Dedication

This journal is dedicated to my three daughters – Phyusin, Ohmar and Thirii – who have all made me proud each in her own unique way.

It is also dedicated to my students – past and present as well as students I hope to see in the future – who will face and overcome myriad challenges including discrimination, micro-aggressions and micro-invalidations with grace and honor and who I feel certain will carve out a successful path for themselves as well as for their children.
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Introduction

When our first journal on discrimination consisting of writings by ESL students came out in the fall of 2018, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of support by the college community. I knew right then and there that there was no way this could be a “one-off” thing. There had to be a sequel and I started working towards a second journal. As I began the process of introducing terms, such as prejudice, discrimination, racism, micro-aggression, and micro-invalidation in my ESL classes, I noticed that many of the students had indeed encountered or experienced discrimination but until then had not known how to seek help or were not even aware that help was available. During a discussion in class, one student asked a question that dealt with the problem in a very direct manner. He said, “It is good that we are talking about these things, but it is not enough. Is there a way we can get help?” I was able to find a way for this student to get the needed help, but the question also made me realize that exposing problems alone would not go far enough. Resolutions must be found. Otherwise, we would be back to square one and would be nowhere close to achieving our dream of an equitable community where justice prevails and transparency and accountability are the rule rather than the exception.

As students in my writing classes really started to open up and began the process of writing their stories on discrimination both in the US and in their previous countries, I was astounded to see how hard they had to fight for things that we – you and I – normally would take for granted. For instance, when we go to a restaurant, we expect the employees there form the waiters and waitresses to the manager to treat us with respect and welcome us with open arms. Unfortunately, many of the students in my class do not always get the respect they deserve as paying customers and are not always welcomed by the employees at such establishments. There is no law in the US that says if you don’t speak English well or you are a person of color, you will be treated as a second class citizen, but in
reality that appears to be the case at many places including the airport and places of work. This is why a journal like this is so necessary today. It gives a voice to those who have been silenced for far too long. These are voices that should be heard for what they have to say is truly valuable.

I urge you to keep an open mind as you read the earnest, heart-felt writings of the students. I hope that like me you will be pleasantly surprised by their views and ideas and will be able to look beyond their minor failings in grammar and choice of words to the deeper and more critical issues that they are trying to raise. Whatever you might think about their skills in English or the lack thereof, I hope that you will be touched by their courage, humility and willingness to learn and positively engage with the new culture in which they find themselves. Their courage and their humility in the face of hatred and ignorance should be a lesson to all of us as we continue to push for social justice and equity in a society that appears to be increasingly hostile and unjust. May their stories inspire you to fight for what is right and good and just and may their experiences encourage you to dig even deeper inside yourself to stand up and be counted as one of those opposing extreme views wherever and whoever they may come from.
Commentary on the Paragraphs

In the very first story, Helen recounts an experience that her friend had while visiting Chicago. I think like me, you will be blown away by the reaction of Helen’s friend to the racist behavior of the waiter. The story has to be read to be believed.

In the second story, Thi Ton recounts an experience that unfortunately many of the immigrant students have had to endure as they reenter the US after a trip back to their country. Wei in her story shares how sometimes the new comers are exploited by the very people they look to for help – more experienced immigrants to the US.

In his tale, Amir talks about how he was mistreated at a restaurant in Miami for no other reason than the fact that he was different. Vu raises troubling questions about equity in the workplace as he describes the discrimination he suffered while working for a well-known tech company in Silicon Valley. Lanh, in her story, describes how she unexpectedly encountered discrimination during a routine trip to a restaurant.

