was like to make those changes. If I continued art school and became an artist, I wouldn't know where my next paycheque would be coming. I saw my daughter choose this path. She chose an art career because she wanted to excel in the art field. At the time, when she made that decision, we just went along with it and didn't object, but we wanted her to choose a different career where she didn't have to rely on patrons, which could be really stressful as far as I can see. I didn't want her to have any difficulties making a living. I didn't want my

children to experience the struggles I faced growing up. But she persevered, she carried on anyways, and she came out successful. She got her degrees and a job. She proved me wrong.

I hope my daughter understands my parents' story so that she can carry on what she learned not only for herself but also for other people. I would like my children to appreciate what they have and their freedom of choice and creativity.

I would like to impart the value of cherishing the people around them because tomorrow may never come.

We should take each day and appreciate it as much as we can.

I would like them to strive to make things better for themselves, just as my parents did for me, and I did for myself. I would like them to achieve the things they set out to do, just as I did in the past and as they are already doing in the present. □





AUDREY'S STORY

Enduring, with faith

"I HAVE TO KNOW"

THE HAPPIEST MOMENT OF MY LIFE was when I was three or four, drawing in the kitchen on the floor. I had so much fun, and life was carefree; I still remember the light in that kitchen—it felt like such an important moment. But the first day of grade one brought about a stark shift and a marker for me, as the first time I felt a fear of failure. I feared I knew nothing, and that I could not possibly succeed in school or life. I remember I was very upset the night before. I was just so scared because I didn't know the whole alphabet yet, and I stayed up all night worrying. I had stomach aches; I thought "I have to know everything now." Since then, I dreaded Sunday nights—I did well—but I dreaded school. It escalated in grade four when I started to get homework. The feeling I always got was "I'm not prepared." Of course, I knew that was not true, learning now as an educator, and even then, my parents would say "That's why you go to school, you go to learn, you're not supposed to know everything." But I always felt "I have to know everything; I have to be prepared; I have to be the best.

It wasn't like I wasn't happy as a child, but those feelings overshadowed everything else.

Aside from homework, there was something else that shifted too that year. Even my sister recognized that I was different: "After grade four, you stopped laughing as much," she said. There was a comment from a classmate, I don't know who it came from, but I remember I was playing in the changeroom, trying to impersonate someone and just being goofy, and someone said, "Don't be a show-off." It made me very self-conscious. I stopped being more outwardly expressive after that, and I tried not to draw attention to myself anymore.

I'm very aware and grateful for my privileges. I lived a sheltered life, and everything was provided for me, so I don't know where these voices and struggles came from. Both my parents taught me in some ways, out of love, to always be prepared for the worst. Their own experiences taught them that you always need to work hard to succeed, to survive.

But they never put pressure on me; I somehow internalized that my value as a person was associated with my performance. To get anywhere in life, I had to get the top marks and be the best. I knew it wasn't healthy.

I remember even back in elementary school they would hand out these awards, and I always got an award every year—either the blue citizenship award or the gold academic award. But there was this one year I didn't get anything and, in front of everyone, I cried. I was just so upset and embarrassed. And even though I shouldn't have cried, that's how I felt. That urge to be at the top motivated me, but it was unhealthy. Even when I was in high school, if I did poorly on an exam, as in getting 80% instead of at least 90%, I'd think "This is pathetic," and cry. It became

overwhelming; I had to learn that getting top marks doesn't guarantee you anything.

WHAT IS MY PURPOSE? SACRIFICE, CONFLICTS, AND LOVE

Ever since I was small, I wondered where I came from. Not the "how are children made" kind of conversation, but a deeper question around why I existed. I remember that, even as a child as I was doodling or drawing, I had this niggling desire to know what my larger purpose for being here was.

How do I fit into this world? This sense of a spiritual and existential void was a simultaneous knowing that I had a reason to be here in this world, and yet, was still lost as to what it was. Maybe that was the motivator as to why I always felt like I had to succeed; success made me feel like I had a purpose, like I had a drive. I don't necessarily know why I was doing things, so my purpose was in school.

There was a pivotal point where my understanding of purpose began to change. Growing up, my household was culturally Buddhist as Chinese. Respect your elders and honour your ancestors. I didn't know the teachings, but it was woven into our customs and behaviours. I also grew up with a lot of friends who were Christian and had various other ways of thinking. I never really thought about it—faith, spirituality, my beliefs - until I went to university and met a new group of friends who seemed really great; I really connected with them. I ended up going to several campus bible studies, and I was truly moved by the discussions and friendships I formed. I made the decision to join their church, to be baptized, and chose to build my faith through Christianity.

I was really excited. I told my friends from high school who were also Christian that I was going to a particular church, but I was

surprised by their reaction: their initial reply was often with an ominous “Oh” or an expression of unease. They were wary of the church’s parent organization and thought it was perhaps a bit too extreme. Some other chapters of this organization had recently received negative press. During that time, the media wrote a few articles and even aired some national interviews that reported cases of physical abuse and coercion. I initially dismissed them as sensationalized or overly dramatic. However, shortly after a news article about my particular church was published in the local paper naming a girl I knew from our congregation.

I did my research about the accusations. I watched several interviews from the media; I read the paper. I talked to people who had written about or had encounters with the church because it was alarming. I was fortunate to have had a chance to meet with the girl named in the local paper, and she gave me another side of the story.

She claimed she had not been hurt or manipulated by anyone in the church; it was someone else in her life who was the cause of the turmoil. The media was confusing, but I trusted her and that it was her decision. I felt I wasn’t manipulated; I was aware of the stories. My childhood friends continued to show deep concern, so I remember thinking “Okay, I have to be careful.” But even despite all that, I continued to meet with the people at that church.

Sometimes I question why, but the relationships I formed felt so profound; when you make a spiritual connection, when someone shares their deepest, most intimate thoughts, fears, and concerns with you, and you share yours, it builds towards a shared faith and understanding that is powerful. They felt like they were family, even though I had only known them for a few years. I

hadn’t felt that type of acceptance and genuine attentiveness before. I felt understood. I love my family, I love my parents, and I love my other friends. But that level and kind of care, where you’re not a physical family and yet there is this sense of unconditional love—knowing that it can’t be tied to people of course—that was something I experienced for the first time. Knowing that I could live in a community and be supported in that way brought me closer to having a faith relationship. I felt like I had found myself.

But then there was this tension point between me and my parents. I was about to tell them about what was happening in the media so that I could explain, but they saw the news stories first and confronted me. They were very upset and said I needed to leave that faith community. I felt like I had a level head. Though I was still a young adult, I had done my research and explained what I knew. I told them how much I valued these friendships and how meaningful it was to me. I don’t usually disobey my parents but I told them, “It’s okay,” and I tried to persuade them that it was safe.

Then my mother started to get sick.

There was a battle at home, and it continued over the span of a year. They really thought I had been brainwashed. They thought I wasn’t listening to them; anytime I disagreed it just reinforced that thought. I didn’t realize that, throughout this time, my mom was telling my friends too. I was so upset. I remember feeling betrayed, and it’s still a sore point when I look back—that people probably thought I had lost my mind or truly believed I had succumbed to some form of brainwashing—I started to second guess who I was.

I didn’t feel that I was imposing anything by continuing to go, but the longer I went,



the more she worried. That's when my father stepped in. He was quiet until that moment, though my mother was vocal the whole time. It was the first time I saw how something like this could be possible: worrying so much that her fear, anxiety, and care were literally eating her up inside; it was damaging her body. She had to go to the doctor. I could see it, but I didn't know what to do. She was losing weight. During this time, I'd deliberately stay at school late to study because I didn't want to go home

Finally, my father gave me this ultimatum: "If you stay with us, you have to leave this church. If you don't leave, then you will have to move out or live with your grandmother."

I love my grandmother, but we didn't speak the same language. In many ways, it would have been like living with a stranger. I also wasn't independent enough to just get a job. I wasn't able to support myself yet, so I struggled for a period of time; it felt like forever. I guess for the first time, it felt like my two sets of values conflicted: my care for my family and my faith. It felt like I had to choose between them.

There were all these different scriptures being quoted to me, such as "choose God over family," but it didn't feel right, and others gave conflicting interpretations and passages. In the end, not in spite of but actually because of my faith, I felt that the faith that I

came to know shouldn't conflict with the love of family. I felt like God would not force me to choose. It was literally a leap of faith because my understanding was very immature, but there was this gut feeling and plea that led me to pray: "I don't know ... but God, you know where my heart is, and I cannot choose." It felt like there was this looming threat that if I left this church, I was walking away from God. I thought I was going to wake up and die.

This experience helped me think differently in terms of faith and extreme values—when you have something that is so dear to you, and someone threatens to take it away, when the very thing you love and value is challenged, that fear of its loss can be used in harmful ways. I now see the complexity behind extremist beliefs that claim to be motivated by "faith," when in fact they cause greater danger and hurt. In essence, I finally made a decision. I was going to stop going to that particular church for family.

I woke up the next day and, well, I am still here.

My mother started to slowly get better.

It took several years to repair some level of trust because after I found out what she had said to my friends, it stirred up more anger within me. Eventually, things returned to a level of normalcy at home. Shortly after that, however, around second or third year of university, these events started to impact my studies. There was this new and yet ongoing pragmatic struggle I had around the purpose of my studies and the direction of my life. Because of the faith that I now had, I really began to reassess my values and motivations for doing things. I remember sitting in microbiology class and looking at these amazing students around me; they were doing so well. You know, I did well, but I struggled—it made me think about my sense

of academic ability where there was always that difference between myself and my peers. I realized that when people do something they love, they just excel. My peers loved molecules; for me it was like squeezing a dry sponge. I started to think “I don’t want to do this anymore.” Again, I think it all comes back to that question I had since I was little: “What am I best suited for? What am I built for? Why am I here?”

My faith pushed me to question and pursue my purpose; my questions around what is right, or “how can I be a better person” not just for me but for the community, with the question of “why am I here” shifted. I had always been doing something creative, always doing my art. But I guess it never occurred to me that I could make that a focal point within my life for my career. There was this struggle again—not quite the same—but similar to have to choose that “rational . . . known” path. I remember sitting on the floor of my room, with a churning stomach. This exhaustion, and this sense of not knowing what to do. This same

pattern was repeating itself, and I saw how I was making decisions—a sense of being compelled and also being yet just so worn down. I even wrote the Dental Admissions Test, but I didn’t even end up opening my results. It caused friction within my family as well. Being the daughter of immigrants, I remember hearing or thinking “It’s just not a very good decision; you’re not going to be able to support yourself.”

There was this battle again, both external and internal. It was so hard; I went back and forth, weighing the pros and cons, but eventually this exhaustion, this gut feeling, this feeling of “what is left”—I finally thought “No, I don’t want to do this anymore. I’m going to pursue what I want to do, which was study art.”

I took a few years off and then went to graduate school in the United States; I ended up staying there for about five years. I had to become independent really fast just dealing with living on my own, but I enjoyed it. After graduate school though, that’s where things start to get a little bit blurry . . . This struggle



to support oneself ... that niggling feeling of “what’s my purpose?” found its way back into my life and into my artistic career. I wondered: am I going to be successful? There was always that little voice from when I was a child: “You have to perform, you have to be the best”, and then starting my career as an adult, “What’s my trajectory going to be like, realistically?” I got stuck in this phase of in-between, waiting for my visa in a recent post 9/11 world—not only wondering where I would live, but what I would do.

COMING HOME

Around the early 2000s, there was an opportunity to go to China and visit my parents’ villages through this bus tour that my uncle found for us. I didn’t really care about the other places; I just wanted to go to their villages. I know my parents weren’t sure if they wanted to go back; they hadn’t gone back since they left. I know they still think the past is the past, but I wanted to know. It was amazing. I am so grateful that I went; it changed the way I looked at my parents. When my father stepped into his own village he just lit up. There was this total role reversal. He was videotaping everything, pointing out places and buildings he could remember, and he was just so alive. These really serendipitous things would happen too, it was magical—like he bumped into this really old man who was probably around the same age as his father, or my grandfather if he was still alive, and there was this connection of like “Oh yeah, I knew your father!”

There was a sense of knowledge of elders passed through other elders. When we were trying to find our way, my dad would introduce himself through his family relations or naming his father, and all these people immediately knew who they were. I’ve never seen him so open and happy.

We went to the rice shop that my grandfather owned, the house where my dad grew up, and he just said “Yeah, this is where that was.”

There was also this beautiful painting he just described to me—it was really meaningful—he pointed out all the details, what should have been there and wasn’t anymore. He was trying to paint a picture for us, and it really impressed me; I marvelled at how much he still remembered, how much it mattered to him and to me, and how lucky I was to have that experience.

It shifted my research; it changed the way I understand my students too, especially those who are marginalized, when you don’t see yourself reflected in other people, to see it and to be immersed in it was powerful. It really made me think about the value of where my family comes from, and what happens when things aren’t remembered.

I still process it, this generational, whether genetically or spiritually, questioning of “where do I belong.” It was both an existential but also origin-related question; I think it had many facets. I always envied my friends whose ancestral lineage was well-documented—those with family trees; I felt like I didn’t know anything past my grandmother. I didn’t really know I was missing it until we happened to run into the record keeper of the whole village. He gave us a copy of the record of my family for all of the generations. It was all in Chinese, so I still can’t read it, and my mom says it doesn’t really make sense in many ways because of the typing errors, but it meant so much to me.

And I remember stepping into the record-keeping courtyard where the village gathered and looking at three portraits of these scholarly looking men (of course), who seemed like they were from some movie or

dynasty, who were related to me somehow. One was even a well-known scholar.

I burst out crying. It felt visceral. I don't know why, maybe of relief, or just in awe? There were documents and evidence that I had a history that went down several generations. I had not necessarily found my people ... but I felt this connection that ... I have an origin, I have a connection, I have a lineage, and I have a history.

ENDURING: LESSONS IN FAMILY, RESILIENCE, AND MYSELF

I saw another side of my parents because of that trip. When we went back to my mother's village, she showed us the places where she played; it was different. My mother's family didn't own property, and I know there were things she had to battle with throughout her life, especially as a woman. From a very young age, the world to her was a dangerous one. She taught me that early on: "You always have to be prepared." I know my mom always worries about me, even now as an adult. I think she literally sees my body, or me, as an extension of herself. Once when I was deciding whether or not to get a minor surgery done, we disagreed; I remember telling her "My body is my body; my body is not your body," and she said "No, you don't understand. Until you have a child, you don't know, you don't see that distinction." I know that it is out of love, but I feel the weight of that sometimes, and I also sort of understand. I am a part of her because I came from her.

My mother was very present, very vocal, and was a key influence. She would always give her opinion or tell me what was on her mind. Mom did a little bit of everything — she worked a lot. She was the one who took us around and everything and made decisions. I think mom taught me that you have to do things right. You have to be

careful. She also had a playful side: she taught me these games she used to play as a kid, and I remember them being so hard, but I always tried. When I think about it, my mother's playfulness and trying to find the humour in things, or find the joy when you can, I see that as something I am trying to learn to do more—just trying to be grateful for the things that are working out when they work out. Even now, my mother's motto when we are struggling is "things will work out." She would say this for herself, and she would try



to put on a face, a front that would allow her to carry through. She would endure it.

You just make it work. Your resilience comes in having to adapt.

It's the same thing with my father, when I think about how he had to immigrate twice and was separated from his family ... He had to figure it out. I see how he's just taught himself so many things because he had to. My dad was always the quieter parent, but he was always there, and he always agreed with my mother. He showed care and affection the best way he knew how; he cared by doing things for us. I was lucky to have some close moments with my father, especially when I was younger. Where my mother and I talked, my father and I did things together. He taught us things including tennis, biking, and

he taught us how to draw ... that was where I learned it. It was from him.

He also had a creative background. We would sit down, and I remember that was a thing I loved to do at the time. On Sunday nights, I still remember the soundtrack too, we would play these records, and he would listen to the music, and I would sit in the living room and draw. I remember he would show us how to draw simple shapes.

I remember getting jealous when I was getting older, around eight or ten, because he was showing my cousins or guests from out of town the same thing, but I think that was the way he knew how to connect with them. He would be happy to show us drawing tricks, or how to fold origami—he was really good at that, and we were so impressed.

He's always been a teacher; he takes pride in when he knows something and being able to share that knowledge or being able to help someone.

He's the one who all my uncles and relatives would seek out to fix their computers. He puts himself out there because that's how he shows care for someone. My father taught me how to prepare: he taught me to do my homework, and if I didn't know, I had to find out. I know sometimes it's to a fault, but I do value being able to support myself and be independent, especially for being a woman, in my choice to be a single woman.

I think my father had the same expectation of me with my career—to abandon our impractical passions or pursuits. When I did not, there was a tension point, but the reason why I love art so much is because it came from him. When I moved back because of COVID and left the teaching position I had been in, I got a chance to really talk more with my parents. When I was younger, the only thing I knew about my dad's childhood and his parents, my

grandparents, was that they had been tortured during the cultural revolution. There were little pieces here and there, and I know it was a really hard thing to talk about, but I know my grandparents had to kneel on glass because they were being punished for owning property—a memory that my grandmother carried throughout her life. I thought about that recently, and I thought about my grandma, my father's mother.

You know ... when he gave me that ultimatum to move in with his mother, maybe it had a different meaning? I saw it then as a way of pushing me away, but perhaps he saw it as a gesture of care? Maybe it was his way of saying “I can't help you, so I'll send you to the one person who can help you at this point, which is my mother.”

I still struggle with “resilience.”

The resilience I hold, I don't know how exactly to describe it; maybe I see the resilience in my life as just more endurance. That's how I felt: just “endure this,” “endure the decision,” or “endure.” Even in all of the agony, or what I used to see then as deciding between “right” or “wrong,” or figuring out the right direction, I just tried to stick through it. That was my universal strategy. I think about that in relation to my faith; despite, or maybe within all the unknown and the unknowing, I still had faith. It wasn't easy. Of course, there was unknowing out of fear and anxiety, but there was also unknowing out of curiosity, and that can feed you.

I still have so much to learn, but it was all genuine.

