

“Mom”
by Kyla D.

1
When I was 14, I sat down with my mom on the couch as she was reading a novel, to interview her about my family in Taiwan. Chinese New Year had just passed and I thought about my grandparents and family who were celebrating. I learned about one of my grandmother’s saddest memories—when her best friend died.

I brought grapes from the fridge and set them down on the coffee table. My mom put down her book and popped one in her mouth. Prior to our interview, I had prepared questions to ask about my grandmother. “Alright, cool, thanks. Next question! What was Popo's (meaning grandma in Mandarin) saddest memory as a teenager?” She finished her grape and pondered. Finally, she thought of something: “Well, I remember the story of one winter when her friend got run over by a train.”

2
My grandmother grew up in Taiwan. Her husband was a kind military man who moved there from China. She married him and had two daughters. My mother was their first child, soon followed by her younger sister.

She had always wanted a family of her own because she wanted to experience the joy of having a child. My grandmother was born and raised in Taiwan, along with her eight siblings.

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My grandma worked in a hotel as an executive secretary, before she became a travel agent.

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Almost every summer, my family and I travel to Taiwan to visit my grandparents and my mom's side of the family. Sometimes, if we aren't able to go in the summer, we go during the winter and enjoy the falling snow. Once we land, my aunt and uncle come to pick us up from the airport. It's a long car ride. Their car smells

of smoke and cigarettes—a smell I definitely don't miss. The atmosphere is cloudy and gray, tall buildings surround us. On the first night of our arrival, all of our family goes to a restaurant called Yellow River Shuyu. They are well known for their fresh fish and delicious food. My family loves this place. We catch up with each other and talk through the night. Even while I'm still in America, the smell of white flower oil takes me back there.

5
In my memories, my grandmother stands in the kitchen by the counter. She cuts pineapple and other fruits. The window behind her is open; wind flaps the curtains and ruffles her short hair. The sun shines down on us, reflecting the colors of the curtains onto the walls. In her hands are a knife and pear.

6
When my mother was 11, my grandma fell ill and was hospitalized. On her way back from school she visited my grandma. She says that the smell of

oranges filled the room. It was a slow recovery, and my mother doesn't remember much of those times.

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Winter of 2020, my grandparents, parents, aunt and uncle went on a trip to Hokkaido, Japan. I was 11 years old and eager to play with the snow and eat delicious food.

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On this trip we took idyllic photos of the landscape and witnessed a world of snow at night. Warmth, as a blue haze envelops Hokkaido's evening sky, the warmth of my grandma's hand reminded me of my mother.

9

My grandmother, before retiring, was once a traveling agent. She worked at a business travel agency. There, she worked with corporations to create an itinerary. She helped book flights, hotels, and transportation. My grandmother was the kind of person who loved to help others.

10

A jade bangle bracelet. In Chinese culture, jade represents virtues like modesty, compassion, sincerity, honesty, and kindness. It is said to bring good luck and fortune to those who wear it.

11

During one summer, I stayed in Taiwan with my grandparents while my mom was away in China for work. I attended a fun day camp where I improved my Chinese language skills. It was close to the house so my grandmother and I walked together to and from the camp. We talked about all sorts of things. We talked about how our days went and what I had learned. We talked about the parks and buildings we passed by. We talked about the mouthwatering aroma coming from the street vendors.

There was a photograph I took of a snack on our way home. Our commute was only five or so minutes and we would eat dinner when we got home, but that day I remember begging my

grandma to buy me a beef xian bing (meat pie). Everyday we would pass by a stall selling xian bing's, and everyday I would start craving them. It was one of the best xian bing's I have ever had.

12

My grandmother was an excellent student. Her memorization and comprehension skills were above her peers. During her youth, she learned several languages. She taught herself English, Cantonese, French, and Japanese—on top of already knowing Mandarin. However, because she never used these languages in her day-to-day life, she forgot how to speak them.

13

When she was younger, my grandma dreamed of becoming a mother. On her wedding day, she received a jade bangle bracelet. In my memories, she always wears the bracelet on her left hand. Marriage was the first step to fulfilling her dream. To welcome good fortune and prosperity in their relationship, her mother gifted her a jade

bracelet. Looking at it took her back to one of her happiest moments.

14

On any big occasion, our family would dine at the Yellow River Shuyu restaurant. During birthdays, we would celebrate by going out to eat their fish and sides. In the past, my grandfather and his coworkers would frequent this place. When he came home, he brought leftovers that everyone would share.

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My grandmother is a woman, wife, mother, and grandmother. A mother whose heart is big enough to love anyone. A mother who overlooks background and doesn't hold prejudice, looking at the character within and finding only the best.

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This memoir, infinite yet finite, will never fade to time. There is something more to be found in the heart of my grandmother, the loving warmth she provides. This memoir is about the heart of one

person. It's about being something bigger than yourself. It's about community. And generosity. And kindness. And opening your eyes. With love. With compassion.

I'm walking in your shoes.
Trying to perceive the world as you do.