Zhe’s story about what happened to a little boy at a park highlights some of the misconceptions that many Americans have about foreigners. Phouc in his story describes again how a simple trip to a restaurant can become a heart-wrenching experience for some of us immigrants. While this is the fourth story in our collection about discrimination at restaurants, I should point out that it never gets old and that the pain is just as unbearable as the first time. Natalia' story about Russia brings back memories of how Japanese Americans were treated during the World War II and how some of them are still viewed in some quarters even today. Cindy’s story of what happened to her at a department store has me scratching my head and wondering if there is any hope at all for improvements in the future. Perhaps the most shocking story of all is Jiayan’s account of how an elderly white man propositioned her on a crowded train while she was traveling in Europe all by herself. I am sure you will be proud of the way she handled herself and of course like me find the behavior of the elderly white man repugnant to say the least.
I never thought there would be discrimination these days until my friend told me her story. This happened in 2012 in Chicago. My friend like me is black. She went to a restaurant with some white friends. The waiter came to them to take their orders. He took her friend’s orders, but not hers. Instead, he asked her how she got into the restaurant. At first, she was puzzled and asked him back, “What do you mean? I don’t understand you.” And he responded to her, ”Oh, we’ve never served a black woman like you.” She was shocked, but said nothing. However, her white friends got angry and started to yell at him. She stopped them and tried to talk to him nicely. She is a very devout Orthodox Christian, and she knows how to talk to people without getting angry. She said to him,” You know what, we all are the same. The only difference is the color. God created us in His image, so we all have His image no matter what. We are what we look like. Do not judge people from the outside.” At the end, the waiter said “sorry” to the whole group, especially to her and took her order. From that time, they became friends, and he became an Orthodox Christian. He always feels guilty about his action on that day, and always says sorry to her.
Discrimination at the Airport
by Thi Ton

Discrimination is a problem that immigrants often encounter. It could happen to anyone. I would like to tell you about discrimination I have faced.

I have been in U.S for two years. Two months ago, I came back to U.S after spending my vacation in my native country. At immigration, I presented my green card to a customs officer whom I could see was of Asian descent. That customs officer’s attitude was shockingly rude. He seemed irritated because my passport had a cover. He told me, "Take it out, why did you cover it, ha?", with a harsh tone. I said sorry to him. He took the cover out, hurled it on the table, and then asked me to identify myself using my finger prints. After a long flight, I was very tired, and my English was not good, so I couldn’t hear clearly when he told me to put my left thumb on the machine. Instead, I put all my fingers on it. He was very upset and repeated his instructions again with a harsh voice. After everything was checked off, he just shook his head. I couldn’t understand what he meant. Suddenly, he faced me and shouted at me, "Go!", with a raspy voice. I was so shocked by his behavior that I stood there for a while before leaving. It really hurt my feeling. He is an officer of a powerful and civilized country, but why couldn’t he treat me with respect. Would he have treated a white person in the same way? I don’t think so. I still feel hurt and somehow violated.
An Experience with Discrimination
by Wei Wang

An most remarkable case of discrimination I experienced happened recently. It concerned my previous landlord – who is a Chinese American. Half a year ago, we posted a message about wanting to rent a house on a Chinese social networking App. Soon after he contacted my husband. Upon reviewing his social network site, we unexpectedly discovered that he took the same major as my husband in college, and one of our former neighbors who also happened to be my husband’s former colleague was once a student of him 10 years ago. What a coincidence! Thus, we both agreed to choose his house without even looking at a picture. Naturally, we were really shocked by what we encountered when moving in. The house was built more than 40 years ago, and the carpet was so dirty because it had never been changed since the house was built. All taps were leaking. However, we never complained about the conditions to the landlord, as we thought it was reasonable that an old man who worked in China for almost 10 months each year would have little time to take care of his home in the US. While we stayed there, he came back to US twice. Every time when was talked with him, he responded to us in English although he knew how to speak Chinese and we always spoke to him in Chinese. And always made it clear to us that he saw himself as an American, not as a Chinese American.

Several months later, we decided to move out because he suddenly increased the rental price. He said “if you want to move out, you’d better move out by Nov 28, then I will have time to check the room before leaving the US”. We accepted, but when we talked about how and when he would send back our two-month deposit we had given him the final night before moving out, he just tried to avoid the topic by talking about other things. Then he went away saying “the conversation is over” in English. I felt that to be unfair to us. We followed all his instructions. We never cooked because he had asked us not to, had no guests, and even cleaned up his garage, which was stacked full of his 20 year- old stuff. We always sent the rental
fees to his son’s online banking account at the beginning of each month in time. Thus, my husband kept trying to ask for a clear answer about our deposit. After a very long time, Lee said he would mail us our deposit by check later. The next morning, we asked him to inspect the house, and he said the condition was ok, but he refused to give us a check-list or any voucher. Thus, we returned the house keys to him and left.