... and I kept going—through all of these moments, transitions, and decisions—I try to keep going. ◻

*I feel such deep
appreciation and love for
you, dad*

*I know you may feel there
were missed
opportunities, but*

*I appreciate what you
have taught me...*

*Even though you were
quiet...*

*You taught me how to be
present without saying a
lot...*

*You taught me how to be
ok to be by oneself...*

*There are moments I am
alone, but I don't feel
lonely.*

*There is a strength in
that.*

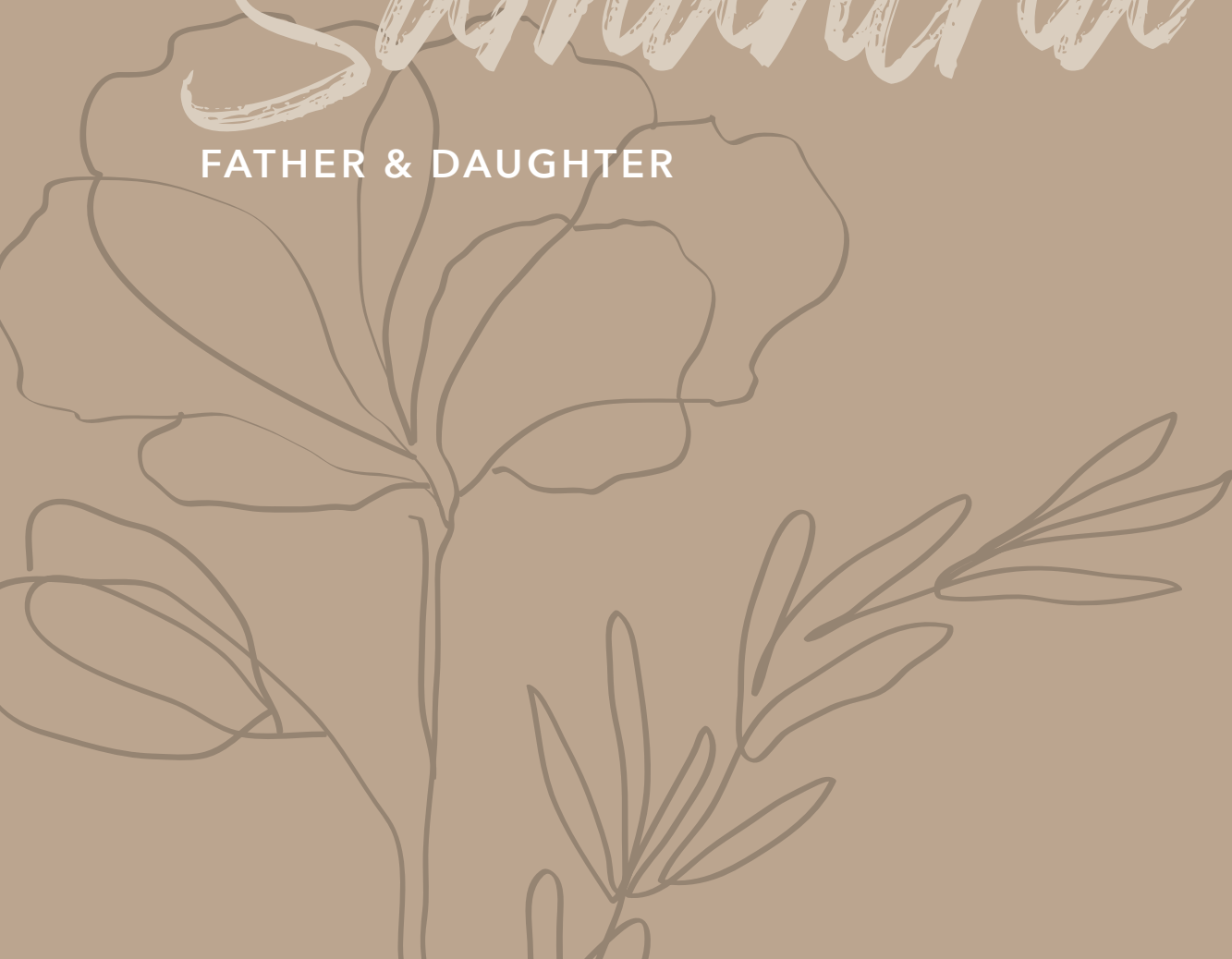
*That is a part of who you
are.*

*That has shaped who I
am.*

A poetic
adaptation of
words shared
by Audrey to
George after
witnessing each
other's story

Alex &
Samantha

FATHER & DAUGHTER





ALEX'S STORY

It's just a hiccup

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING, “We walk under the shade or tree of our parents.”

俗語云：桐油瓶出桐油。父母對子女的成长是有一定的影响力，我们就像他們的縮影。

We all walk under their shadow every day. We pick up points: good points and bad points, the view they take. We are our mini parents in many ways; we copy them to a certain degree. I was lucky since I have a broader view than a child who grew up in a two-parent family. My dad and mom had to work long hours. My dad barely made ends meet, so he shipped me off to a boarding school. I was fortunate enough to get picked. Those six years were my formative years. It taught me discipline. Discipline, it gave me the foundation of what is right and what is wrong, and I am living in the right way.

The lightning rod that shifted my life forever is after my marriage, I realized I have a huge responsibility to support my family as a unit. I didn't want them to experience a typhoon under my watch, so it made me keep on improving myself. I had the responsibility of an adult—to have my job constantly

on my mind and the learning curve of language, which was a big hurdle. Also, the occasional racist outbursts; the stupid things that people display on their face and say to you like “China Man,” it still happens. It’s never going to stop until everyone on the Earth, one day, looks the same.

I don’t want my family to live in the fear of not belonging. 我不想自己的家人感覺不到在加拿大應有的 - ‘歸屬感’。

I don’t want my children or grandchildren to ever feel like they’re an inconvenience to the world. There needs to be a change. How can we be inconvenient? Who built the railway? What was the Exclusion Act in 1923 for? Hardships are hiccups, and we all need to deal with that in life. Everybody is traumatized, yet it’s not the end of the world—it’s just a hiccup. I use the same term with my granddaughter: hiccup.

GROWING UP IN HONG KONG

People were poor. There was a point in my young life when my parents weren’t doing so good. We lived in a 10 by 6 square hut and my mom and dad had 6 kids, so being the oldest and not having enough room, I needed to



sleep outside of the house in the summer time. I didn’t have a comfy bed, and I didn’t have a blanket, but I did have a pillow. My family didn’t have a fridge probably until the 1970s. We didn’t have fancy food, but there was food for us to eat. I never had to go to bed hungry. My lunch those days were rice and one fried egg. There were times by noon that some restaurants would cook up a mixed-up dish of leftovers. And there were times I needed to go get 雜碎⁷ (zaap6 seoi3) for my family with a little bucket. There weren’t many people who lined up for 雜碎 (zaap6 seoi3). We couldn’t afford to go shop for a regular meal from the market all the time. We were still quite lucky in certain ways because my aunt and uncle used to sell veggies and fish, and I used to go buy groceries for dinner with around two Hong Kong dollars that my mom gave me. This experience didn’t impact me negatively. We were just poor.

Nobody had any money at that time. I used to walk to school every day for 45 minutes. Along the way, I gradually found out all of the short cuts to go to different places. Touring all of the theatres was my only entertainment. What else can you do when you have no money? Fortunately, I got picked for boarding school. My primary teacher recommended that school to my family after knowing our situation. There were 500 of us. We got up at 6:30am and the lights went out at 10pm. There were many rules and regulations. When I was 16 or 17, I didn’t believe in discipline. I wrote a letter to the principal without signing my name. I suggested that we needed to improve on our well-being. He wasn’t very happy. I was in his

⁷ 雜碎 (zaap6 seoi3): Chop suey (mixed stew and mainly mixed vegetables)



office one night, sitting from 9 pm to midnight. He asked me “Do you know what you did wrong?” I was thinking, “What would you do to me?” And I told him “I quit” (我不讀了)! He gave me a press on the head. I still remember what he did: pressed it and dragged the devil out of me.

So that was a dramatic experience, and it gave me some anchor points. Without a father figure in my young life, I figured out at this school that what they say goes.

Discipline was one thing that I learned from boarding school, and it was probably the best thing that ever happened to me.

寄宿學校的生活養成我有紀律性的生活習慣，這可能是我經歷過的最好的事情。

I learned that when I was in the priest’s office. Toughness and discipline never hurt anybody.

Regular hardship becomes a regular routine after a while, and I can laugh about it now.

You do whatever you gotta do. And I learned that from my mom. “你做你該做的事”這是我從媽媽那裡學到的。

My mom was very good. She had to bargain for six of us, and she tried to fulfill her end. My mom is tough; she would never complain. She never threw a tantrum at us, except when we were being bad. I never heard my parents arguing. Growing up in the family, my mom had to learn many other things other than taking care of us. Mom didn’t even finish primary 3, and dad wanted to open a wholesale. She had to learn how to write a cheque and figure out how to check this and that. My mom was also persistent. Those days when I didn’t want to go get 雜碎 (zaap6 seoi3), and didn’t want to wait for it, my mom would tell us that we don’t have 志氣 (zi3 hei3), meaning no guts or firm conviction. It hurt my feelings then, but she is my mom. My mom is my mom. She followed her routine and whatever came up to her in life, she dealt with it. Let life tell you, and deal with it. I wish I could have her tranquility. Since I’m the only one in Vancouver who is taking care of and visiting my mom at the care home, my sisters say “辛苦你啦!” (san1 fu2 nei3 laa1), meaning “We know the trouble you have to go through,” but I said “No, this is part of my responsibility.”

MAKING A LIFE IN CANADA

The life of an immigrant is pretty routine—a bunch of struggles as well as ups and downs.



Most of my hiccups happened after I arrived in Vancouver in 1973.

It was just me. Trauma to me as a 21-year-old guy doesn't exist because my parents bought me a rice cooker, a single-person one. San Francisco was my first point of entry; everything happened in San Francisco and one of my friends from Church lived there, so I visited them. They liked my rice cooker, and I guess in those days it was hard to get one, so I gave it to them. Not a worry in the world for me. That was just me.

I always knew prejudice existed. I had some pretty good basic understanding of English, listening-wise anyway, so I knew what was going on and I knew from the tone. One time when I was looking for the vocational school in Chinatown, by mistake I walked into a Native Affairs Office and the lady behind the counter didn't even look up, and she asked if I wanted a meal ticket or a room ticket. I learned then that Indigenous people were being looked down upon in a certain way. The Chinatown old timers had their own slang. I knew it wasn't right to paint people with one brush. I developed almost a sixth sense on people's body language and tone—that helped me. I can see that subconsciously, the majority still displays this kind of attitude. One time, there was a native guy who was being looked down on, and every time I walked by him, I called him by his name. Some Caucasian guy kind of sideways glanced at us. "How come this Chinese guy and this Native guy have such a great conversation?" Why not? The Caucasian guy won't be the last guy to give me a sideways glance, and he wasn't the first guy, so I don't pay attention to them. It's just human nature. We all have our prejudices towards other people and good-hearted, level-headed people would suppress this negative feeling. I'm very happy for the Truth and

Reconciliation movement in Canada. Our Indigenous brothers and sisters finally will have justice. Perhaps, these are my personal feelings, but it's a long time coming for them.

Racism happens. Even before the pandemic, I heard people say "You never know what a Chinese restaurant will serve you—cats, dogs, whatever." So I never let it get me down since there's no point in letting it get me down. I think when times are good, everyone is happy. But when times are bad,



people tend to pick the easy target. We need to make our voices heard and our feelings known about how our Canadian society always picks the easy way out. My son was born in 1974 and Samantha was born in 1976.

When they were young, we tried to instill in their young minds that they have to work hard, perhaps twice as hard, because of the colour of our skin.

当孩子们年轻的时候，我们灌输一些理念给他们：因为我们是亚裔血统可能要双倍努力。

We have to make ourselves stand out compared to others. I think they were quite young and didn't understand what I was trying to tell them. In their young minds, they already saw that they were different from their peers at school. When Samantha was in kindergarten, still in her childhood innocence, she asked me, "Dad, can I change my name to Samantha White?" I said "Why?" It turned out that her kindergarten teacher's last name was "White," and there were only two Asian families in the whole of Port Alberni. I told them "No because we are Chinese." English is already their mother language. I wanted to make it clear that some things are not negotiable. If I was white, I wouldn't have to go through all this crap, either and I could talk about bad stuff easily, but I wanted to set a good example for them. As a young father, I felt a huge sense of responsibility.

The year we moved to Port Alberni, there was a grocery store for sale. We owned it for about 6 years. I also had a job in the pulp mill and the store opened from 10 am to 10 pm. I knew nothing about running a store, and my wife had a mathematics diploma from Korea. She could teach mathematics and our language was not up to it, but she was willing to help me, help us, make a better life for the future. I didn't even know there was a snack called "Nuts and Bolts." A customer once came looking for it, and I told them to go to a hardware store. She shook her head and walked out of the store. I had no idea. But if you want to get out of the rut, to get better for the future, for the kids, for yourself, there's only one way ... hard work and education. In 1997, I took Occupational Management at a vocational school to accomplish something. I've accomplished more than my fellow Chinese Canadians at that time. I'm a firm believer of education and both of our children



are good with that—my son has the brains and Samantha is the studious type as well.

I had a friend who came from Macau to Port Alberni when he was a teenager and, for 30 years, he never went on a holiday. The first time was when he was in his late 40s. Work, work, work. That's not the kind of life I want to implant on my kids. They have to have a life like other Canadians. I knew at a young age that they needed to see the world, so we took them on a long trip to Alberta. We brought them to Colorado and back up to the west coast. As a parent, we tried to expose our children to the world. We wanted them to see how other people lived, so they could have independent thinking.

It was not easy to bring up children in Canada—a lot of hiccups. I told them I've never been to parenting school, so give me a break.

在加拿大养育孩子不容易。我告诉我的孩子：“我从来没有去过家长学校。”

They teased me a lot about my accent. Those days, I said, “Just be proud, never deny your heritage.”

Discrimination happens. I find that, because of my extensive dealings with the public, I have an easier time talking to people Southeast Asian, Black-Canadian ... they can confide in me, it’s easier. I don’t know what brought this up, I was getting my second COVID shot and the Southeast Asian volunteer said “Don’t worry. There’s more of us than them.” I didn’t expect this mindframe—I was surprised she blurted it out. I didn’t know how to respond. I know what she meant: there’s more non-white people than white people. So, I said “Racism goes both ways” because as much as some of them dislike my face, what is superior about you? I know they



call white people all kind of names. Because of COVID-19, discrimination is being brought back to the surface again for no rhyme or reason. Chinese Canadians or Asian Canadians are being finger-pointed. But discrimination goes both ways. I’m prouder of being Chinese now than when I was in Hong Kong. I see Canadians as equals. We need to be inclusive as Canadians.

YOUR FAMILY IS STILL FAMILY

As a new immigrant, a new father, it was a lot of work. With the lack of a father figure in my

young life, I always wanted to find a father to mentor me and give me a hand. When I was in my early 40s, I talked to my friend, who is an older person I knew from the city. He knew what was going on, and I thought it would nice if he could be my dad because then I didn’t have to go through all this crap. But he was just a good friend to go to for advice; he is not my dad. By then my dad was gone for 10 or 12 years.

You can’t pick your family, but you can pick your friends. Your family is still your family.

我們可以選擇朋友，但不可以選擇家人。 家人永远是家人。

Life companionship, it’s not a guaranteed meal ticket. Both need to be balanced, and your partner has to be compatible, regardless of education, background, or income level. As a parent’s point of view, I tell my daughter, a husband is not worth a meal ticket. It’s not worth it. After I got married, I realized I have a huge responsibility and that I have wasted lots of time. It reminded me of when I grew up with my family and how we had to keep all the chickens inside of our small place during a typhoon. I don’t want any of those events to happen to my family. In my youthful years, I didn’t accomplish anything at all. When I went to college to study steam engineering, I travelled down from Port Alberni to Victoria every other weekend. I realized that shift work is not good for family life. I was confident that I would not be stuck in the small town for the rest of my life. Many Chinese-Canadian friends I made wanted to stay in the small town once they stepped off the plane. They worked in the pulp mill or Chinese restaurants from black hair to grey hair. I knew that I didn’t want to do that.

I told my children "Education is important, you need education."我告訴我的孩子們“教育很重要，你需要教育。”

The City of Vancouver hired me from Port Alberni, out of all those applicants. People don't hire you because you are good-looking; people hire you because you have what they need to do the job.

When our kids were young, I always took the approach of guiding them towards their own chosen direction. I told them to do whatever they gotta do. As parents, we all want our own kids to graduate from the best high school. And I know now that you never want to compare your children with other children. We used to go sit at McDonald's to



do our tough talks instead of at home because the parents are the boss, but at McDonalds, it's neutral ground. The high school we looked for both of them, it was for gifted kids. I thought they both had potential,

but they both declined the opportunity. But now my son knows, and Samantha knows. That's the hiccup; that's my hurdle.

And now I think our children are good at what they do. My daughter is a good teacher and a very good person. She's got some good points, and she is also helping children with extra needs. She sees the good side and not-so-good side. She does self-help. She has gone through her own twists and turns in life. Even though she is not together with her husband anymore, she is still constantly upgrading. My son was going to be a kinesiologist, but he said to me, "I can't stand people that lie." Then two years later, he started to work at an insurance company. He wanted to work on things that didn't lie to him, so he chose computers. And now he has a group of people with the same frequency. They know that the value of work that they put in will give them extra income to buy stuff—hard work will not hurt anybody.

PERSISTENCY, CONSISTENCY, AND EMPATHY

I have overcome all of that because I am resilient. When I was a kid, there was no toilet paper, so we just used newspaper. If I don't have this, I can always make do with that. It is what it is. This is tough. Life is never easy. My sense of humour ... I developed it. I had to have tough skin. I guess it comes with life's ups and downs. If you don't laugh, you pout and that's not good for your health. Why not be happy or try to be happy? I try to be happy. I am not superior to those people who pout. We all have to live our life in a way that is healthy for ourselves and the people around us. I have come to believe that I have my limitations. After all this upgrading academically and professionally, I believe in the system of pick-and-choose. You have to be able to play ball with everyone and when you

don't like to play ball with them, you create your own game. That's my coping mechanism. Laugh it off.

Two children with two different personalities. It depends on a person's makeup—how they perceive things and who they encounter. My son, being a guy, is quiet and tight-lipped. Samantha is more outspoken, and she has encountered some altercations, even in the school system. For example, a colleague snapped his fingers to get Samantha's attention. At this day and age, you don't do that. You gotta be respectful of your colleagues and your environment. I think my son would just ignore it.

Samantha would give a couple of good comebacks. I think we learn from our parents for sure. Samantha probably picked up all the bad influence, like quick comebacks, from me. I learned from my environment because all my abilities or inabilities of our language is from Canada. If I'm going to blame something, I'm going to blame my environment. Why do we look at the Indigenous people and think they're all drunkards? Because the society instilled in us that they can't handle their liquor. The white man introduced that fire water. I hope our future generations can see it for what it is. My son and Samantha know what hard work is. I think I did my 110-115%. I think after I'm gone, they'll think dad's a stupid workhorse. I understand that, when it's coming, I have to laugh it off because we all have to face some unpleasantness in life. So if I'm lucky, I'm healthy—gotta be positive.

Throughout our whole life, the generation gap has always been there.

This story is about my own passage of time, but I share what I feel my three grandchildren or their generation should always carry in

their mind: persistency, consistency, and empathy.

這故事是關於我自身的經歷, 不过我会分享我的体会, 希望子孙们和孙背的一代能記得: 不懈之心, 专一性, 同感之心.

These three things are high on my list. I think persistence and consistency will give young people success. Everything that authority figures in our lives tell us, there's got to be a reason. As a teenager, most of us, myself included, sometimes we want to rebel, want to get away from them. That's why I spent 2 or 5 hours standing in my principal's office. Our school had a very structured environment, and it was a good thing for young people. I know young people these days live in a different world. I told my granddaughter "You and I are three generations apart." But I was 16-years old once. Everybody takes a cigarette and a drink at parties. I pretty much did everything they are doing, maybe less. But ... different generation. I told my granddaughter "What's your plan B if plan A doesn't work out? Your best friend is the one you see first thing in the morning when you look into the mirror! As long as you realize, for every action there is a consequence, and for every action you do to yourself, those in your family will have a reaction. You have to be ready to take responsibility. If you want to have adult privileges, you have to be ready to take on 'adult-sized responsibilities.'" I want my grandchildren to know about all these privileges they already have.

