

Collecting Stories

Category: Diversity

written by Lisa Gong | April 7, 2025

My love for collecting stories was seeded in middle school with the sounds of crinkling sleeping bags, the salt of instant ramen brine, and the ache of raw conversations digging deep past my bedtime. Those nights, with the other pimply, Asian American peers at church, we peeled back our tight facades, revealing layers of vulnerability and hurt intermingled with courage and integrity, imprinting moments of connection felt so real to me that I became hooked recreating them, especially with individuals not so similar to myself.

Soon I started stepping out of my familiar circles, working in refugee centers, kitchens of fast-food chains, and prison advocacy groups. At fifteen, my first job was at a bicycle warehouse. All my coworkers were middle-aged Hispanic men, and as a young Asian girl, I struggled to find my stride. Nevertheless, I persisted. I packed boxes, labeled shipments, and tried my best to listen. By summer's end, I had made unlikely friends.

My pursuit of others' stories culminated after college when I moved to the mountains of rural Massachusetts to work at a mental health rehabilitation center. There I ate, hiked, cooked, danced and laughed with my patients, becoming so deeply integrated into their lives that they didn't even have to speak for me to listen. But even in this space built for healing, few would find belonging. Whether it was the songs we sang, games we played, or even therapy we practiced, the inclusive program we professed to offer was only designed with a narrow demographic in mind. In fact, I couldn't remember the last time I had served a meal that reminded me of own home. The menu reflected the center's very White census.

My dream in medicine is to create spaces of healing for all my unlikely friends, but as I began medical school, I discovered care structures built only for those privileged enough to fit the dominant social norm. That is why we need Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which is much more than a political pleasantry. It is a celebration of all our stories and a commitment to creating spaces wide enough for all our identities. The recent defacement of DEI was akin to telling each of my friends, "you don't belong, and you aren't worthy of healing." And as each of these stories has wormed its way into the deep crevices of my heart, I feel this heart slowly shattering.

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