Unfortunately, it has already been over three months since checking out, and we have not received any check for our two-month deposit. We contacted Lee several times through email and the Chinese social networking App, which he had used to contact us before. He never responded, but we know he is still using that App, as we can see his interactions with others. What a disappointing and confusing experience! We had witnessed his interactions with others. He claimed to be generous. For example, he said he felt pity for those poor gays who were treated badly or cheated by the landlords. And he said he hoped the law would protect the tenant. However, he took our deposit money which was nearly 2,000 dollars and never intended to return it to us simply because he knew that we had language issues and he felt that he could do this to us. We are puzzled and cannot understand how an “American” can do such a thing. If this is not an example of discrimination, I don’t know what is.
Discrimination at the Restaurant (2)
by Amir Simai

I experienced discrimination for the first time when I went to an American restaurant. About two years ago, I went to Miami. I wanted to go somewhere to eat and I didn’t expect to experience discrimination. Thus, when I did encounter it, it was really painful. I went to a restaurant called __________, and I waited to be seated for about 5 minutes or longer. No one came by to ask me if I wanted help or to show me to a table, so I sat on a bench and waited. After about 10 minutes I was still standing there looking for help. The people from the restaurant saw me, but no one even waved a hand or acknowledged my presence in anyway. I saw that many seats were available, so I just sat down at a nearby table and I called the waitress over to order food. The waitress – a white woman – came over but didn’t say anything to me. I said to her, “Why is everyone ignoring me? Why is no one helping me?” She answered with silence. She just looked through me as though I wasn’t even there. I thought to myself I have money, and I can eat my lunch anywhere I want. With that thought I left that restaurant I found out later from my friends in Miami that this restaurant is known for its anti-immigrant views there. I didn’t know. Their actions pained me.
Discrimination in the Workplace
by Vu Dang

I have never been a victim of discrimination until I started work at __________.
I think it happened because of three reasons. First of all, I am a new immigrant. Some Americans have formed an opinion that new immigrants take away their jobs. Thus, they will mistreat immigrants when they get an opportunity. For instance, sometimes I ask the managers for help or to fix something wrong with the system. Half of them would not even respond to me let alone help me. A second reason is that my English is not that good. I can not speak English fluently, so they have a bad impression of me. One of my coworkers always pays attention to me and likes to look for any faults or errors. That person complains to others about me. Finally, I am not yet a US citizen. Because I am not yet a US citizen, these people may think I don’t know the law. They may believe I lack the ability to argue with them or report them for their mistreatment. I realize now after working here for a few months that in the US, discrimination is happening everyday everywhere. I am hoping that things will change. I am not looking for special privileges. I simply wish to be treated like my coworkers there and to be given the opportunity to adapt to a new life in the US.
Discrimination at the Restaurant (3)
by Lanh Vo

This is my story, I don't know if this can be called discrimination. Two months ago, my family went to a restaurant for dinner. There were four of us. When we arrived, the restaurant was full and there were no tables available. The waiter told us to write down our name on a board and wait for a call. So we did. After five minutes had passed, a white couple and one group of about four white people came in at the same time. Both groups wrote down their names and waited like us. A few minutes later, the waiter came and took the white couple and the group of white people to be seated. I could understand that for the couple, it was possible that the restaurant only had a table for two open so they were seated ahead of us although they came later. But what about the group of four people. Our family consisted of four people and they were four people and they clearly came after us. We complained but were told we would have to wait even though we arrived first. My husband was very angry, and asked why we were left behind. The restaurant guy didn’t answer my husband. He only said “wait a few more minutes” in a rude tone of voice. We left for another restaurant because we felt we didn’t want to spend our money at a restaurant that didn’t treat us right...
Discrimination at the Park
by Zhe Xie

There is one thing that I could not get out of my mind. One day last summer, my family was walking in the park after dinner. There were many children chasing one another on the ground, and an old lady was walking her dog. When they approached the area where the children were playing, one Asian boy walked over to see the dog. “Go away!” the old lady said to that boy. I don’t remember what she said exactly – her exact words - but the meaning was Asians eat dog meat. She hates that and she doesn’t want the boy touching her dog. The boy was scared by her rude attitude, and just stood there confused and lost. I walked up to her and said: “Excuse me, he’s only a child, please don’t speak to a child like that.” But she said nothing to me. She just gave an unfriendly glance. Then she turned and left. I felt angry to see this thing. It may be true that some people in Asia eat dog meat, but not everyone does. And it does not give this old lady an excuse to treat a little boy like that. It was very painful to see.
Discrimination at the Restaurant (4)
by Phuoc Tran