I've seen Canada. In 2006, I biked across Canada—what better chance to be Canadian. Spirituality has also become a part of my life, so I rode a bike from July 1st, Canada Day, to September 3rd to St. John's, Newfoundland, to raise funds. Every night, we stopped at a

church in a different town, and congregations would serve us wholesome food. I got to meet with and talk to people along the way and stayed in their homes, which they graciously opened to us for the night! Our “one-night stands” must have broken the world record! It gave me a great opportunity to understand Canadian people as people. It was a great experience. My bike ride was an eyeopener for me.

We are all the same. Hardships are hiccups, and we all need to deal with that in life. I have overcome all of that because I am resilient.
我们都一样. 我们都需要应对生活中的困难. 我克服了这一切, 因为我有韧性.

I am tough. It's just a hiccup. 📍





SAMANTHA'S STORY

It's okay, we're all human

I THINK THE DEFINITION OF RESILIENCE is coming out of something really difficult and living in a fuller way by still getting more out of life than it took from you: it's the ratio of getting more out of life than what the adversity took from you. I am resilient in an auto-pilot kind of way. I recognize my privilege, and that my parents have a different experience of

adversity. My parents are very resilient—they're really tough, but it must have been super difficult for them emotionally when we were younger. We're noticing now that they're human. Humans, people, who have emotions. I notice that they're way more vulnerable to being hurt than I thought. The separation ... my dad coming to retrieve me ... my uncle passing ... I see a commonality; my dad is a human being. I don't often see it ... I'm the offspring. And my own offspring has a hard time seeing me as someone who is human or ever had human emotions. It's a self-centred world they're in at the time, but kids these days grow up with words like self-care and reflection. When something really difficult happens, it's easy to gloss over it, but we have



time now to talk about it. Having grandchildren helped. Having my daughter as the new member of our team has made the transition to talk about emotions a lot easier. She forces people to say “I love you”—words my dad would label as “awkward.” Talking about something was always our last available option. Now we talk about it.

LEARNING MY DAD IS HUMAN

It was a watermark moment: it was the dawn of the 2000s and I just moved back from Ottawa, back in with my parents in their detached home in Vancouver. My dad spent quite a lot of time away from home to go on trips, but he would always come back. We'd always joke about how that's how a successful marriage ran. For them, it's not common to be on the same schedule. They even had different friends because my mom's Korean and my dad's Chinese. But this time, he left and said, “I'm leaving for good.” He was leaving because he didn't want to be with mom; he didn't want to be here. I took it really personally, for my mom. How could he abandon her?

Though I know in the grand scheme of life, even if your marriage is fine, you can get up anytime and walk away. It's totally within anybody's right, but I was angry that he put her in this position.

I remember he gave me his car for a dollar. It was a crappy white Geo Metro and the driver's side door didn't even work, so I had to climb in through the passenger door. I was really uncomfortable when we met. He was very defensive, and I didn't want to talk about anything with him. After I signed the papers and he said, “I want to talk to you.” I remember I didn't want to deal with it—it was so awkward. I thought “Who are you? You don't talk about stuff.” So I ran away from the house, got into the car that he just signed over, and zoomed away while he stood in the street calling, “Get back here!” That was the beginning of emotion and conflict—the acknowledgement of conflict. Back in the day, we wouldn't typically do something like that. The way they parented was so skillful. They knew the cold shoulder really well. We just got it, but we weren't talking about it. We just had to think about it, lots of thinking. When

you have to talk about it ... that's really hard. There was a ton of conflict, but the acknowledgement of conflict was very uncomfortable. That might have been the beginning of "let's talk about our feelings" with my mom and dad.

I think he was gone for a year and a half or two. I started spending a lot more time with my brother and mom. I think that was a way to cope, to just enjoy each other's company, just sit around the kitchen table and talk. We would also watch terrible tv shows, super cheesy comedy dramas. Dad had this routine of watching the news at 6 pm and watching the *Entertainer* at 7 pm, so we just wanted to change it. The first Christmas we had without him, mom wasn't into it, so my brother and I suggested to do everything completely different and introduce new traditions. We were just living it, doing everything different, and seeing how it sits with us. I put hours into making this ham that we don't usually have; it was covered with pineapple rings and cherries; it looked like such a spectacle and it's so gross, but she enjoyed it. I still think about that ham and every subsequent Christmas ham because it doesn't actually belong there; it was just planted there in the attempt to distract, something new and different. That was a rough time, so I'd help my mom out at her store, and we were spending more time together, letting our worlds come together.

And then he came back. That was ... weird. And I think the weirdness was solved by me moving out, by not talking about it. It just seamlessly came back together. Things just carried on. I picture what he would say or do if I asked him "Hey, remember when you left mom? What were you thinking? What were you doing?" But I can't even imagine it. We would never talk about it. But they're okay, I think. They made some minor

adjustments, and they get along. I don't think we would ever talk about it again, unless he brought it up. I don't think I would bring it up because I have no idea what caused him to leave or what caused him to come back. That's a giant Scooby-doo mystery. We have no clue. But, for whatever reason, they work and I'm happy for them. I'm super relieved and happy for them because the thought of my parents being lonely is scary, so it's nice that they have a home base. I feel content. I'm not even that curious now. Even though I don't know why he left and why he came back, they're just human. I'm sure I would understand his reason.

I think it's really reassuring seeing that my dad is a human being. To see him as an autonomous human, or for lack of a better term, "a white person whose really in touch with their feelings and other people's feelings." I know there were moments of adversity in his childhood that have shaped him and his relationships. He was given to be raised by his grandma, instead of being at home with his mom and dad. He defined it as just how it was back in the day but, knowing him and the way he opens up more and more about his childhood, I know it was something that bothered him. Knowing this is reassuring and definitely helps as I grow as a person because it reaffirms that it's okay to make emotions and to even HAVE emotions. It's a double-edged sword though, cause if it wasn't okay and emotions didn't exist, we could just creep through life; just going to work, doing a business, and being ... just fine on the surface. He also told me about being in boarding school, and I think he was disappointed those days. He would talk about it if I asked him, but what's different is he would bring it up on his own sometimes. He'd bring it up if we're going through something that's hard for us. It definitely



helped when he did, like oh that sucks. His whole childhood was kind of messy, and he was largely left on his own. He had to build his own emotional resilience; that would have been pretty hard. Though, it leaves a lot of space for my own child and his granddaughter to grow emotionally, so it's really given us good life skills moving forward.

LEARNING I AM HUMAN

January 13, 2006, this was my moment of adversity. If my infant and I stayed in New York, possibly one or both of us would not be alive right now. My dad took me back and helped me move home. He did what I couldn't do for myself during my moment of adversity. Now everything I look at, I treasure. My daughter and I came back 16 years ago with nothing but a suitcase. And now, all these things ... we have so much, it's amazing. If we stayed there, we would not be speaking right now. Life would be completely different.

My ex-husband was an addict, incredibly controlling, and verbally abusive. I wasn't able to recognize his addictions until it was too late. The week prior to us leaving, his body was very uncomfortable and in a lot of pain from withdrawals while he was trying to

detox. He was angry all the time. I remember it was New Year's Day when he slept through our daughter's 6-month milestone of beginning to eat solid food. I was so mad. You can't just wake up and pretend to be normal. Then he took the sweet potatoes and threw them across the apartment, brown smear everywhere ... it created this reign of terror because it was just this back-and-forth of screaming at each other and throwing things. It was so bad ... so bad. It just got worse and worse. I couldn't be there anymore. If it was just me and I was the only casualty, then fine. But we had a daughter, a child, so we needed to go. We were already living by incredibly low standards, and it was not good enough. So, we had to go.

I didn't tell my parents right away. I told my best friend and she's like "Somebody needs to come get you," and called my brother, but he didn't want to do it. My dad ended up coming. He can make things simultaneously awkward and comfortable for people. He's very socially malleable that way. And so, he came to help me move home. To sort of "Okay everybody, there's a real adult here now. Let's just clear a pathway." And it worked. I don't think I would've been able to do that. He got my ex-husband to sign a letter for the baby to travel with me and just took me back. It was a really adverse time for me, and probably my dad too, but my parents were so involved. I got to live in their basement again with my daughter—it was fun. It was so clean, normal, and quiet ... so much quieter ... than being in New York ... than being with him. My friend would come over every day after she taught and just take care of my baby.

My dad also took me to meet a domestic violence counsellor at the hospital where he worked, so I got to bring my daughter there and talk to her. My parents were so involved

and proactive about nudging me towards a healing path. They made it easy for me to get back on my feet and taught me the value of having positive networks and maintaining friendships.

I'm still getting through it. I've done so much in the past 16 years; I was trying to live life very busy, but that didn't work out well. Working took a lot of time and now I try to be more authentic with people about my boundaries and what I'm willing to take on and what I'm not willing to do, so I just try being more balanced—just letting people help me. I don't like to ask for help, but some days I just can't deal or leave the house. I'm addressing when I get anxious about things because of that event and that time in life. And my parents are lately very in tune to that, so they help me through acts of services such as driving my daughter around or preparing a meal. Continuing therapy has been good. Also, I started smoking again and, back in the day, my dad smoked a lot. Just recently, he asked me about how many cigarettes I smoked a day, and he said, "That's fine, just something to take the edge off." It's so funny how the relationship changed 'cuz there is no way in hell he'd be okay with it if I was a teenager. Now he's like "Samantha, do what you need to get through this." It makes me feel good.

I think it's really important for adults to be open to kids seeing their flaws. Maybe not see me at the height of my psychosis but enough to remember I'm human and also going through stuff. It's okay to be human about it. I also find it hard not to crack a joke and make some sort of fun about it, cuz it's kind of funny but so not funny at the same time. I'm still getting through it.

LEARNING WE ARE HUMAN

I think it was 2013 and my uncle had gone missing. I thought adults were supposed to have it together. My uncle was older than me, but he did not have his life together. He did it in the best way he knew how to though. He was the coolest uncle ever. His passing made me realize now that we don't always meet the timelines. There are people all over the city just trying to stay alive.

His plan was to retire here in Canada, but when he moved here from Hong Kong it was probably difficult for him to adjust to the differences here. And I think he was too proud to ask for help. He was just starting to get his life in order: he invested in a condo with my dad in Chinatown. It was to be built but was still in developing stages. In the



meantime, he lived in some sort of shanty house? I don't know how to describe it, but it was a house filled with illegal suites and it was so gross. Like it was the grossest thing. It was an area in Vancouver that had been gentrified near the PNE (Pacific National Exhibition), so it looked aesthetic from the street, but inside there were 10 different men living in different rooms where fake walls were put up in a living room, and it had wires everywhere because they shared one cable box. They shared a bathroom and kitchen but

would bring all their dishes back to their room for storage. It was such a small room, where they slept in and held all their belongings and food. I know my dad knew where my uncle lived, but I don't think he had ever been inside.

Last time we saw him was during Christmas for the holidays. No one heard from him for a few days, so my dad tried calling him and knocking on the house door, but it's a shanty house; no one really answers because none of the men living in there know each other. After a couple of days my dad had a funny feeling, so he went back, unlocked or took down the door ... and found him dead



in his room ... his bedroom ... in his whole world, I guess.

The smell of body ... you don't ever forget that smell. We're people that usually don't ask for help, but my dad asked me and my brother to help move his things. It's interesting to go through people's things after

they've passed. So, we had to pack up his things, and my dad was very practical and pragmatic, so me and my brother did the same because we wanted to match his energy. But occasionally, one of us would pop off and cry or get mad. My dad would do the same: we're all on the same wavelength; we've come so far. It was so bad seeing all my uncle's stuff there. His life was just coming together. He got a job and had written all his upcoming shifts on his free Rice World calendar that was up on his wall. He had written lists of what to get my daughter and the nephews for Christmas. So crazy. And seeing stuff from our past that we've given him, having to go through someone's life like that and all their private stuff, there was just no room for old walls—we had to communicate and get through it together.

No one should have to live like he did. I was kind of pissed, low-key, at my mom for not letting him stay in the basement where I had lived and recovered. It would've been so much better; it's a nice place to get your crap together. So, I was kind of resentful about it and worried about if my dad would be angry about it. I think it immediately impacted me with anger. I thought "How could people live like this?" So, I called the city and told them there was this house will all these illegal suites. I told them there's a cable box with 10 wires coming out of it, and that my uncle's door had bullet holes in it. I would just research for hours online about what to do about it. I'm sure my dad felt pretty guilty about it too. You think you know your family, but they have all these secrets, or maybe it's because we didn't give room to him to tell us these things. He died because of health complications. He was cutting his heart medication in a half; he should've been able to ask for help. We're family and we turn to our family members for protection, but he

wasn't offered that. I worry my dad feels guilty about this.

As family, I think we should all have given him, given everybody, space to ask for help. It also impacted me positively because I know I



should be spending more time with my family and make that a priority. We became a little bit closer and more aware of each other's well-being. We adapted in a positive way—checking in more often with each other. It was a good reset, before we weren't even supposed to acknowledge that we had experienced hardships. Now we turn to each other a little bit more as the years go on. It's a good thing that we're communicating more. Anxiety just really makes you want to prepare for worst-case scenarios. I'm obsessed with preparation now, and my dad did the same after my uncle passed: he obsessed with preparing for death. I'm trying to enjoy life for the sake of enjoying it; it's been hard. I should be staying in the moment a little more.

We also coped by enjoying each other's company more. We spent a lot more vacation time together since my uncle passed. My mom and dad organized a big family trip together to Asia before COVID during spring break. It was really fun. We hit Korea, Seoul, where my mom was from and Hong Kong, where my dad is from. In Hong Kong, we

stayed at the worst hotel possible called Panda Hotel, and there were stuffed pandas and such in the lobby. It made no sense, it was stupid. And the wi-fi was terrible, but the strongest signal that came through had the same name as my uncle. It was a dramatic moment of connection for my dad, brother, and I. We were like “WOAH.” The trip was a way for my parents to show us not the hard times they grew up in but a keynote, so we can get to know them a bit more. We just let it happen and it was fun. We decided that it was best to be in the moment together. Like “What do you wanna do today?,” “I don't know let's just go find coffee,” “Okay.” It was much more pleasant than I thought it would be. We were all present with each other. It was a really good trip, really good.

OUR LIFELONG LOVE OF LEARNING

I kind of give myself credit for being the one to come home broken, you know, give my parents a project to work on, become a success story. It took me a lot to get unstuck and move on. I have a life where I can take a day or 180 for myself if I need to, but I just don't. I keep going until I stop, and then I need to stay in bed for three days. So, there's definitely room for improvement in that area. My dad copes by trying to get better and by working a ton. I think he's always coped by preoccupying himself, and he still does. Maybe both for pleasure and in a meditative way to get through something. He always has a new hobby on the go. We're similar in that aspect. It's very easy for me to throw myself into work and become “the best teacher ever,” or spend too many nights planning or making phone calls for a kid, to help out other people, to distract myself from what I should be working through. So, we're similar in that regard. My dad and I like to phrase it as “a lifelong love of learning.”



If you had to put us in little themed shirts, ours would say, “What else you gonna do?” My parents definitely passed down the importance of being independent, of being able to stand on your own. Because life is just going to be full of those moments when you are alone physically, starting over. And you

just have to keep on going ... I’m a little bit conscious of them getting older. Like, I’m not going to have these parents ... that’s going to be hard. We all live in a world where we have these connections that we have to honour and stay present for, and I can’t just run away. It’s always like “mother to, loving sister to, you know, wife of, grandchild ...”, who are you in relation to somebody. But there’s always a glimmer of opportunity to be your very own person; there’s always that promise of being able to start over because what else are you going to do?

I hope this story shows that I admire my dad for his resilience. Somehow, he can have human emotions but still move forward, despite it. That’s just what he does. There’s always going to be something to live for. That’s how my dad keeps going. So many crappy things can happen to him, and he’ll just continue to carry on. He’s a fighter—it’s how he is. I’m so grateful for my dad’s emotional intelligence, and his ability to set boundaries for what’s okay and not okay to talk about, because I really need that. Me and him ... it’s easy. Now, we talk about our feelings. 📍

i didn't think that you would be searching for a father figure...

and i'm so grateful that you're my daughter's father figure.

it really means a lot to me that you said you think your children are good...

and that they can handle things.

i'm just in awe of you...

but the amount of empathy you've shown me...

...has been incredible.

*you're like the first old chinese dude that thinks of mental health as a priority...
and that's had such a great impact on me and your granddaughter.*

did you drink today dad? did you have a drink?

why do you say that? no, it's the lighting!

we're all human ...

i had no idea about what huge responsibility it was to have kids.

oh yes, it suuccks!

Snippets of Alex and Samantha's conversation after witnessing each other's story



*Cecilia &
Tsabelle*

MOTHER & DAUGHTER





CECILIA'S STORY

*You do what
you need to do*

"PUSH THROUGH IT, YOU JUST DO IT," is something that I've carried with me from my parents, just like the other traditions they've left with me. My parents were very very traditional. Tradition means you do things in a certain way because that's the way things have always been done. And, to be honest, I do follow many traditions instilled in me from my mother and father—a lot of it. It's a way of carrying on my culture. I always felt that I have a slightly different life than my friends while I was growing up in the way that I was brought up. I was just different. I chose not to do certain things, and I chose not to buy some things. My family very much accepted what we had—there was a value of humility that I was taught. Being a second-generation Canadian Chinese, my parents' generation does not always acknowledge when something's going wrong. There's a different acknowledgement I have than what my

family's had. For my parents' generation, it was very prevalent: grandparents, great grandparents, even more prevalent.

My generation's resilience is still knowing that you can get through, but it's also about how you do it and how you approach it. You don't have to fight everything all the time. It's just part of life.

For myself, it's knowing I didn't get stuck. I did what I needed to do. Like dad taught us, you need to be independent: you never want to be stuck or depend on another person. I understand that you need to ask for help, and I encourage my daughter to do that. I am very proud of my children; there is a strength that they show in getting through difficult things that I feel that sometimes I did not have.

Resilience in our family hasn't been in the same way across the generations but it's there, and in knowing that you do what you need to do to show up for family.

FAMILY OVER MONEY

Growing up in Chinatown, I always remember my parents taking me down the street and saying "Say hi to 公公 (gong4 gong1), say hi to 婆婆 (po4 po1)." Everybody knew whose granddaughter I was; they knew my parents and my grandparents. During Chinese New Year, when you see old men and say "恭喜發財, 恭喜發財" (gung1 hei2 faatz coi4; hope you get rich), you would then get a penny or a nickel, which was a huge amount of money to me. Even penny candies, we enjoyed them because we didn't get them often. My family was heavily involved with Chinese community through their village association throughout several generations. Every celebration they had, we participated in.

We weren't an affluent family. I remember when we were in the grocery store, I really wanted orange juice but mom and dad could only afford to buy apple juice; apple juice was

always on sale. I was afraid to ask for anything that was not on sale or different. My parents had to be careful with money. It might not be the food we wanted, but we were never without food. In Victoria those days, buying Chinese groceries was very expensive, so we bought only what we needed and went to Vancouver at least once a year to buy them. My great-uncle had a partnership with a Chinese grocery store, so we normally spent two weeks there every year, loading up on our groceries. We don't buy two tins; we buy at least a case or two! It was expensive for us to go to Vancouver, but bless my father's heart, we spent as much time as we could and stayed with my great-uncle and his family. Even today, I still have a very good relationship with his children. I wasn't surrounded by money, but I was always surrounded by family. At a very young age, I was taught that you don't ask for big things; you should be humble for what you have. My parents taught me that, even though money helped, it's not all about financials; it's not all about the money.

