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Mrs. Shultz

AP Lang and Comp – 3

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“Pay no attention to that behind the curtain.”

When I was younger, I was a rather peculiar child. Through the years, I have spent a lot of time thinking about my childhood and why that was. And after all this time, I still have questions, but I have come to several conclusions

I was raised in a Filipino household. I did not know the things that the other children who were raised in a typical, American household knew. I knew what children on the other side of the world knew. This made my childhood different.

I was a sheltered child, so I thought everyone was like me. I was naïve and assumed everyone was raised the same way. So, when I started school, I did nothing to hide the fact that I came from a Filipino family. I was proud of my heritage. I was proud of my leftover pancit and ampalaya that I ate with a spoon and fork at lunch. I was proud that I had traveled to my mother’s home country. This made my childhood different.

I also grew up in a very religious family. I could not listen to Rihanna or Usher. I listened to Christian music. I could not read Harry Potter. I read the Bible. I could not have a sleepover on the weekends. I went to church. That was my normal. I liked it. It was a part of my life. So, before eating my lunch, I would pray. This made my childhood different.

As a first grader, no one cared that I was different. We did not know any better. We did not know adversity and skin color. We did not know the hardships people faced. But as we matured, we saw those differences.

As a third grader, people started to notice. People saw the way I acted, and they knew it was different. People saw what I ate, and they knew it was different. People saw my skin color, and they knew I was different.

I will admit, that was a rather dramatic opening, but it is true. Because what people saw on the outside was different, they could not see past the girl that stood before them. As a result, I was bullied a lot as a child. The friends that I made often left me for other friends --- friends that were more like them. The other children whispered behind my back. I was even punched once, but I won't bore you with the depressing details of my childhood.

I did my best not to let it bother me, but at some point, if you just keep throwing stones at a window, no matter how strong, it will break. Eventually, my window broke, and their words were like broken glass against my skin. It was like a thief had broken into my house and stolen my most valuable possessions because I started to resent what made me "me." I hated my family, and I hated my heritage. But worst of all, I hated me. It was like I had created my own "Valley of Ashes." Those years were my own stretch of desolate land carved not by the dumping of industrial ashes, but emotional ashes. Its existence elevated the bullies living around it and stripped away the vitality of the one living in it. I would look in the mirror and I would not see "me" anymore, I saw what everyone told me they saw. I would no longer "Pay [any] attention to that man behind the curtain!" (*The Wizard of Oz*). And this way of thinking, it ruined me. It led me down a dark road where I alienated the people who loved me for me --- the people who cared enough to look behind the curtain. I turned away from God, someone who I had always turned to for comfort. And before long, I hated who I was so much that one night, I found myself crying on the kitchen floor, knife in my hands.

You might think that night on the kitchen floor or really, any of those things, would have been what convinced me that my mindset needed to change, but it was a Bible verse a friend of mine shared. She shared Deuteronomy 33:27: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are his everlasting arms.”

To this day, I am not really sure what clicked when I heard that verse, but something did. I knew that no matter what, there would always be a light at the end of the tunnel. I knew that it did not matter what the kids at school said, because someone would always be there to tear down the curtain and patch up the window. Someone would be there to catch the thief and return the stolen valuables.

After that day, I made a vow to never let other people’s opinions impact how I saw myself. I told myself that when I looked in the mirror, I would draw back the curtains so I could see the person underneath because that is what really matters. This new way of thinking made so many parts of my life better, but sometimes it is so easy to slip back into that pattern of dumping ashes in a valley. It is so easy to let the little things people say when they think you cannot hear them get to you. But all you can do is turn the other cheek and let it roll off your back because you know what is really behind the curtain and that is all that matters.