

We Are the Ones We Are Waiting For

Category: Immigrants

written by Jenny Kwak | May 3, 2025

Practically every doctor, nurse, medical assistant and caregiver that my family ever had are immigrants. They, or their parents, immigrated to the United States for “a better life.” If it were not for these health care workers and care providers, I don’t know if I would be here today.

My parents immigrated to Seattle in 1973. They came for a better life and to escape prosecution, because my father was a vocal professor who believed in democracy under a totalitarian regime in Korea. He has survived incredible tragedies and heartbreaks, including my mother’s death from Alzheimer’s in 2019. He is still thriving and contributing to the local Korean community, as well as the Democratic Party.

My father is not alone. His friends are also active, vibrant contributors to society, and they helped him celebrate his recent eighty-fifth birthday. Some of the fifty people who attended were in their nineties. I am amazed at how resilient they are and admire them because I hope to live that long.

I grew up in Seattle and have called San Francisco Bay Area my home since 1993. I have experienced so much love and care in my diverse community with over forty percent of the population being Asian and Pacific Islander and the rest of the Bay Area being home to so many other immigrant communities. This is what makes my work here as a therapist and social worker so worthwhile. I get to hear so many stories of resilience. One needs to be resilient to survive the great hardships of leaving one’s birth country behind to create a better life in a new country, with a new language and without a support system.

America used to shine and “embrace immigrants,” or so the Statue of Liberty symbolized. I do hope the light of the torch she carries can shine again. My family, like so many families, benefitted from that message. This country is built on the backs of those who were “othered.” We are also the ones who can heal this divided nation.

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