We moved out of Chinatown when I was six, but we visited all the time because my father's family, business, and home were all still there. Our community was very very close. My grandparents were very traditional, and my father was very traditional in comparison to many in his generation. My grandfather played a large role for the Chinese association, and my father had continued on with that. He helped a lot of elderly gentlemen and extended family that had no family here. There was a lot of responsibility and expectations put on my father. I remember him saying when men died after number of years, he helped my grandfather in the cultural responsibilities, which also meant arranging for the bones of those who died in Canada to be returned to

their “home” in China. I recall my father assisting with funeral arrangements for those who did not have family in Canada. He was the one responsible for keeping family together. He did whatever he needed to do. He, his family, and my grandfather offered lower rents, helping immigrants coming into the country.

My father was short in stature, close to five feet, and he worked in forestry and logging industry. I know that there were times when things were financially difficult for him. He did whatever he needed to. The men he worked with within the industry very much respected him. He became very good friends with them. My father understood what friendship meant and what a handshake meant in the business. He learned not to be pushed around. For dad, it was very important to be independent. He made me learn how to change the tires on the car because “You need to know how to do these things.” He taught us that we should not rely on others because you never know when there may not be someone around to help.

I AM DIFFERENT

I remember being in preschool, not a traditional preschool in the sense of what I see now, this was the preschool at the Chinese church, and just knowing I was different. I went there because my mother went for English lessons in the afternoon. I wonder if I even understood English then, because being in Chinatown, you only needed to speak Chinese.

I was different. It wasn't really until I was in kindergarten that I realized how different. In preschool, everyone was Chinese, but in kindergarten suddenly I was surrounded by people who I didn't look like. I guess I realized, but I also didn't realize, because there was this perpetual sense of difference. My

difference wasn't just being Chinese: it was also my father's profession. My friends who were also Chinese, their parents were grocery store owners, cooks, nobody else was in logging. I also grew up around an industry and profession that was predominantly Caucasian.

When I was in Grade 4, we were talking about nationalities and the teacher asked everybody what theirs was. When they asked me, I said I was Canadian. This boy, I still remember him, he said “No, you're Chinese,” and he pulled his eyes back. I was taken aback for the very first time. That same year, my girlfriend (she was also Chinese) during the lunch hour, something happened. The teacher had to have a big talk about racism and how you didn't treat people in certain ways. My friend was crying and looking at me, saying “But Cecilia's Chinese too, so she's faced with this as well.” I don't know exactly what happened. I wasn't around when the incident occurred, but there was this other part of me going “Yeah, I know I'm different.”

I had to go to Chinese school Monday to Friday because it was important to my parents that I carried on the Chinese culture and language. That also made me different because many of my friends could be involved in other things after school that I could not. I remember having trouble with times tables; I learned them differently from my friends. My mother taught me to memorize them in Chinese then translate them in my head for class—it was very similar to memorizing verses in Chinese school.

I also had to be an interpreter for my mother when my father was not there, with doctor's appointments or in stores; I knew that at a young age and accepted it as that was what was expected of me. It was just the way it was, and my mom learned to manage very well in an English-speaking society around her. I knew things were different for me in

comparison to my friends, but I guess I didn't realize I was faced with so much of that difference in the classroom, or that other people recognized it.

This sense of difference was something I navigated throughout my life. In middle school, I predominantly hung around people who were Chinese. There was a bit of comfort there because they seemed to have somewhat of a shared understanding—we had a commonality—but still, their backgrounds were not the same ... my father was the logger. My parents were also much more traditional than theirs were. Sometimes I felt that they were much more refined than I was, that they were better than I was, intellectually, financially. Thinking about the difference now, my parents just lived in a much more humble way; they didn't need to demonstrate what they had. You did things in a certain way because that was the way things have always been done; my parents tried to instill in us the values and traditions they grew up with.

The same thing came up throughout my career, like when I was told that the director said that me being hired was a way of meeting their employment equity quota. It

just left me with more questioning. I never knew why I was really hired, or why I was there, and that impostor syndrome stayed with me even when I was told that I was hired because I was the best qualified for the job. Like, gee, how much can I keep this up? Is this really me? It pushed me to be better, I guess, it's always pushing—you're pushing yourself to prove a point. It gives you a bit of a drive and just pushes you more.

Overall though, I don't know if I can really pick up on the fact that I am Chinese and therefore different. It was just in my environments that I felt I had a slightly different life than others.

It comes back to this question: what do you identify as?

That depends on who's asking.

FAMILY

There were a lot of loud voices when I was young. I remember being afraid of playing with my friend because my aunt would be upset with him. There was something about this friendship that someone in my family did not like ... I remember just being scared. As you can imagine, having your extended family living so close to you can be difficult. Do I understand now that there could naturally be a little frustration? Yeah, I get it. I think there was just too much closeness. There were a lot of expectations, and everybody was on top of each other.

My parents expected that I would go to university, and their goal was to get me there. I asked my father "What do you want me to study?" He said his job was to get me to this point, but what I did while I was in university was for me. But yet, when my work remained unpredictable after Isabelle was born, I remember my mom asking me "Why can't you just get a job that, when you come home, you are just home? You don't have to work



later.” It was confusing, but maybe that’s her way of thinking. I thought, like “Mom, you wanted me to attend university, now you are telling me don’t use my education to pursue a career and be at home doing a ‘normal’ 9-to-5 job?” But even still, my parents took care of the kids at home when we were working, five days a week. That was not something I expected. I think she just didn’t want me to need to work late and to be with family or wanted me to not have to take so much responsibility at work.

When I lost my newborn so young, my mom tried to deal with it by saying “Just forget, just keep going,” even though I know she still remembers. They tried to push me to feel better, and you don’t know how many times there were comments from my parents and from my husband’s parents such as “Are you going to have another one?” My parents were very very supportive, but for them it’s always being supportive by pushing through things—not to think about it. But as opposed to pushing through, I felt that it was ignoring. It felt like my parents wanted to ignore the issues. As I think of it more now, it is not about forgetting but rather to not dwell on the situation—pushing through meant that you need to move forward.

For Isabelle, I know it was something someone so young would not understand, and I felt conflicted at the time about whether or not to have her there at the hospital with me, with us, when my second daughter passed. I still question whether we made the right decisions sometimes; she was only three. My mom thought I shouldn’t have had her around to see everything we were experiencing, to see her sister, but I did not want to hide her from what was going on. Sometimes, you need to go through the door—go through the hurdle, not go around it. My parents supported me in their way, and

thankfully my husband actually acknowledged what was going on. He’s been a huge support in the times that we have gone through. I feel so much for my parents, who have lost their grandchildren—my sister lost three children, and I lost one child. As a parent, you never think you’re going to go through that. You never forget; you just learn to cope. I think the only difference is I went to counselling, sought support, grieved for her and them, and I did what I needed to do for me. I also acknowledge that my parents also did what they felt they needed to do to get through these situations.

RESILIENCE & PUSHING THROUGH

“I guess I’ll never make it to the Mediterranean” is what my dad said to me when he was diagnosed with kidney disease and was no longer travelling. I turned to my husband and said, “Go book that trip.”

It was almost a decade ago that we got everything cleared by the doctor and we took my parents. He got to see Paris and the Mediterranean. That’s what I needed to do, and that’s what we did. Whatever I needed to do or sacrifice to save that money to get my family there, I did.

Since my father’s passing, doing what you need to do has meant ensuring that mom is taken care of. That was dad’s message to me: always make sure that mom was taken care of, so that’s what I do. We actually moved into the house we live in now 4 years ago, and it all goes back to taking care of family. We initially planned the move so that my parents could live with us, but when dad got too ill to be cared for at home, we still continued with the plan so that my mother could be here anytime she wanted to. We agreed that we would do what we needed to do to take care of mom. We could’ve been mortgage-free otherwise, but you do what you need to do.



My husband has also been a huge support; his father and mother both passed away suddenly a few years prior to my dad's passing. We've gone through a lot together, and you don't take anything for granted; you learn not to sweat over the little things because you also learn what is more important—what is important to you. Taking my father to the Mediterranean was much more important than buying another car. It's the same thing for mom, and it's the same thing for my daughters: we sacrifice and make sure they get the things they need or what they want to pursue.

Throughout your life you learn; I learned to push on, right? That's it.

But there's a liberalism from being second-generation and having more exposure to post-secondary education. The education is different, and the acceptance is different. Without all of this, my life would have stopped the year when my daughter died. There were times when I didn't cope well.

What got me through this was actually having Isabelle there; I needed to show up for her and to also be careful that I didn't put all of my desires and wants on her. In comparison to my mother, I'm kind of a hybrid: I will push her, but I will also ask her.

With Isabelle, she is not afraid to ask for help. We are very open, and we talk about everything (or as much as she is willing to share) at our dinner table. I've always encouraged her to ask for help where I have pushed help away at times. If she thought she needed counselling or someone to talk to, I would take her there. I don't need to be in there, but I'll be supportive.

It's something that wasn't accepted for my generation and something that we never had or knew how to seek. She's learning resilience in a different way.

Isabelle, at times, will just push through and put up this façade, but she's willing to acknowledge when something's going wrong (or at least I think she does). She's very very

grown up for a person who's in her early twenties and has gone through so much. She learned from my mistakes; I have tried to instill in her what I have learned through them. I see a lot more strength in her than in me at her age: coping, thinking through things, understanding, and, through it all—still being able to help others. I'm proud of the values that I've instilled in my children.

Even though what they have taken from those life lessons is different from my experiences of them, they're the same values passed on to me from my parents: respect, integrity, humility.

... and of course, knowing that you do what you need to do for family. 📍



ISABELLE'S STORY

My becoming

MY STORY OF INTERGENERATIONAL RESILIENCE is about the challenges and losses I experienced growing up that tore me down and the people who brought me back up. My life is filled with tragedies of people close to me passing away, beginning with my sister who died early in my life. Growing up, I felt like I didn't belong in my white-dominant community. I never felt like a valid person next to them, and they sure didn't treat me like one. But the wise figures in my life helped me feel like I belonged. And now I see it in myself: I vicariously learned how to nurture others. I continue to find myself diving into my passion and desire to see others, like how I was seen by the figures in my life.

ACT I: TO BE UNSEEN BY OTHERS

In the early 2000s, my sister passed away. I was really young, and I barely understood it. I learned the concept of death much earlier than my peers. I had to grow up really fast. My parents were never home and, when they were, I saw this shadow over their faces that I somehow felt responsible for. So whenever I think about the past, it feels like I'm grieving my childhood—naps in the backyard on the lawn chair bed my

grandmother made me and chocolate milk at the coffee shop. Sometimes it feels like I didn't get to have a childhood for long enough—and that's hard to think about. People always told me I was mature for my age; we frame that phrase as a compliment, but it's not—it means your childhood was taken from you. At the same time, it's difficult to think about the events in my life as hardships because I got to grow up in a beautiful house in a very nice, safe, neighbourhood. I went to a great school, got to do French immersion, and I have a very loving family. All my basic needs were met, and I know that not everybody gets that.

According to my mother, I was having panic attacks at the ripe age of nine. I didn't know what they were before; I just felt very upset all the time. I had a really hard time with my peers in elementary school. They liked me, but they were not nice to me. I was in French immersion in a very white suburban area. My friends were pale-skinned with blond hair and blue eyes—my mom literally could not tell three of them apart. Nobody looked like me. And the people who did, I wanted nothing to do with. I think

there were only four of us—three Asians and one black kid.

My experience with racism was much more prevalent than I thought it was. I remember in second grade, my friend was having a pool party and I thought to myself, "I need to shave my legs because all of my friends were blonde." You couldn't see their hair, but you could see mine. So, I secretly used my mom's razor but ended up giving myself a really bad cut on my thigh—and I still have the scar. I was bleeding profusely in the shower, unsure what to do. When my parents found me, I felt super embarrassed. My mom asked me, "Why?! Why are you doing this?" And I told her "I want to look like everybody else." Then my mom and I just sat together and cried on the bathroom floor for a while. I was only eight. I think this was the reality she hoped I'd never have to face.

I think the adults in my life probably thought, "This one's definitely going to have a harder time: just look at her compared to everybody else." Comparatively, I was not an academically successful child, yet I felt like I had to be good at a lot of stuff when I was young, just to be important or relevant. Because if I was relevant as a kid, it wasn't for good reasons. There were times I was afraid of not being good enough. I had this one teacher where, whenever she tried to talk to me about how I was doing in class, I would just shut down—I had a lot of trouble finishing work. I just start crying and hyperventilating; it wasn't cute, but she was really sweet. For my parent- teacher conference, she started off by asking me "Do you know why we go to school?" I said "So we can get good jobs." She nodded and told me "I know you're a very smart girl" before asking about my unfinished work. I remember I cried and said, "I didn't think it would be good, so I just never finished it."





ACT II: BECOMING SEEN BY OTHERS

There were many deaths in my life. I was 14 when my 爷爷 (je4 je4)⁸ suddenly passed away from a heart attack. Then a year later, his wife, my 嬷嬷 (maa4 maa4),⁹ passed away. My 嬷嬷 fell down the stairs and sustained a serious brain injury. They put her in a coma and she just never woke up. I think this was harder than dealing with my 爷爷's death because my grandma was in the ICU for a long time. We had to watch it happen until it was over, which was rough. I remember holding her hand in the ICU and she would pat my hand in hers. I know it was an involuntary reflex, but it only made it harder to let go.

My 爷爷 was a very warm person: I describe him as a happy baby man. He just looked so content, like a happy baby, all the time; he was so sweet. The dynamic my grandparents had was so funny because 爷爷 was extremely supportive. When I made food that tasted terrible and asked him what he thought of it, he'd say "Ah, it's my favourite. It's the best I've ever had." And then 嬷嬷 would be right behind me and say "The best you've ever had, you say? Okay, you're only going to be getting meatballs for the next month!"

8 爷爷 (je4 je4): Paternal grandfather

9 嬷嬷 (maa4 maa4): Paternal grandmother

I see that kind of spitefulness in me, and I just know it comes from her. Someone will always eat their words (sometimes literally).

But in that fiery spirit, there was so much warmth and care; I remember lying on the couch, and she would rub my back not saying a word but always letting me know she was there.

While I'm a lot like her, there's still so much about her I aspire to be; she was such a fashionably fabulous woman and very much believed in physical maintenance. I always said, "I want to be like 嬷嬷 when I grow up, except if 嬷嬷 went to therapy." I wouldn't say my vanity is something I'm proud of, but I don't shy away from it either. I guess we know where I got that from.

When I was in my mid-teens, my dance teacher died. I got really into dance in middle school and started to kind of play with the ambition of being a professional ballet dancer. I knew I loved it and my dance teacher was such an amazing mentor. When she passed away, it was just such a shock; she had an aneurysm. She's one of the only passings that still makes me cry when I talk about it.

The impact of my sister and grandparents' death made the passing of my dance teacher even more difficult for me. I coped with my panic attacks by leaning on her; outside of my parents, she was the one who saw the most in me when my peers didn't acknowledge me. I never gained a sense of confidence from my peers, so when this figure I adored told me that I was doing something right, that was the only way I knew I was. I was so excited for her to be a part of my future. We talked a lot about me doing a double major in a Fine Arts program, I didn't really know what I wanted, but I know I still wanted her to be proud of me. For a long time after her death, I was angry. I

knew I wasn't done with her and she wasn't done with me. There was so much we didn't get to see through. At the reception of her funeral service, I remember there was a notebook where I wrote a letter for her. I wrote "I miss you and I'm doing all this stuff and I'm going to do the things that we talked about. And I'm going to do them for you." She always knew I was a smart kid; she always knew that I saw things differently than everybody else. I love art and I love making things, and she saw that in me when I didn't see it myself. My love for art never went away; it just went in a different direction. I work in entertainment now. I want to help performers navigate something vulnerable and sometimes a little scary. I think she would be very, very happy with that.

My 公公 (gung4 gung1)¹⁰ passed at the end of my teen years. I spent a lot more time with my 婆婆 (po4 po4)¹¹ and 公公 than I did with my parents when I was young because they had to work. Most of my early childhood memories are with 婆婆 and 公公. My grandparents would take me to school, pick me up, and take me to dance class. Grandma would do my hair until I learned how to do my own hair, and, even then, I did it badly so she would have to redo it every time. My 公公 was the landlord of a building in Chinatown that had a coffee shop, and we would always meet there because he got free coffee. I remember they would take me along with them to see their friends and a lot of them still remember me. I spent a lot of days in Chinatown with them and I loved taking close friends there. I would show them around and point out where I used to play as



a kid and the apartments that they would take me to collect rent. I think their tenants liked me too—they thought I was a funny kid.

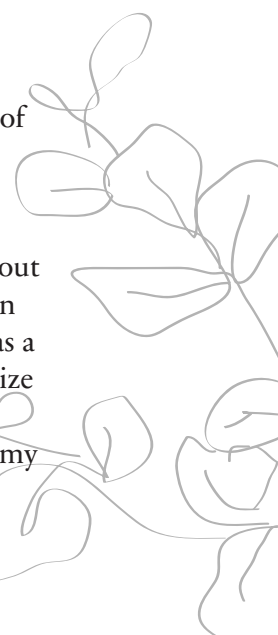
My 公公 got to see me graduate before he died. It was the only and last graduation he made. I was on the stage in my cap and gown, and the whole auditorium could hear this thunderous coughing; the boys sitting next to me laughed, but they stopped when I told them who it was. His death hit me pretty hard because he was the one that took care of me when my parents couldn't. I got to speak at his funeral, and I remember I was working on my speech one day at work and I asked my manager, "Is it acceptable to be funny at a funeral?" and she asked, "Well was your grandpa a funny guy?" and I'm like "Yeah he would laugh at this." So, I did, and people loved it as much as they loved him. People say we're a lot alike. My grandparent's financial advisor sent an email to my parents afterwards to be like "That was beautiful service. You know the one grandkid that spoke, she was great, she sounds like one of yours." Yup, that's me.

ACT III: SEEING OTHERS

When I was 16, I became more serious about ballet, and I changed dance studios to join their professional training program. It was a significant event because it made me realize how toxic classical ballet and the dance environment can be; it was not good for my mental health. They mess with your self-

10 公公 gung4 gung1): Maternal grandfather

11 婆婆 (po4 po4) : Maternal grandmother



worth so much that you genuinely think you're a useless individual, which is dark ... so I left when I graduated high school. No longer being in ballet was like giving up a dream. It required me to figure out my identity of who I am without it. Then I discovered that I vicariously became a nurturer. I feel enveloped in a process of nurturing where I need to cultivate it before I can give it to myself.

I remember even earlier in my life when I was at the hospital because of my sister, there was a nice old lady with these little knitted dolls that asked me to pick one both for myself and my sister. When I picked the dolls for us, it felt like a symbol of the solidification of our sisterhood. I was three years old and thought "She is mine to take care of now." We had the dolls for a long time. I like to think of myself as a spiritually connected person. I've had consistent dreams where my sister and I would just hang out and chat.