Today I'll tell you a true story that occurred to my family in the U.S.A. Can you tell me if this is discrimination or not? Last summer, my family went to San Francisco on the weekend. We visited Golden Gate Bridge, went to the beautiful park, walked to Pier 31, and enjoyed a music festival. We had a good time all day. Before we came home, we stopped at an Irish restaurant for dinner. About 15 minutes after we came in, nobody came to get on order from us. Some groups of white people came in after us and were served right away. Two or three groups of white people who came into the restaurant after us were served, and still no waiter or waitress had approached us. Finally, after at least half an hour had passed, I called a waiter over to ask why they hadn't even taken our order. He could not give me a reply. I felt upset, so I couldn't enjoy my dinner. We decided to leave and had dinner at another restaurant. The rude behavior of the staff of the restaurant destroyed our day which until then had been lovely, and I will never forget it in my life.
Discrimination in Russia
by Natalia Lobacheva

In 1949, my grandparents experienced discrimination. At that time, my
grandfather was an officer serving in the Soviet Navy in the North, on White
Sea, when he met my grandmother. After an accident when he was wounded, my
grandparents went on a vacation to Crimean Peninsula, which also was a part of the
Soviet Union. There, they wanted to get married and to spend their honeymoon.
However, Crimean officials refused to allow them to get married. The reason for the
refusal, as they said was the bride’s ethnicity, which is Tatar. The Soviet Union was
a huge country with a lot of different ethnicities, such as Russians, Armenians,
Caucasians, Tatars et cetera. There were a few regions where Tatars lived; two of
them were Crimean Peninsula and a region around Volga River, where my
grandmother was born. During the Second World War, Crimean Peninsula was
occupied by the German army, and some of the Crimean Tatars collaborated with
the Nazis. When control of the peninsula was regained by the Soviet army in 1944,
USSR government repressed all the Crimean Tatars no matter whether they
collaborated with Nazis or not, so most of them were forcefully relocated to other
parts of the Soviet Union. I can’t say whether it was the decree of the central
government of USSR or just the initiative of local authorities in Crimea to forbid
marriages between Russians and Tatars. My grandparents went back to the North,
where they had no obstacles on the way to getting married; however, for the rest of
their lives, they feared that one day someone would separate them because of my
grandmother’s ethnicity, so they tried to hide it as much as possible.
Discrimination at a Store  
by Jiangrong Zeng

I had a bad experience at a store I used to frequent. One day, when I checked my bank statement, I found one expense that looked weird from a well-known store. I have been there before, but I could not remember what it was I bought at that store that cost so much. So, I went to that store to see if they could help me discover what it was I bought there. I really didn't remember that expense, so I wanted a staff to help me find the history. A white lady there checked the computer very quickly, then told me she could not find anything. She told me to ask my credit card company for help. Although I suspected that she didn't want to help me at all and simply pretended to check without actually checking, I still called the credit card company right in front of her. They told me that they only have the date and store's name, the amount of the money, but not the item, and that the store should have a record. So I told that lady what they said, she reacted angrily, rolled her eyes with a sigh, and flung out her hands. Then she turned back to me with her eyes wide open, scowled, raised her voice, and impatiently said in a tone that was almost unbearably rude, "I already told you, we couldn't find anything on the computer." I sadly continued shopping at the store reluctant to leave. After a few minutes, I saw another staff there who was a person of color. When I told him of my need, he was able to help me and I was able to find out what the item was. I felt so disappointed with that white lady who treated me like that. It was my sad experience with discrimination.
Discrimination on a Train
by Jiayan Lin