I learned how to nurture through conversation from my mom and how to nurture through food from my grandma. When I was younger, I didn't tell anybody anything, but as I got older, my mom and I would talk more. Now, I would talk to her about everything. Meanwhile, my grandma's role was always to make sure I was fed. I think my grandma copes by caring for me. When things are really hard for her, I'd come over and she'd make me five different things to eat, ask me what I want to watch on tv, if I have homework, if I need anything. My grandma thinks "I'll care for other people until I can care for myself;" and I'm the same way. Now, whenever a friend is having a tough time, I'd ask them if they've eaten yet. If I'm at their house, I would go to their fridge and improvise with the ingredients to make them something. That's how I get them to disarm;

I'd say let's sit down and ground ourselves with something in our stomach. It's a double-edged sword. I will always set a small part for myself that reminds me to take care of myself and have a good cry. I'm able to step back and give that back to myself so I feel re-energized to keep going.

My work as an educational assistant can be really hard sometimes. I go to some rough areas of town, where some 10-year-olds are obviously displaying signs of sexual trauma, and it breaks my heart. Sometimes the kids are annoying, but sometimes your heart just squeezes to its brink for them. I was known for taking the kids on a walk to talk about their feelings whenever they were having a rough day. I saw a lot of myself in a little girl I worked with last year. She was only six but with an inexplicable sadness inside of her. I remember I took her for a walk one day, and she expressed that her teacher was mean, so we talked about some strategies. I told her sometimes you just need a hug, and you can ask for it. Then she runs at me, tackles me, and cries in my arms for a whole 8 minutes. Nobody cries in a grown-up's arm for that long just because their teacher is mean. Something else was definitely going on for her. That's when I realized I was just like that kid. I thought "Somebody saw me, so I'm going to tell you now that I see you and I understand you." I only had this dynamic with her for a week or two, but it was clearly important to her, and it was important to me to give that to her.

An old professor of mine is a trauma counsellor, and I asked him for advice on some students I was working with. He said to me "When I go through my client's life story with them, I look for people like you." And I hope they remember me like that.

EVERYTHING WE DO, WE DO FOR THE FAMILY

Both my mom and my 婆婆 have experienced hardships in their lives. My mom has always been very, very family-oriented. She is the one who took care of my grandparents the most and still takes care of my 婆婆 the most. When my grandma had a stroke, it was especially distressing and scary for my mom. I remember when I was 16, I had a social studies project that required interviewing my grandma. I remember it clearly because it was the first time seeing her open up and cry talking about something that happened in her life that she found genuinely upsetting. It was about how they didn't have anything to eat, so they would chew rice and spit it out again to keep some sort of illusion that they were eating. But she doesn't think it's a big deal because so many people went through it. I think that's how she coped. My mom also will not admit to her life events as traumas or hardships. They're genuinely avoidant and dismissive. They say, "It's whatever. You just have to keep going" and they're really hardcore about it. I'm like "Okay, now I'm going to give myself some space and let myself process this," but they're like "you just keep going and you just keep doing it." I think my grandmother came to Canada with this scarcity mindset that it could only take a second for everything to drop from under your feet. So, you keep working, you keep going—that way you always have something.

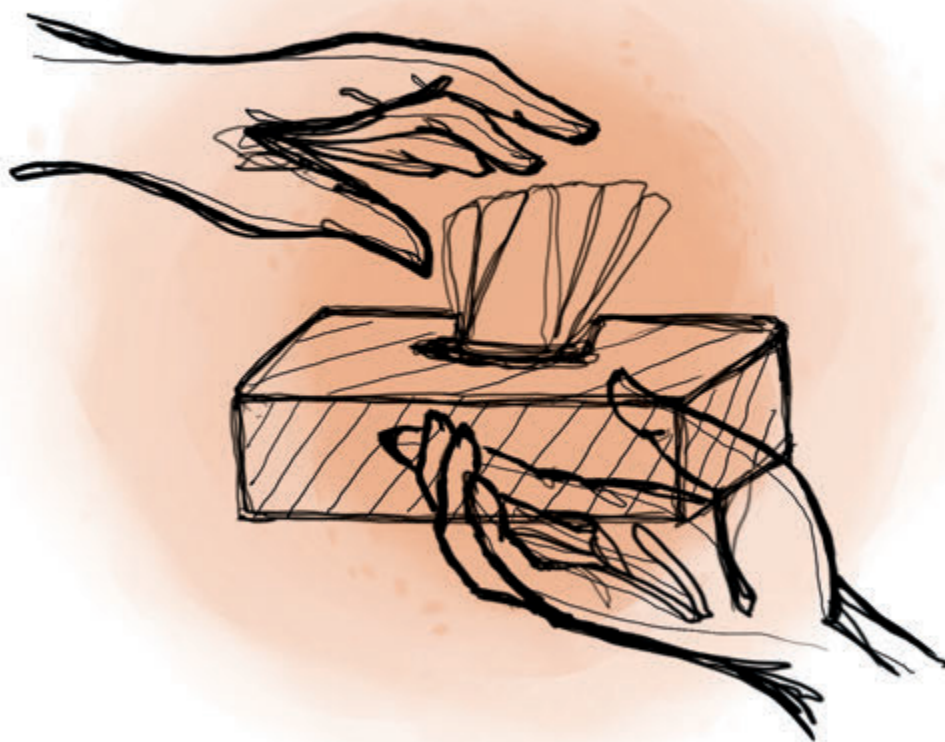
Me, mom, and 婆婆, we all cope by being productive. We're high-energy, active, and love doing things with our hands. My mom and grandma like to garden and make things, while I like to paint, write, and make music. Learning a new skill is also another way of processing for us. We have to get down to business; you have to keep going, and you just have to keep living. You just do it. It's about

finding things to do, kind of like a distraction, that helps make things okay for a little bit. We're very productive people. Even when my mom has a depressive episode and decides to take a mental health day, she's driving around town, up and about doing something. Likewise, my grandma is obsessed with her garden. During the period when she was living with us, she would make us drive to her house just so that she could tend to her garden. She loves being out and about too. We take her to the market and grocery shopping. Her life very much revolves around food, which is probably related to her past traumas. For me, sometimes when I'm burnt out, I just stay in bed.

I know that my mom is a safety net for me. If my life goes down to shit, I know I can always come back to this house, have this bed, this kitchen, and figure out my life again from here. There's a sense of unconditional loyalty. I saw how she parented me and my sister. I wasn't always happy with it as a kid, but it worked out well. I think every mom has issues communicating with their daughter, especially her eldest daughter. I tell people I never fight with my mom, which is far from the truth but they're hard to remember when every fight is always resolved. I always want to give back in return. In my adolescence years when I tried to nurture her, she'd get defensive and tell me to stop because it was her role. But I think she's warming up to it a little more now that I'm an adult. In one way or another, we've got people to take care of. Somebody else needs me to hold it together just for a little bit, even if it's just enough to get through.

To survive, you just have to do it, then when the time comes, if you're lucky, you can have your moment.

You can breathe. 📍



A visual representation of Cecilia and Isabelle's interactions as they witnessed each other's story

*Fleanor
& Emma*

MOTHER & DAUGHTER





ELEANOR'S STORY

Enduring to resilience

All that I've endured has made me the person I am today. As a child, I felt pain, hopelessness, betrayal, and fear. I learned at a very young age that my world was filled with uncertainties and not safe. This was one of the first things I learned and it determined how I saw what life was like.

My mother was always alone in the house. My father wandered in and out of our lives never staying long enough to act the way I thought a father should. I was terrified of him. I couldn't get away from his abuse, so I had to endure it. My father was a teenager in China during the Japanese occupation, so I suppose he was traumatized during the war, but that shouldn't give him the right to take out his anger on someone else, especially a child. His abuse was traumatizing for me.

I resented my mother because she didn't stand up for me and protect me like I thought a mother should. I was filled with sadness and anger; it was distressing. I remember my Mom telling us to not talk about anything outside of the home because she didn't want people to come and take us away. That instilled fear in me. I didn't know who to trust, so I just kept to myself. It was all about keeping the family safe. I had to stand up and go to bat for my siblings because it seemed like there was nobody else who was capable. The adults couldn't be trusted. We had very little money and my

mother had difficulty supporting herself. I used to blame her until I realized that it wasn't really her fault. She too was a war child, probably always wondering if she was going to have anything to eat the next day or even still be alive. She made the best of what she could with what she had.

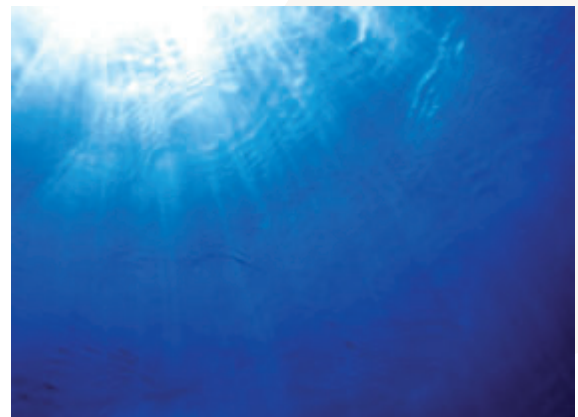
I coped by crying and with a lot of self-talk. I kept my troubles to myself. I try to not let my past control my present. I acknowledge that the problems are there and then I let them go. That's what life is about—always adapting. I endured, Mom endured, and my family endured. It has always been a theme. Now, I give my children guidance in the best way I know how, despite not receiving any guidance myself. I remind them to focus on the positive, to focus on what they need to do and move forward, to laugh and give themselves credit. And they have done that. They are very successful in their own right.

MY ENDURANCE

The physical and mental abuse from my father made me the person I am today. I was only a few years old when it began. I remember it was so confusing ... I didn't even know what I did wrong and, after I realized I didn't do anything wrong, I still couldn't run away. I just had to quietly endure it. He never showed any remorse, concern, or love. Whenever he showed his face, he brought us fear. I was always the one who became his victim. My older sister would run and hide, while I just stood my ground and looked him in the eye—he saw that as a confrontation, a challenge. He would tell me not to cry and keep hitting me and hitting me, until I couldn't bear the pain anymore. Once I started crying, he would stop and then walk away. I think my father enjoyed watching someone who couldn't protect themselves

suffer in pain. I think it gave him immense power and satisfaction.

I have a clear memory of a time my father brought home a huge stuffed panda bear and gave it to me. I was thrilled! It seemed like he really loved me and wanted me to have it. Then the very next day, he took it away and gave it to our dog to tear it up. I remember holding onto it and saying "But you gave it to me!" and he said, "Nope this is going to the dog." One moment I was elated and then the next minute the toy bear was being pulled from my hands. That was worse than being beaten. It was horribly confusing, heartbreaking, and traumatizing. It reinforced the idea that the people who are supposed to love you are not to be trusted. My father was supposed to be somebody I could look towards for guidance.



My mother never stepped forward to help. I think she was afraid, and she didn't know what to do. As a mother, you should protect your child. That to me is a natural instinct. But she didn't have that instinct. My father could have taken my life. Maybe Mom was traumatized or maybe she observed other parents behave the same way, so it didn't alarm her. But these are the people I thought were supposed to protect me.

My world, my job, was to bring up my siblings. “The older children always have to take care of the younger ones” — that’s what my grandfather told me, “That’s the Chinese way.” I saw myself as a surrogate mother, so I always had to watch over them and protect them. I was willing to sacrifice myself for them because there was nobody else. My mother was always working so hard, and I know she wasn’t a happy person. I had to do my part and I had to cope. I helped my mother do a lot of the housework and take care of my brothers and sisters, being watchful and making sure they did their homework. It was difficult while I was going to school. I didn’t get to do my homework until after nine pm, so I’d end up going to bed really late. It was like a never-ending, toiling struggle trying to deal with all of that. You don’t realize when you’re going through it that all of it is making you physically ill. I developed a lot of headaches and became very physically unhealthy. I had seen how my schoolmates’ parents were always hugging them, asking how their school day was, and being supportive and proud of their achievements, which none of my siblings and I had growing up. My parents didn’t seem interested in whether we did well or not. I was quite a withdrawn child because I couldn’t talk about things my classmates would talk about. They would talk about things that they did with their parents on the weekend, the friends that they had, sleepovers, and so on. None of that stuff existed in the world that I lived in.

But I didn’t give up. I kept on going. If I let the past control my present then I’m not living. I wanted to show my own children physical and mental love. I wanted them to have all the love and support I never had when I was a child, to show compassion, to embrace them, and have them understand

that I would always be there for them. Growing up, the television was our babysitter. We watched shows with caring, smiling parents who would always compliment, give support, give praise, and give forgiveness. I wanted to believe it didn’t matter if I did something wrong unintentionally, that they still loved me, that my mistakes don’t make me who I am.

MOM’S ENDURANCE

My mother was a beautiful woman. She endured a lot of suffering as a result of situations that she had no control over. All she did, she did for us. We’re grateful. She is the face of resiliency.

The physical and mental abuse continued until I was seven, when my father left for good. He gathered us all in the kitchen and said, “You have to take care of mom. I’m not coming back.” It was puzzling because he acted like he had been around for most of our life when he hadn’t. I was never really sure if he was my father. I often asked my mom, “Who is that?” I didn’t understand who or what he represented in my life. It was so difficult for my mom after he left. I remember I phoned her at work right after he left to break the news to her. I told her he said he wants us to take care of each other, to take care of her, and to listen to her. And I said, “That was it.” I think my mom was in disbelief that he was not ever going to come home again. She struggled with that, and I was confused as to why she became so distressed because he abandoned us for most of our lives. I did feel a sense of relief that he wasn’t going to be a threatening force in our lives anymore, but I remember how depressed my mother was. How she used to cry. I just



didn't understand. But I didn't want to ask, and I didn't know how to help or comfort her. I felt helpless. She would be crying for what seemed like forever. So I tried to not be in the house and basically let her do her thing, I guess, as an adult I was probably just waiting for mom to be herself again. After a long period, when she did stop crying, there was something in her eyes that was gone. I don't know what it was, but she was doing what I'm doing now, refusing to let what happened to her hold her back because she had to still work to keep us all going, to pay the mortgage, to put food on the table, plus be both the father and mother. She couldn't and wasn't going to let anything stop her.

My mom lost sight of herself as an individual. She didn't see herself as an attractive woman, just someone with a mission to put money in the bank. It was difficult for my mom to realize that she could have a happier life. If you take yourself so seriously, you lose that part of you. When our mortgage was finally paid off, I remember trying to get my mom to look at things from a different perspective. I said, "Now you can go to the hair salon, you can buy clothes, and you can live happily." And she said, "Nonsense. I still have to spend money on food and utility bills. I can't stop." That's when I realized that you can't change somebody who spent most of their life thinking in that one direction. And that's okay, because it's okay for her. I wouldn't say it's okay for people in general, but for her ... it was her life, her mission.

OUR FAMILY'S ENDURANCE

In the early years, we didn't have much money. My mom was never around because she was always struggling to find work. She would work eight hours and then another four hours if she could find it. Going to

school, I never had the clothes everybody else wore. We always grew out of our shoes and clothing. A lot of donations would appear at our house. We walked to school in runners that had holes in them. We always wore hand-me-down clothes, but they were fine because they were always better than the clothes that we were wearing. Food was also an issue. We didn't eat a lot of nutritious food. My grandfather would come by every once in a while and drop off some food. It seemed like my mother only had just enough to pay the mortgage but barely enough to survive on. It was so hard. I used to think my mom didn't attend my school concerts or my teacher's meeting because she didn't love us, she didn't love me. When the teacher asked, "Where are your parents?"; I had to lie for them because I didn't want them to find out they were never there. I was ashamed and embarrassed. But deep down, I knew that she couldn't be in two places at once.

Like all adolescents, I went through a struggling period where I started to feel sorry for myself. I felt like life was meaningless and that nobody really loved me. It was very depressing, very sad. I was filled with anger because I used to blame my mother. I think most teenagers go through that; it's part of growing up. I realized at some point, maybe because I had more awareness, that I was not really being fair to my mother, who had lived through such turmoil in her life. I realized it wasn't her fault. She wasn't given a silver spoon. It doesn't make sense to blame someone for the life they were given. She lived through the war. I matured and had to change my mindset. I saw her struggling, and I really felt that I wanted to lift her up. I forgave her and forgave myself for blaming her. I wanted my mother to be proud, and I wanted her to feel like I was on her side. When she was struggling, I was struggling. I

did my part to help her out. I decided to pick myself up. I decided I wasn't going down the path of negativity. I tried to not let the fall hurt me or cave me in. I chose my own path; I chose a positive outlook that made me feel stronger and made me want to embrace life.

ENDURING SOCIETY

Society was crude to Asians at that time. I experienced racism at a young age and continued to experience it throughout the rest of my life. As a young child, I didn't understand what it was because there were no words to describe it. Having people use derogatory terms to you, singing racist rhymes, cornering you and taunting you, shopkeepers not giving you service as a paying customer, that stays with you.

When I was trying to get a job, a few times when interviewed, the interviewer would reject me saying my stature was too petite, or that they needed somebody with more presence, or that I looked too insignificant. One large company ended up hiring me because "Asians are hard workers and they're very loyal and dedicated. That's why I like to hire Asians, and that's why I'm going to hire you today—because you're Asian."

When I moved to a small town I was actually really shocked that racism existed here too. I thought we were moving forward, not backward. There was a particular incident that really upset me. I was in a retail store, lining up to pay for my goods. It was a long lineup. As I got closer to the till, I noticed the cashier kept looking at me and she said, "You're at the beginning of the line, go to the end." So I moved to the other end only to be told I had already been in the right place. So what they were saying was there was no lineup for me. I got the message, so I just left everything and walked out of there. Then there's the security people that follow me

around while I do my groceries. They hide behind the posts, pretending that they're shopping. I'm aware that they're singling me out, but I just laugh to myself thinking, "Hah, he's wasting his time."

Racism can happen anywhere, it's something I have to deal with. I understand that it's about who they are, not about who I am. Their racism is about them. There's nothing wrong with me. So unless somebody physically attacks me, I don't let it bother me. It's not like I'm saying that I'm used to it; it doesn't bother me as much as it did when I was a lot younger.

GUIDANCE TO RESILIENCE

I endured the physical abuse, but the mental abuse stays longer. I'm always on guard and need to know who I'm going to be exposed to. If I don't feel safe, I need to leave. I still have trust issues with people of power, of authority—I am aware and watchful of their actions and listen carefully. I observe what they say and do because it shows who they really are. Not everybody is worthy of trust. Having to go through that, it's a process. It could be positive or negative, and I decided to focus on the positivity of it all because I don't want to be stuck resenting everybody who holds power and authority. That's what I do in order to survive. The scars are there, but they don't control me. The trauma I've suffered made me so much stronger as a person, and I'm able to give that strength to my children because that's what I want for them. I draw from my own experience and I always focus on the positive because I don't want to traumatize them with my history. It's my history, not theirs. Their experiences are their own.

I give my children guidance throughout their whole lives. I tell them to focus on their purpose and be fully committed to what

they're doing. But it's up to them to choose what they want and use it because they must do it for themselves, not for me, because I don't live their lives. I always tell them that sometimes you work at things, and if it's not going your way, you have to sit back and look at it and ask yourself 'why?' Refocus on what you want. Is it in alignment with what you believe in? If you don't believe in what you do, don't engage in it. Understand you have to live with the consequences of your decisions. You have to take care of yourself, mentally and physically, and you have to eat well and exercise. Health is important, always. Keep people around you that give you a lot of positive feedback. Be patient with yourself, and always, always, always give yourself credit, because if you don't give yourself credit, who else is going to? You have to give yourself a

pat on the back and never give up. Stay positive. And take a break because life can get you down. It's an ongoing process, not a one-time deal. It's all a part of life.

I see in my children what I see in myself. It makes me happy to see that because they are very successful individuals. They are determined, focused on their goals, and they don't give up. They are happy and living a good life. It makes me feel proud: what more can I ask for? The lessons that always stand out are the following: Laugh. Don't let things get you down. Don't take yourself too seriously otherwise you can't enjoy life. Focus on the positive because it keeps you moving forward. Ask for what you want; don't wait for it to come to you. My children have always found positive ways to move forward. ☐





EMMA'S STORY

Healing for future generations

My life has been a beautiful journey. High school was a period of growth and figuring myself out. I changed a lot during this time. I had many challenges and disagreements with my parents. Part of it was hormones and being a teenager; I had all these feelings I didn't know what to do with. My parents picked up on that and got me a therapist who I saw for several years. It really helped. And when I was severely bullied, my mom supported and advocated for me.

My young adult years were about maturing and learning that my parents are people with baggage, just like the rest of us. I learned what intergenerational trauma is: my mom's childhood didn't come with love and affection; it barely came with food and clothes on her back. I was going to university

and working. I found out my dad was unfaithful to my mom, and, soon after that, my sister came out as transgender ... it was a really hard time for my family.

Then, I had a baby and became a mother. I had a traumatic birth experience: I was sleep deprived, emotional, and the hormone shifts made me irritable. My relationship with my mother changed. Society doesn't discuss how hard it is to become a parent, but any parent is an example of resilience. There was me before I was a mom, and there is me now, with a "plus one" forever.

If I hadn't gone through so much, I wouldn't be the person I am, that people appreciate and love. My healing journey comes from a place of privilege. I can get support and heal because my mom did her best for us with what she was given. She raised us while working and didn't have the support when needed. My mom could have given up many times, but she didn't. It's granted me the ability to also not give up. I think my mom is proud of that.

HEALING AS A YOUTH

High school was pretty tough. I always felt out of place. I didn't know how to connect with different social groups. I was faking it, and it got me into trouble. I ended up hanging out with people who would drink and party on the weekend. I didn't have a good sense of consent. It was hard. I made poor decisions with friends and the bullying started. I apologized, and we stopped being friends, so I thought it was done. But some girls tried pulling me out of the car to beat me up. I was able to kick them away from me and close the door. Then I told my parents, and my mom got involved. She worked at the police station then, and the dad of one of the girls was actually a police officer. So my mom went to their houses and told them what

their daughters did. My mom, specifically, was really there for me when I was being bullied. I never got hurt, but I could've. It was really scary. I took a break from in-person high school and did distance education. By the time I went back for grade 12, people were over it.

I had a high school boyfriend who was pretty life-saving. I dated him for half of grade 10, then 11, and 12. He was a routine. He was very caring and sweet. He was a pivotal, and a good person in my life. My parents were scared and worried about me when I would go sleep over at his house. I didn't think it was a big deal because I was only with him, but obviously they were worried about sex and pregnancy and all that stuff. One time I got brought home by the police, and I was horrified at that time, but it's hilarious now. The police were like, "Oh, you're Eleanor's daughter?" And then they took me home and said, "Here's your daughter; we picked her up at a party." It was pretty embarrassing. My parents were like "Who is this person? She changed all of a sudden." I remember it not being a big deal because the other kids were doing the same, but I guess my parents weren't really prepared for that.

Even though I was doing all this stuff, I knew what was important to my parents. I still went to school and had A's and B's on my report card. I remember one time I panicked because I had stayed overnight at a friend's house and had a math exam the next day. I was hungover because we partied, but I still attended my exam. I remember thinking, "No, I can't miss my exam; my parents will kill me." I felt that, as long as I got good grades, the rest was forgivable.

I threw a house party at my house once, and my parents will never forgive me for it, but it tested how much I cared about not pissing my parents off. I didn't just host the

party; I went around and put all the valuables away. I covered the tv and all their electronics with bed sheets. I was very, very careful; I made people take their shoes off when they entered. They don't know how much effort I put into making sure that the house didn't get destroyed. But I betrayed their trust. All my stuff was packed in the living room when I saw them again. They said, "You need to follow our rules, or you need to get out." So I left. I thought, "I'll be fine. I can take care of myself." I moved in with a friend, but it was actually sad because my friend's mom was the total opposite of my parents. She was never home and barely any food was in the fridge. I didn't feel like his mom loved him. I was there for a month, and then I went home. I didn't want to live there ... it was depressing.

When I came home, my parents changed. I don't know what happened to them, but they started to meet me in the middle. They said, "We won't make you come home at 10 pm; your curfew is 12 am. We don't want you to sleep at your boyfriend's house, but we won't stop you if you do. We'll pick you up after parties; just call us." I didn't get in trouble for drinking anymore. They started to respect my boyfriend. I didn't expect that shift from them. I started trying harder to respect them, and they tried harder too. Moving away made me realize my house was so much better. My parents were always there. We had love and everything we needed.

Looking back, I know it was a tough time for my parents and sister to experience this chaos. I took all the attention during our teen years, and my sister admitted that she didn't act out because she didn't want to make things worse. I feel terrible now because she kept everything inside even though she was going through her stuff. Her needs were neglected due to mine overshadowing hers. I feel grateful for my parents, and I also feel

guilty for making them worry. Knowing what my mom went through as a child, and the kind of worry with me she had to go through, I didn't even know she was taking sleeping pills. She used to wait in the dark until I would come home at night. It must have been incredibly hard for her to go through what she did. My mom didn't have any roadmap for how to be a parent because my grandmother was never there. My mom was doing her best to take care of me.

I went through a lot emotionally. Some of the pain is hard to connect to, but I know it still impacts me. Now I understand what I went through as resilience, but as a teenager I wouldn't have used that word. I was just trying to make it through the day at the time. Now when I go through hard times in life, I'll use self-talk and remind myself that I'm going to get through it. I can identify when I am being strong; when I am being resilient.

HEALING AS A YOUNG ADULT

In my 20s, I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression. This stage of my life felt like an awakening; I had a new boyfriend, studied university full-time, was working, and found out that my dad was unfaithful to my mom and my sister was transgender. My dad never really talked about the cheating with me, but I remember my mom began talking to me and relying on me. She would call me, and I was suddenly learning details about my dad that I didn't know before. But I'm the child right? I could empathize with both my mom and dad. I think my mom felt frustrated because I couldn't be someone to validate her and take her side. I felt like if I validated her, I would be invalidating my dad. It was very stressful, and my anxiety got really bad. I ended up dropping out of university. It was a constant blanket of anxiety that never went away. I felt like I had to carry a lot ... like I

wasn't a kid anymore. It was really hard to navigate; I didn't know how to set boundaries with my family, but I did eventually. I would change the subject or I wouldn't talk about it. Eventually my mom stopped talking to me about it. I remember she started to visit me more to get away and be around us; I think she was lonely. But she and my sister weren't on speaking terms, and my mom was not accepting of my sister. My dad ended up getting professional help, and they tried marriage counselling for a short period. They got through it, but I don't think they dealt with it. I felt guilty I couldn't be there for my mom. I know she had a hard time, but I needed some space to keep myself afloat.

One time I ferried home together with my sister, and she told me she was transitioning genders. It didn't surprise me—my sister was always unique. She was pretty funky and just did her own thing. I thought, Alright, we're doing this now. Okay, just gotta stop using he/him pronouns." Sadly, our family was never the same after my sister came out to my parents. I remember the warm and welcoming family moments as children; we haven't had that in a long time. There's always this tension now. After time with us all in the same room, I realize I have been anxious the whole time, even if nothing bad happens. I'm hypervigilant of the people around me. This was, and still is, very tough.

I coped by going to therapy more, starting antidepressants, and making life changes. Needed to focus on myself and keep going. I just had to put up the wall and deal with my stuff. I don't have any regret, but I have a lot of sadness. There was a time I was angry with my mom and said some hurtful things to her that I shared publicly. I had a really tough time with my mom not accepting my sister. I still do. For me, I feel that I took care of myself the best I could. I didn't give up. I

asked for support, and I got help. I embraced my struggles and developed tools for managing my mental health when it declines. I want to support my mom, but I am unsure if I can help with taking ownership or fixing things in our family. I still think it must be me if no one does it. It's a tension I'm still carrying. My parents are doing the best they can, and I can't force them to do more. I have empathy for my mom; I will never be able to understand what she went through as a child, but I know it affects her relationships with us today. I hope we can work things out in our family, but no family is perfect. I have to keep going, no matter what—I learned this from my mom. It's a positive thing because it did keep me going. There's sadness and grief with how hard it was during this time, but it became part of my journey. It shaped who I am now.

HEALING AS A MOTHER

I had my son when I was 31. Postpartum is something that you think you're prepared for, but you never are. My entire world changed, my relationships changed, and my body changed. I was in labour for 3 days. I got a



C-section and all the medical interventions I didn't want. And I planned for everything. I knew exactly what could happen and all the outcomes. The one thing I didn't realize is

that you can be in labour for 3 days. Most of the first year is a blur. I had a sound support system but felt lonely and disconnected. I remember the exhaustion and constant lack of sleep because not only was my body adjusting from growing a human for 9 months, but my body literally became a human milk machine. I noticed a lot of similarities I have with my mom since I became a mom myself. I started to make connections when I shut off and became less nurturing to my son. I try to be as tender as possible, speak calmly, and co-regulate with his emotions, but, still, I push him away when my body is constantly overstimulated if he's all over me. Raising us must've been so hard for my mom. I can't even imagine it. People say everything changes when you have a kid, and I never realized it would be so true.

I don't think I overcame my postpartum fugue for 2 years. I gave up drinking alcohol around that time because I started developing an unhealthy relationship with it. After a stressful day, I would have a glass of wine, and slowly I started drinking earlier in the day and more of it. Mom drinking is glamourized in today's society—like “sip-sip-hooray,” “I'm the reason my mommy drinks.” I got sucked right into it. As soon as I had one drink, it helped me relax. I was so exhausted. Nobody tells you how hard postpartum is. I felt a bit of shame that I needed alcohol so bad. I also felt sad because I let alcohol take advantage of me. But I didn't want to make that my story. I knew there was a better way to cope than what I was doing. I remember the exact moment when I decided to stop drinking alcohol and never looked back. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and I had put effort into walking to the wine store with my son in the stroller. I remember walking home and thinking, “This is ridiculous – it's only one o'clock in the afternoon, and I already want to drink.” I knew

it was not the standard I wanted for my life and my son. I had the tools, knowledge, and privilege to do better for myself. That was enough for me to be done.

During this time, I developed premenstrual dysphoria disorder. My body became hypersensitive to the hormone shifts 2 weeks before my period. I would go through wild mood swings and terrible depression and anxiety for days at a time. I had also returned to university to complete my bachelor's, and the pandemic started. I was never someone who'd yelled, but I would get really angry and lose my temper, so I wasn't coping. That made me realize I needed to go back on my antidepressant medication, so I went to get an urgent outpatient assessment at the mental health center. Within 4 weeks, I got an appointment and met the most fantastic psychiatrist. He listened to all my concerns about why I came off medication during postpartum. He switched me to a different drug, and it was better. It helped me cope; I started getting more sleep and saw a therapist again. I put my healthier coping strategies back into place. I think postpartum is resilience in itself. If you can survive it, you can survive almost anything.

After I completed my degree, I was promoted at work. With the added responsibilities and pressure to perform, my mental health began to decline again. My sister also came to live with us temporarily. It was during this time that I was able to reflect on my past few years with my sister and seriously consider whether I should be screened for ADHD. My sister had been diagnosed a few years ago, and my dad a few years before that. But because I didn't exhibit the stereotypical ADHD behaviours, I hadn't given it too much thought. It was only when I returned to school and struggled with learning (especially online during the pandemic),



balancing new work responsibilities, and motherhood that I was thrown into a hamster wheel that utterly burned me out. I figured it wouldn't hurt to pursue an assessment. I was diagnosed with ADHD right away, and it was validating to hear that my feelings of overwhelm, and my inability to "stay on top of things," was not imagined.

One of the beautiful things about having a child is that my mom and I connect on a different level. My mom has become this warm, fuzzy, loving grandmother. I don't remember her being how she is with my son with me. She's really sweet with my son, and seeing her with him allowed me to set aside some of my family frustrations. She lights up when she's around him. All of the sad things stop and disappear. She puts in a lot of effort and does things I'm too tired to do, like baking cookies from scratch. It's really nice to see my mom become a grandmother. It has been healing for me, and I think it has probably been healing for her as well.

I also know I get my empath side from my mom such as helping others, making sure they're okay, thinking about others always, putting them first even though it's detrimental to my health. I learned to be aware of the people around me and notice the tiniest details about their body language and facial expressions. Being hypervigilant is exhausting but beautiful because people feel safe around me. They confide in me, and, at the same time, the safety alarms go off inside to ensure everyone is okay because if everyone is safe then I am safe. I'm so invested in it with the people whom I love. I learned that from my mom.

HEALING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

I know my mom's basic needs were neglected as a child. She didn't experience a stable household and had an extremely abusive father. He would go away for a long time and, when he came back, it was terrifying. I know my grandmother had no say about how many children she could have. For some reason, my mom was the caretaker for her siblings, although she has an older sister. She took that on, and that's a lot to carry. It took me a long time to realize that what she experienced as a child influenced how she is now. She couldn't co-regulate with my emotions when I was a kid, maybe because she wasn't allowed to have space for her feelings when she was a child. When people are upset and emotional, it is challenging for her to stay present and engaged. And now I experience this with my own child. I get really triggered when he's distraught sometimes. It's a lot. Sometimes I stop, and I realize why my mom was unable to give that space. She didn't know how, and she did the best that she could.

I know my mom and I know that she is a survivor. She doesn't give herself time to feel

sad and depressed. There's no such thing as depression because you have to keep going, work, and put food on the table. But despite all that's happened to her, she provided a



loving, nurturing home and raised two children. She loves animals, gardening, and married an incredible person, my dad. She created a life for herself. She did all that herself. No one helped her. By compartmentalizing her feelings, she and her siblings survived, which allowed her to create a beautiful life for herself and her children. I'm really proud of her, but I'm also really sad for her. Growing up as a Chinese Canadian with poverty, abuse, and neglect ... she lived in survival mode. I want more for her. She deserves it.

My mom tries to find the silver lining in everything because that's how she overcame difficult moments. If I'm going through something challenging, she'll remind me there's always something to be positive about. Even when I solely want her to listen and validate my feelings. Sometimes my mom does these sweet little things, which shows

me that she loves me. She won't call me and say, "I love you, I miss you, I'm sad, I'm sorry." But she'll send me a cute little handmade card she spent three days making or give me tiny creations collected, cut, and stuck together—they're works of art. I know she puts her heart and soul into it. I have shoeboxes full of little things she's made me with inspirational quotes, and I won't throw any of them out. It's how she shows she cares so I feel loved. She'll also remember little details—if I tell her something my son is into, the next time we visit, she has found exactly what my son was looking for, usually thrifted and at a fraction of the price.

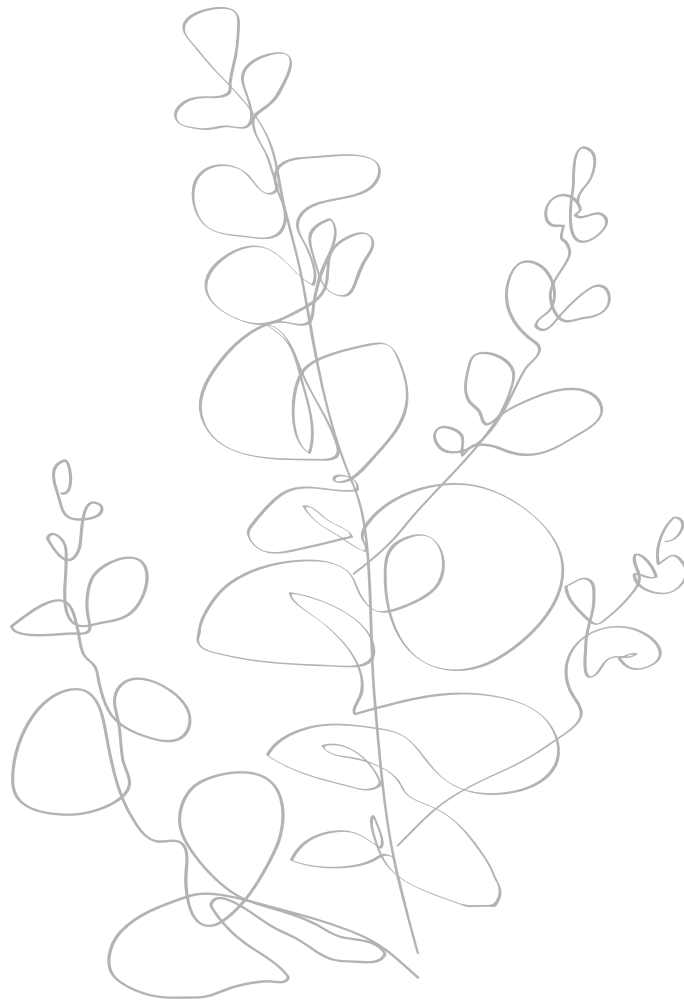
I think my mom is more resilient than me. When I look back at what we've both gone through, I wouldn't have been able to go through what my mom went through. I'm so thankful for her and how she raised us. I know that my mom put her all into everything that she did with us. I know that she did her best. She wasn't given many opportunities, so the fact that she was able to raise us so well ... that's pretty amazing. I can empathize with my mom because I believe we hold the trauma from previous generations. Logically, I know resilience helps us to keep going, but I'm still accepting it. I think I'm always going to feel that. I don't want this badge of resilience on my arm.

Resilience is viewed as a strength, but it is a result of systemic oppression. I wish my ancestors didn't have to be resilient, experience trauma, or be forced to be tough and work hard. It's a skill that helps people survive, it shows our strength, and it also carries sadness ... because we shouldn't have to be resilient. We should be held and carried and loved and supported, so I have this resistance with resilience. I am frustrated and resentful that I have inherited this responsibility to heal intergenerational

trauma from my ancestors; simultaneously, I hold gratitude that I have the privilege to do this work. With the world becoming more aware of the long-term effects of being forced to be resilient, I have hope for the generations that will come after me.

I am committed to keep doing the work moving forward. My mom and grandmother suffered a lot, but my grandmother was resilient for her mother, and my mom was resilient for my grandmother. I need to keep the healing going. If I can continue this

resilience and healing for my mom, who didn't get the opportunity to do so, it would be very meaningful for me. My mom struggles with confronting the trauma she lived through, and I need to respect that, but I can do this for her. I can work on myself and be an excellent example for my family and child. It's important to me. I can't get rid of the trauma, but I want to contribute to the healing. I can be a good ancestor. I'm doing that now—healing for our future generations. 📍



Poems weaved
by the authors
using Eleanor
and Emma's
words during
the story
sharing process

when you were young

i love you too

*i didn't want to talk about it
i didn't want to relive all of it
but talking it out for the first time
i realized the hidden pain
i'm not sure i ever want to deal with
but i'm glad i endured*

it's true

*when you see me with your son
it's true
that's how i was with you
and doing the same thing with him
is like reliving my motherhood
because what you see in me
when i am with him
it makes me so happy*

love, time

*things i wanted myself
i tried to give to you
i never had it but at least
i could give it to you*

*your grandmother lost
special moments with us
so i wasn't going to do that with you
as soon as you were born
i wanted to give you
the world you deserve
the world i deserved
a loving parent
a parent who's there*

*you never gave up
if only i could capture those moments again
your ballet performances
crying, as i watch you
fly across the stage
i still remember it
you make me so proud*

i love you

— Eleanor



when i am a mother

i love you

*thank you for sharing your story
mom
i know it was really hard for you*

*i appreciate
the shared experience
the shared healing
of being
a mother*

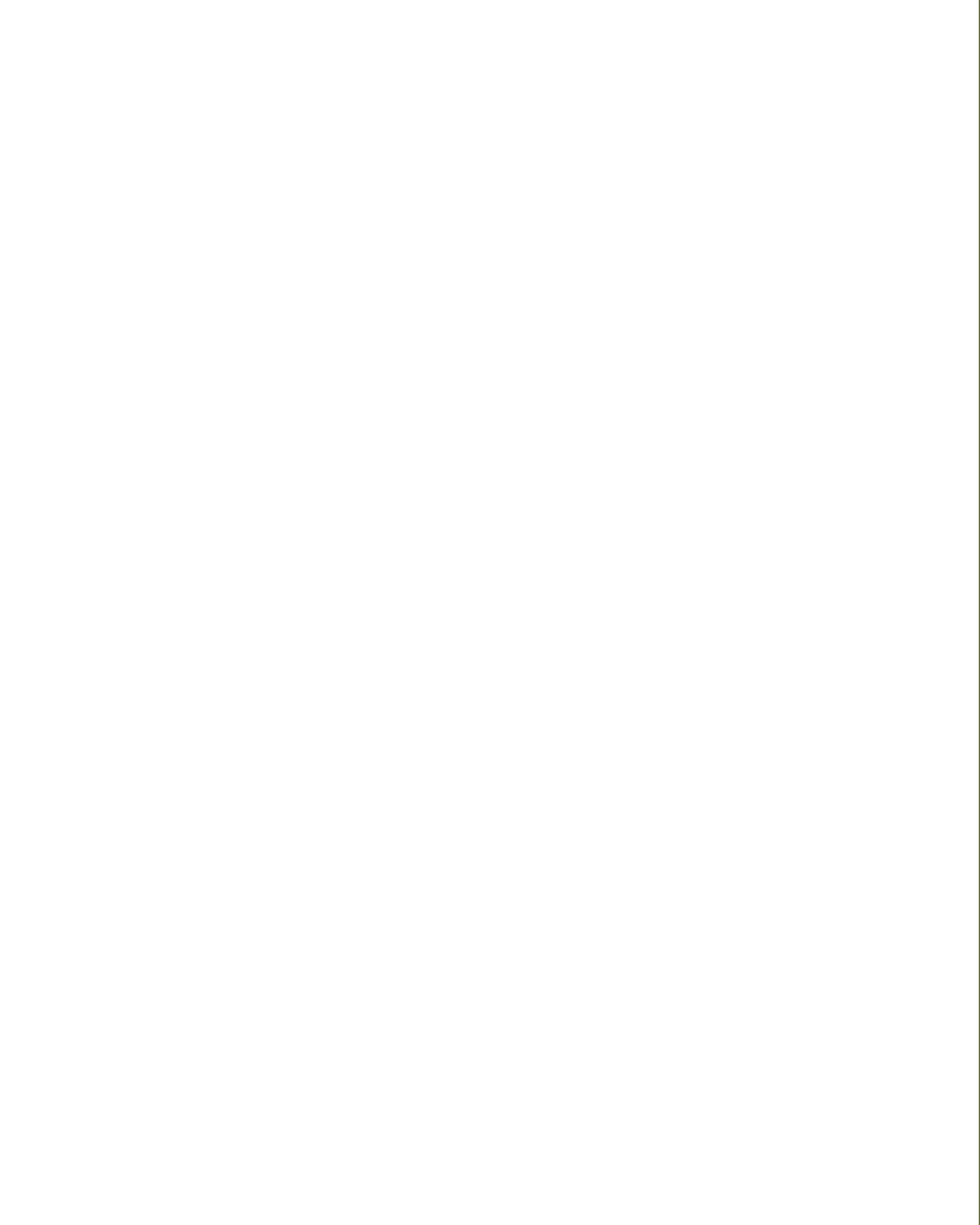
*i can see joy in you
sharing these memories
my memory is not as good
but i can remember
you were always there
every ballet recital
you volunteered
did people's hair, makeup
you were the hall monitor
sewed their costumes
you were committed*

*i can share the joy
i have the same experience
watching my son at Tae Kwon Do
just seeing when he's there
how dedicated he is
how much fun he's having
and how hard he is on himself
how hilarious it is
to watch 5-year-olds do burpees
it brings joy*

i love you too

— Emma







RE
FLEC
TIONS



Participant Storytellers



Alex

ONE YEAR LATER

One year has passed since you and Samantha shared your stories with each other. Where are you in your life now?



After our interview last year, I experienced the final stages of mom's journey. The care aides dropped hints that I should buy her favourite chicken feet.

I've seen life and death many times, but it was never this personal. In clinical terms, mom was deteriorating. There were no other words to explain it. I felt powerless. I thought long and hard about what else could help her, but the nurse said that to prolong a life with artificial means is just as cruel. I agreed. So for the last 7 days, I stayed by her side overnight because I didn't want to miss the moment.

After mom passed, I decided to volunteer at her care home. I didn't want to cut ties with where she spent her last 7 years. To be honest, for the first few months I couldn't get myself onto her floor to look at her room.

Each time I volunteer, I talk with the senior men. I know someday I will be going through that same stage of life. Being a part of their journey has kept me grounded about staying positive and focused on maintaining my health.



What was it like to take part in the project, and how has it changed you?

It wasn't easy, but the experience informed me. The interviews taught me to present my truth and not be harsh on others. I am not qualified to assume how other people feel. I always had empathy for other people, but now I try harder to understand other people's perspectives and what they have to go through. I am more attentive to their feelings, and I am reminded that everybody is brought up a different way. It made me a better person in my view.

How have your relationships with your daughter and family changed?

As parents we're always concerned about our children, but now I give my daughter more room to be her own person. It's no longer my job to step in. She is a complete and separate individual. There will be a time where I will no longer be here. It is what it is.

When I was a young dad, everything I did was a reaction to get food for the day. Now 45 years later, I think: "maybe I could have done that differently," so it has helped me become a better grandparent. It taught me to always leave a bit of room and never burn bridges because we never know what's going to happen next.

What wisdom from this experience would you like to share with others?

Tell your truth. Even though it's not going to be easy because the colour of our skin is different from the majority of the society. Participating in this project gave me the opportunity to spread the word that, under the sun, we are all equals.

We will always be viewed as different—and not in the happy way. But don't be hesitant to

voice your legitimate concerns. Don't be afraid to speak out. Without voice is without power. You have to say it because other people may not understand what you have gone through. The older generation is still worried about repercussions and afraid to cause trouble by speaking up, but I hope the next generations will speak up for their rights. The process takes time, but I'm sure they will be able to.

What would you like to share about resilience?

There's a Chinese idiom: 百折不撓 (baak3 zit3 bat1 naau4)—it means that even when the willow tree (楊柳樹; joeng4 lau5 syu6) on the riverside is blown a hundred times, it succumbs to the wind and refused to bend over, and when the wind subsides, the willow always returns back to its original shape. This idiom means that we as people will always have unfortunate and unexpected circumstances come at us, but we always come right back up and never give up. We all need to. Resilience prevails. 回

No.

Date

Epilogue

I want to dedicate this story to my late mother, my wife (and best friend) and my children. They made me a better person.

Why do I choose to rehash past events and share them with total strangers? So be totally honest, I don't have a tailor made answer for you.

We face life differently equipped only with how we were brought up, our personality, temperament and circumstances. Simply put, with the cards we were dealt!

My story is far from unique, thousands others probably have gone through similar trials and tribulations in their own journey. I share mine to let you know that you are not alone.

Whether you are black, white, descendants of early settlers, recent immigrants, refugees seeking a better life, or children of our original stewards on this land for millennia. We are all the same under our skin!

A chance encounter with Wendy led up to the opportunity in part-taking this Project. And without Carmen's patient coaching during our interviews, I would have been stuck with words many a times.

Last but not least for Dr. Fred Chou in spearheading this project to its fruition. I am grateful to you all!

Sincerely

Alex.

2024 09 09

Isabelle

TWO YEARS LATER

When I read this back, it never sounds like me anymore. Probably because resilience is an ongoing process; it doesn't end with the words on the last page. That's to say, my story isn't done by any means. This was written in late 2022, and, at the date of this piece's publication, I look in the mirror and see a completely different person. For me, resilience comes with constant exponential growth. I will never be the same person as I was when I wrote that. I'll never be the same



person I was yesterday. I don't disown my words by any means, but, coming into adulthood on my own terms, I've come to learn how much of resilience comes from joy and where that joy comes from. The resilience after loss comes from memory. How my dance teacher smelled like cigarettes and love, how she never let me leave her downtown studio in just a leotard. The way my grandfather would ask me if I "made out okay" after school, and the way he insisted on picking me up far longer into my childhood than he needed to. I think about these people, and the tears start coming out; I used to hate that. It makes me smile now, the tears. I think these people

who I have loved and lost would smile at them too. They say grief is all the love we never got to give somebody. I would say resilience is all the love we have left to give.

I cried for a long time just the other day; I didn't get the job I hoped for. Mom sat with me in my room, trying to comfort me with solutions—ever the pragmatic one. Yes, those tears shed disappointment and sorrow and anxieties I thought would be fixed with a new place to work in a consistent environment with people I liked (being a freelancer immediately after finishing your first degree does absurd things to your mental state). Those tears were a release of a passion for a life I desired; they came from the desire to keep going when things were tough. The emotional process for someone who feels so deeply is treacherous, it's gross, it's downright

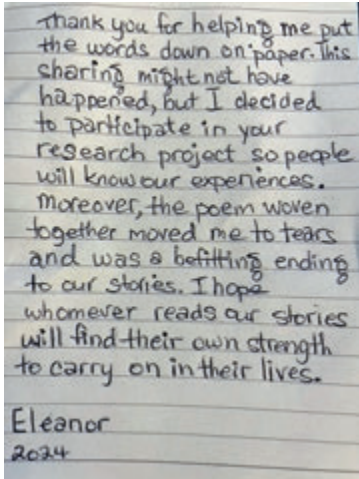
unpleasant, and an absolute bummer. And it is not felt without a deep-seated joie de vivre, a need to persist through hardships and other bullshit, through a world that doesn't always feel like it was built for us. I see where mom came from with steps forward (was it a kick in the ass at the time? Yes, but I get it). Life sucks, and you get on with it because, at the end of the day, you have a life to get on with. You need to see what tomorrow, next week, or next year brings. You set yourself up in the hard times to make the good times sweeter.

For resilience to come, we must first experience weakness.

The seed is feeble and delicate before the roots start, the tree grows, makes new seeds, and it all starts again. A vast forest grows, and, with people who love you, you don't have to tend to it alone. ☐

Eleanor

TWO YEARS LATER



Thank you for helping me put the words down on paper. This sharing might not have happened, but I decided to participate in your research project so people will know our experiences. Moreover, the poem woven together moved me to tears and was a befitting ending to our stories. I hope whomever reads our stories will find their own strength to carry on in their lives.

Eleanor
2024

Thank you for helping me put the words down on paper. This sharing might not have happened, but I decided to participate in your research project so people will know our experiences. Moreover, the poem woven together moved me to tears and was a befitting ending to our stories. I hope whomever reads our stories will find their own strength to carry on in their lives.

— Eleanor



Emma

A poem about becoming a mother, postpartum and the passing of time.

TWO YEARS LATER

On birthing a mother

I move in between shadows as sunlight flickers through. We are fleeting moments in time. I feel brilliant joy and then long exhausting moments of emptiness. It's all the same.

Time is a great expanse that forever moves forward and carries me through. So while some days might be unbearably boring and grey I learn to sit in the nothingness and just be.

I am driven to be in a constant state of tightness that chokes me. Where every second is filled with action or racing thoughts. And I think this fills me and gives me meaning and value.

But what is that busyness worth when the most beautiful moments are quiet and slow. It's a deep, relaxed sigh and the warmth of my blood keeping me alive. It's the baby soft cheeks and hot, sweaty body of my son leaning on mine as he snores sweet little breaths next to me. It's a stillness inside me that is both unbearable and immensely rich and full.

*a beautiful smile and a tender caress...
crying for me and only me...
sleeping on the edge of my mind...
high alert and feelings of failure...
sleep regressions...
soft cuddles...
pushing myself past my limit...
finding a new limit...
loving more than i thought i was capable of...
wanting to be alone and untouched...
missing your touch it hurts so bad...
not knowing if i am doing anything right by you...
knowing i am only doing what feels right...*

*Carrying the grief of each moment with you that is gone
A memory to cherish
Desperately trying to be present, today, together in the midst
I pause to soak it all in*



Research Team



Wendy

eldest daughter

*i was invited into this world
with the responsibility as the eldest
daughter
invited to bear the title of being
a gwai neoi—a daughter who should be
well-behaved, obedient
a title i resist, i shake
but stays*

*i make a mistake
i am struck
with dishonourable pain
mui mui imitates my attitude
i am struck
with paralyzing shame
dai dai is hurt
i am struck
with eternal guilt
because i am invited into this world
with the responsibility as the eldest
daughter*

*the use of clothing hangers
will be taught
as objects to hang garments
not strike
when I invite into this world
an eldest daughter*

馬凱怡
– Wendy Ma



coming home

*the name i am called each day—it was found in a dictionary
dictionary—a word too long for my parents to know in english
Mom, why did you give me this name?*

*easy to pronounce, daughter
i don't want your existence to be
uttered foolishly
like mine*

凱怡 (hoi2 yi4)
*words that don't exist
in the language that holds half my identity
hoi for the victorious return of a ship after war
yi signifying happiness from the heart
meanings that become lost
if not asked about*

*this is the reason I named you, 凱怡
i hope for my first daughter to return
home happily
after leaving home for marriage*

*marriage is the only reason
to leave home
without shame
but i chose shame
it was not for marriage
but for reclaiming
and now i am coming home
happily
from a battle inside of me*

馬凱怡
– Wendy Ma





you have taught me
that I could ask for help

"have a tissue"
* laughter *

Wash your face, eat some food

You know that you are very important
to me.

For daddy
for your gong-gong

You taught me how to be
present, without saying a lot

Mikaela

(tiger) balm for the yearnings of my heart

(for the stories and words unheard
or unsaid, and those that feel like home)

Stories that Shape Us has left me with a medicine—of words, stories, and moments of connection—that I will carry with me throughout my life. Words that allow me to find, carve out, remember, and come *home*.

in the handwriting of my parents and borrowing and gathering the words and offerings that I was privileged enough to witness, receive, and feel from these stories, I fill a jar of balm for my own heart and share with you this collective medicine, with space for you to take, receive, or leave, as needed. 📦

BABA || NYONYA

*My mother teaches me
The language of my ancestors
The coloured tapestry of their identity
In every chicken stock soaked grain of rice*

*In every vibrant
Keropi green
fluffy and light
Pandan chiffon cake*

*In between each black crevice
In buah keluak
Unearthing the wisdom of
Generations before me
As I dig
For more treasure
With my tiny fork*

*In each etching on the gold filigree
carved, marked,
with intention
precision
relation*

*In every bowl of bubur
each glass of rose pink bandung
Every serving of sweet noodles
To ring in another year of being alive*

*(Panjang Panjang Umur
Long long life)*

*in every cut and peeled fruit
or 'how was your day'
and 'good. makan'
followed by the clinking across plates*

*in the red string that mama pulls
tighter on my wrist
To secure the carved jade
and silver pendant wrapping me in protection
for the year ahead*

*i trace the edges of the crimson lines
where the threads land
upon my golden skin
and hold me in remembrance*



*of the storylines of my ancestors
colouring in
the paths they walked
(be)for(e) me.*

i take a bite.

*My mother teaches me
The language of my ancestors
The coloured tapestry of my identity
In every chicken stock soaked grain of rice*

– mikaela chia



Carmen

a “good” daughter

Dear 妈咪,

What were you like as a child?
Did you listen to your parents?
Were you obedient?
Did you get good grades?
And stay out of trouble?
Were you a good daughter?

What was I like as a child?
Did I listen to you?
I felt like I did. I tried.
Was I obedient?
I knew how hard you worked. I really tried.
Did I get good grades?
Straight As didn't seem good enough.
And stay out of trouble?
I don't think you'd agree with me.
Was I a good daughter?
Sometimes, but it didn't feel good enough.

Dear 宝贝,

What was I like as a child?
Did I listen to my parents?
As much as I could. I had a mind of my own.
Was I obedient?
Most of the time.
Did I get good grades?
Yes, they were good enough.
And stay out of trouble?
Depends who you ask.
Am I a good daughter?
I think your grandma would say so.

What are you like as a child?
Are you a good daughter?
Always, my good daughter.

乖女

– Carmen Huang

Fred

GENERATIVITY

This is the word that echoes in my mind throughout this project and at its completion. It resonates with my thoughts about my 爺爺 (je4 je2; paternal grandfather), who inspired my original inquiry into intergenerational trauma.

Though he never spoke of his story, it was in learning facets of his story after he died that started this journey of researching intergenerational trauma during my doctorate.¹² In many ways, it is fitting that he continues to occupy space at the completion of a project on intergenerational resilience. For me what stood out about him was his posture of **integrity, benevolence, and generativity**. After engaging in this area of work, I have come to understand that his demeanour and silence was perhaps always an act of benevolence and generativity. He was, after all, always present even if he did not speak much. And though I don't recall him ever saying he loved me, I know that he was delighted in me.

I think why he comes up so presently in this project is because I am reminded of his way of being in the storytellers. There was an incredible vulnerability in the parental storytellers, I would say even a reckless abandonment of social position and normative ways of being, by taking part in this project. I saw this ultimately as an expression of love towards their children. It was an act of benevolence and embodies the core characteristics of Chinese relational culture that I have come to appreciate more with age and with children of my own.

For the offspring storytellers, it was integrity. The integrity to speak about stories that risk being lost and with veracity, even if it was potentially costly. For both generations, their commitment to sharing their stories with benevolence and integrity is a generative gift that will be passed on to future readers, and perhaps future generations.

12. Chou, F. (2019). *Stories of Our Ancestors: Intergenerational Trauma and Chinese Canadian Families*. [Doctoral dissertation]. University of British Columbia. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0376557>

The parallels between generations persist in odd, wonderful, and serendipitous ways. I think about the parallels of resilience that exist between the generations and how the storytellers inadvertently or intentionally continue the acts of care that was and is viscerally imbued in their lives by past generations. I imagine that the generational resilience in some ways is a replication of the past embodied in slightly different ways. Concretely, I think of the image of my grandfather and the ways he cared for me, and how I too pass on the same-but-different care to my own children. Perhaps that is what intergenerational resilience is—same but different. Or, whenever I say or do anything similar to my son, he would say, “same same.”

In a way, doing a project on intergenerational resilience felt much like a needed closure to the project on intergenerational trauma. One can only dwell on trauma so much, and focusing on resilience felt like a breath of fresh air. Yet, I realized that in doing this project, it only

made it more clear how interconnected these concepts are. That you cannot explore one without the other.

Perhaps it is a constant reminder of Taoist ethos of Yin and Yang that has persisted in the collective consciousness of Chinese folks.

So, I end this reflection inspired by generative efforts. I feel invited to continue the ongoing act of generativity that others have gifted me with through story and through care. To me, intergenerational resilience has an enduring and everlasting quality to it; that despite circumstances that may muddle its presence, it continues in a boundless and fervent way. I see intergenerational resilience embedded in the ethics of care and hospitality that shape my culture as I know it. I am a part of it whether chosen or not, and I have stewardship of this resilience to hold on and pass forward to my children and future generations. □

周敏浩

— Fred Chou







INVITATION



GRATITUDE AND INVITATION

*To the story keepers
To the story shapers
To the builders and space makers
To the sojourners
And to the dreamers
Thank you.*

This project has been a journey and one that we found ourselves graciously a part of a larger community seeking to understand and bring together the pieces of diasporic narratives. It is a part of preserving and continuing the ongoing narrative of Chinese Canadians and collective efforts to maintain its integrity. The beauty of intergenerational narratives is that it continues onward beyond the scope of any project.

Our hope is that, as you have engaged in these stories, that they resonate deeply with you. We hope that this can serve as reassurance to commitments of preserving stories and family history and perhaps a conduit as well. Perhaps these collected stories can be healing and inspirational, as they have been for us. So the ending here is not just an ending but an invitation. It is an invitation to be impacted and to be moved by generational stories. And it is an invitation to continue preserving stories in your own ways and to continue this work beyond the scope of what could have ever been envisioned.

You may want to continue intergenerational resilience narratives in your own way—for those, we have included the primers that we used with the participant storytellers to help develop their stories (adapted to be shared outside of the research context). This includes a primer that we used for the parent generation and one for the offspring generation. For others, the continuity of these narratives may exist in other forms and present itself as infused into daily life and gentle reminders of how our collective and generational resilience persists and exists in your own life and in the life of your community.

Thank you for journeying with us.

– Fred, Carmen, Mikaela, & Wendy



A Storying Guide for the Offspring Generation

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in developing your own story related to intergenerational resilience in your family. This package is meant to orientate you to your life story in relation to resilience and offer an opportunity to begin to narrativize your's and your family's story of intergenerational resilience.

The purpose of this guide is to explore how resiliency in your parent(s) influenced you growing up as a Chinese Canadian. To help orientate you, we provided a writing activity known as Life Mapping. Life Maps can be a helpful tool for you to help tell your story in the way that you want it to be told and in a way that is respectful of your experience.

Below are three parts of the Life Map:

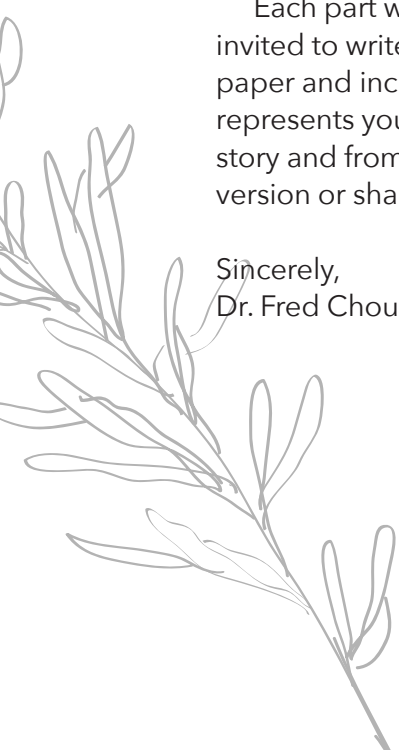
Part 1: Focuses on your life story by looking at moments of when you faced hardship and/or adversity

Part 2: Explores how you coped/adapted/overcame these moments of hardship and/or adversity

Part 3: Examines how the resiliency in your parents (i.e., how they coped and/or adapted with hardship and/or adversity) influenced you and the way that you dealt with hardship and/or adversity

Each part will include questions to guide your reflections. You are invited to write 1 to 2 pages for each of these parts on separate pieces of paper and include an object (e.g. photo, book, family artifact, etc.) that represents your story. This draft will mainly serve as an initial draft of your story and from there you can build on it to create a more comprehensive version or share it with members who are close to you.

Sincerely,
Dr. Fred Chou, R. Psych.



LIFE MAP

Part 1: Moments of Adversity in my Life

Use the template “Life Map Timeline” to develop a timeline of your life with key moments of hardship and/or adversity. These moments are challenging experiences and/or difficult events that significantly impacted your life. These difficult moments may change the direction of your life or lead you on different directions. On your timeline, identify these moments and their dates.

On a separate page answer the following reflection questions:

- How have these events impacted you and the direction of your life?
- How did you make sense of it?

Part 2: How I Coped/Adapted/Overcame these Moments of Adversity

Looking back at your life map, reflect on how you coped, adapted, and/or overcame some of these events. Highlight the 3 most significant moments from your life map that helps define how you dealt with these challenges. Reflect on the ways you coped/ adapted/overcame these moments of adversity.

On a separate page answer the following reflection questions:

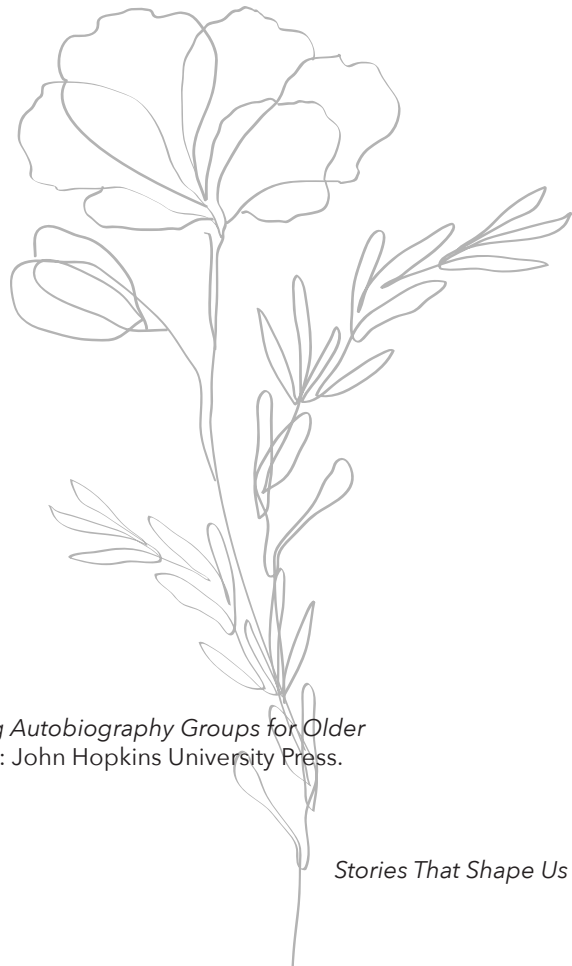
- What was your experience in coping/adapting/overcoming these moments of adversity? What were your thoughts and feelings related to these moments? Who was there? What helped? What did you learn?
- What made these moments the most significant for you? How did it define the way that you dealt with difficulties in general?
- What common theme(s) do you notice in how you adapted/coped/overcame these moments?
- Would you define the way you dealt with these moments as resilience? Why or why not?

Part 3: How I was Shaped by the Resilience of my Parent(s)

Parents have an important, often implicitly understood, role in Chinese Canadian families. This part invites you to reflect on the hardships and/or adversities your parent(s) faced, how they coped and/or adapted to these events, and its influence on you growing up.

On a separate page answer the following reflection questions:

- What hardships and/or adversities did your parent(s) face and how did they cope and/or adapt?
- What do you see in your parent(s) that you identify as resilience? How did their resilience influence your family and you personally?
- What were some of the lessons you learned from your parent(s) when it comes to dealing with hardship and/or adversity?
- What similarities do you see in you (see Part 2) and your parent(s) when it comes to dealing with adversity? How does your resilience parallel your parent(s)?



Source: Birren, J., & Deutchman, D. (1991). *Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults: Exploring the Fabric of Life*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

LIFE MAP TIMELINE

- **Step 1:** Place your key moments of adversity and their dates on this timeline; answer reflection questions.
- **Step 2:** Highlight the three most significant events; answer reflection questions.
- **Step 3:** Reflect about your parent(s) resilience and how it shaped you; answer reflection questions.



A Storying Guide for the Parental Generation

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in developing your own story related to intergenerational resilience in your family. This package is meant to orientate you to your life story in relation to resilience and offer an opportunity to begin to narrativize your's and your family's story of intergenerational resilience.

The purpose of this guide is to explore your experience of hardship and/or adversity related to migration trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and/or racism, and how your resilience influenced your family and child(ren). To help orientate you, we provided a writing activity known as Life Mapping. Life Maps can be a helpful tool for you to tell your story in the way that you want it to be told and in a way that is respectful of your experience.

Below are three parts of the Life Map:

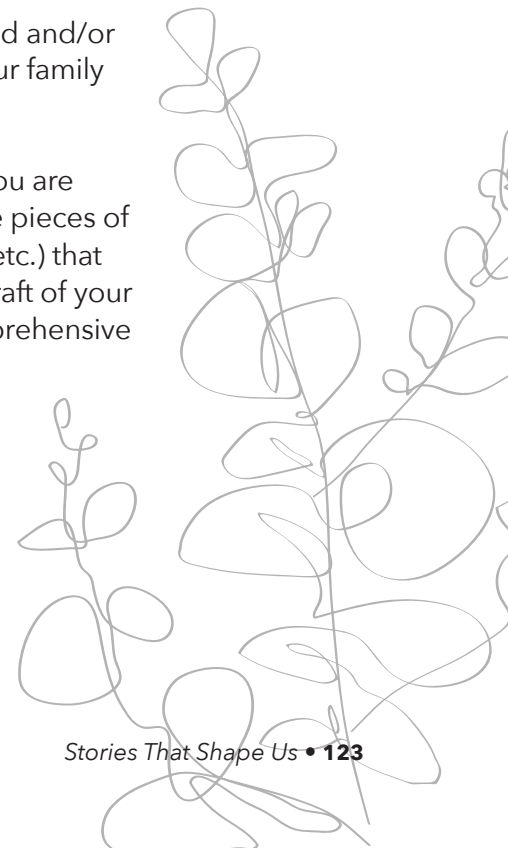
Part 1: Focuses on your life story by looking at moments of when you faced hardship and/or adversity

Part 2: Explores how you coped/adapted/overcame these moments of hardship and/or adversity

Part 3: Examines how your resilience (the way you coped and/or adapted with hardship and/or adversity) influenced your family and child(ren).

Each part will include questions to guide your reflections. You are invited to write 1 to 2 pages for each of these parts on separate pieces of paper and include an object (e.g. photo, book, family artifact, etc.) that represents your story. This draft will mainly serve as an initial draft of your story and from there you can build on it to create a more comprehensive version or share it with members who are close to you.

Sincerely,
Dr. Fred Chou, R. Psych.



LIFE MAP

Part 1: Moments of Adversity in my Life

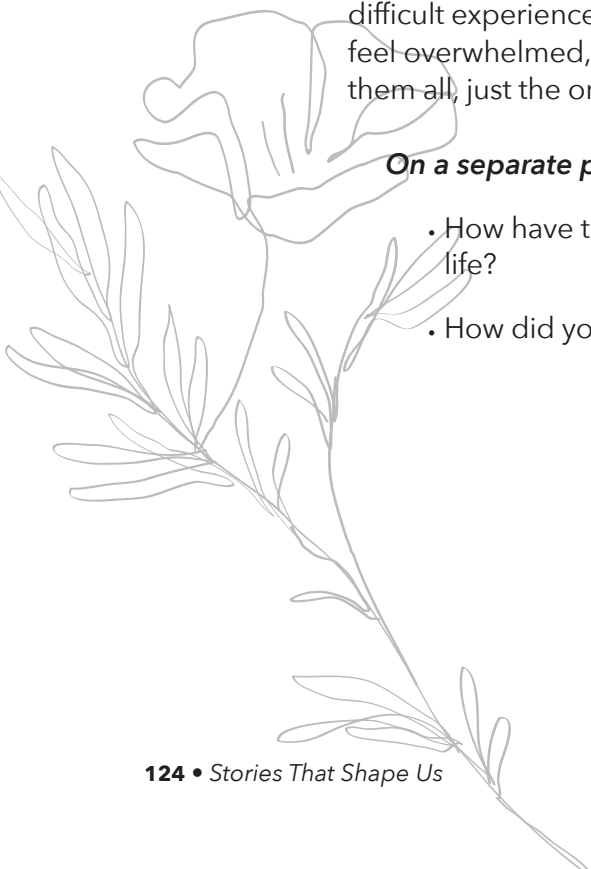
Use the template “Life Map Timeline” to develop a timeline of your life with key moments of hardship and/or adversity. These moments are challenging experiences and/or difficult events that significantly impacted your life. They can include:

- *Migration trauma*: The traumatic experiences related to migration (before, after or during) where you or someone close to you experienced real or threatened harm. Examples include war, near death experience, assault/abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, psychological), sudden death (intentional or accidental), natural disaster, life threatening illness or injury, exposure to toxic substances, and torture. Traumatic events may be a one-time incident or they may occur over a long time.
- *Adverse childhood experiences*: Difficult experiences, such as poverty, homelessness, violence, abuse or neglect before you were 18 years old.
- *Racism-related stress*: The mental and emotional injury caused by racism that can be real or perceived.

On your timeline, identify these moments and their dates. These can be difficult experiences to remember, so take your time. If at any point you feel overwhelmed, take a break from the activity. You do not need to list them all, just the ones that are most important to you.

On a separate page answer the following reflection questions:

- How have these events impacted you and the direction of your life?
- How did you make sense of it?



Part 2: How I Coped/Adapted/Overcame these Moments of Adversity

Looking back at your life map, reflect on how you coped, adapted and/or overcame some of these events. Highlight the 3 most significant moments from your life map that helps define how you dealt with these challenges. Reflect on the ways you coped/ adapted/overcame these moments of adversity.

On a separate page answer the following reflection questions:

- What was your experience in coping/adapting/overcoming these moments of adversity? What were your thoughts and feelings related to these moments? Who was there? What helped? What did you learn?
- What made these moments the most significant for you? How did it define the way that you dealt with difficulties in general?
- What common theme(s) do you notice in how you adapted and coped with these challenges?
- Would you define the way you dealt with these moments as resilience? Why or why not?

Part 3: How my Resilience Influenced my Family

This part invites you to reflect about how your resilience (the way that you adapted and/or coped with hardship and/or adversity) influenced your family and offspring(s). These may be a direct impact on improving their lives, lessons you have instilled in them or shared patterns of behaviours.

On a separate page answer the following reflection questions:

- How did your resilience influence your family and child(ren) both directly and indirectly?
- What do you see in your child(ren) that you identify as resilience? How does it connect with your resilience?

Source: Birren, J., & Deutchman, D. (1991). *Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults: Exploring the Fabric of Life*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

LIFE MAP TIMELINE

- **Step 1:** Place your key moments of adversity and their dates on this timeline; answer reflection questions.
- **Step 2:** Highlight the three most significant events; answer reflection questions.
- **Step 3:** Reflect about how your resilience influenced your family and offspring(s); answer reflection questions.



To my children,
may you continue to bear
witness to the ancestral
stories that shape you.

阿嬤,

謝謝您教了我如何
善待他人。

for Kong Kong

To the generations that
came before us,
and to those that will
come after us.

for grandpa
for grandma

ou dieh ai gah
感謝大家
hieck fan mee ah?

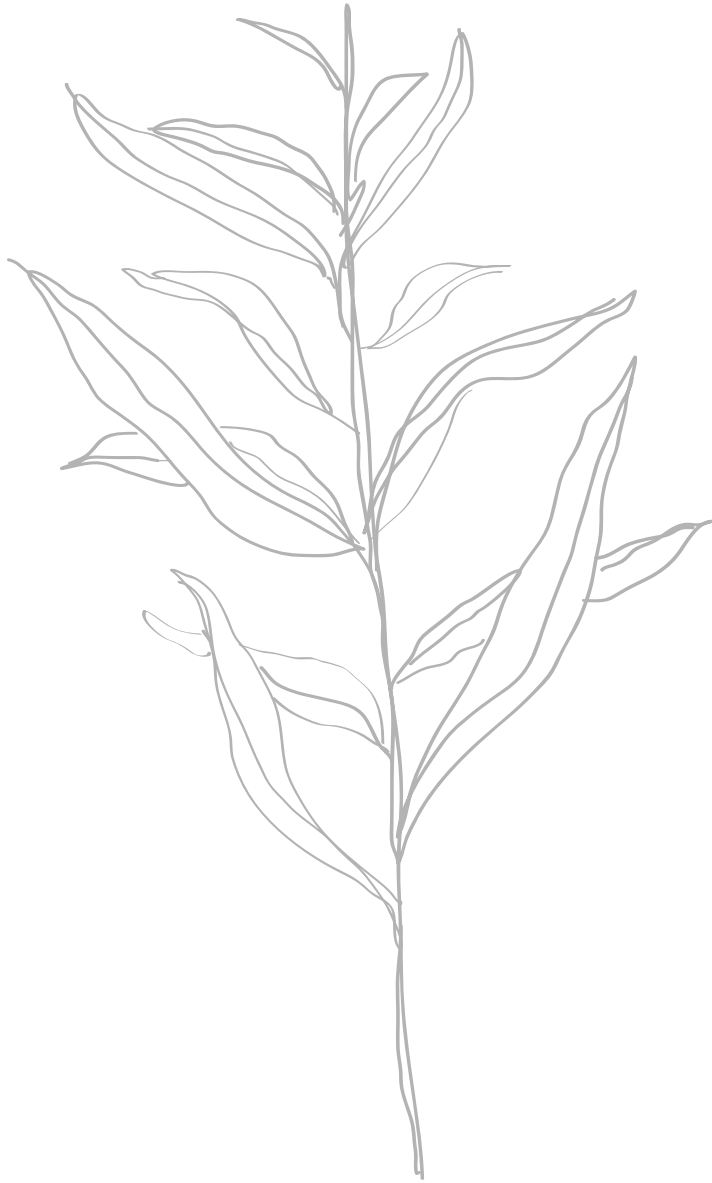
May we honour your stories,
today, and every day.

親愛的爸媽, *Thank you.*

真心感謝你們的辛苦
與付出。

for Mamah

for daddy
for your gong-gong





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University of Victoria