When I took a trip to Europe alone a few years back, I mostly had a great
time, but there was one encounter with an elderly man that had me
scratching my head. It happened on a train that was fairly crowded. He was sitting
in front of, so were sitting pretty close facing each other. I was a young Asian girl
traveling alone looking for adventure. He was an elderly white man obviously
retired. Because of the difference in our age and because my parents have always
taught me to show respect to people older than me, I was happy to answer his
questions when he started talking to me. He asked me about myself first and
inquired why I was traveling alone. I guess by answering his questions, I must have
emboldened him somehow because soon he was regaling me with the story of his
life. I don’t really remember what he said. I wasn’t that interested. I just kept
nodding my head and saying “Yes” or “Really” just to be polite. My eyes popped open
though when I heard him say that a young girl like me could learn much from having
sex with a much older gentleman. Other passengers on the train also heard that, and
they stared at us. I was too shocked to stop this old man. He continued talking about
his sexual experiences and finally came right out and asked if I would spend a night
with him. A man old enough to be my grandfather actually thought that because he
was white, he had a chance with a young Asian girl. He was lucky that I was too
shocked to be angry. I just refused him in a calm voice. He kept asking and I kept
refusing till we got to the next station where he got off. As I thought about this
incident later when I got back to my country, I wondered how many white men have
unrealistic fantasies about Asian women and how they could be so arrogant thinking
that just because of their race, they could get any women they wanted. This old man
I encountered on a train while I was traveling in Europe all by myself didn’t exactly
spoiled my trip, but his actions and words did leave a bitter taste in my mouth.
Commentary on the Essays

In the first essay, in a calm detached manner that belies how scarred she was by the incident, Huong describes a hair-raising encounter her friend had with a racist bully at a fast food restaurant. Although Huong’s friend came out of the encounter relatively unscathed physically, it was indeed a frightening experience and it could so easily have led to tragedy. In the next essay, a student using a pseudonym described how females in her country are viewed by males and how she used that to her advantage. The next essay by Tran Doan recounts a sad tale of friendship that almost became a victim to gay bashing – a horrible practice that seems to know no cultural or physical boundaries. Jose in his essay pokes fun at ignorant people who seem to think all Hispanics are from Mexico. Though Jose never loses his sense of humor, he is able to portray quite accurately his frustration at people who insist despite his denials that he is from Mexico. In an interesting and thought-provoking essay, Owen presents the other side of discrimination where the tables are turned and males are the ones victimized by a society that prefers female renters to males for various reasons. In the next essay, Trung shares his experience at his tax preparation firm where both his relatively youthful age and his lack of English skills made the customer disrespect him although he clearly had the required skills to prepare her taxes. Martha in her essay recounts a sad tale of discrimination based on the color of one’s skin that occurred in that most holy of places – a church. Lam, Lisa, and Trieu described at length in their fascinating essays how even the family is not immune to unfairness and inequitable treatment of its members. Alex Phan – once a budding soccer star – explained how traditional views of females in her culture led to many incidents of discrimination on the soccer field for young females focused on playing soccer. Wayne shares a story from history to highlight the differences between the haves and the have-nots in today’s society. In the final essay, Huy Tran shares his experience at his former place of work where he faced discrimination due to two factors – for being a new immigrant lacking skills
in English and surprisingly for him being a male employee working under a female boss.
Incident at a Fast Food Restaurant
by Huong To

It is not pleasant to be a victim of discrimination, racial or otherwise. Yet, we know for certain that there have been many victims of discrimination, and there continue to be many victims even today. Spurred on by hate and baseless fear, many Americans today continue to harass, insult, and even attack people based on their race, religion or sexual preference. Shockingly, at times, the police and even politicians have sided with the attackers instead of coming to the aid of victims. Hence, I was not at all surprised but deeply disturbed by what happened to one of my friends at a fast food restaurant.

This incident happened at a fast food restaurant in a part of San Jose that I would rather not mention here. It was crowded and people were standing in line to order food for their dinner. It was in a part of town that Hung usually would not visit. But that evening, he had business there and by the time it was done, he was hungry, so he stopped there at the dinghy-looking restaurant. Hung was behind a Mexican man, who seemed older and was taller than him. Apparently, his name was Paco because Hung heard some other people in line referring to him as Paco. Paco was somewhat dark with some wrinkles on his face. As for my friend, Hung, he is short by American standards, and he has very smooth skin like a baby. Especially, his face is smooth and free of pimples and blemishes, which has earned him the nick name “young deer” among his friends. The line was getting longer and longer with each passing moment and since it was close to the restroom often people would pass by him on their way to the restroom. To pass the time, Hung took out his phone and started to play a game on it. He was so focused on his phone that Hung was oblivious to his surroundings.

Finally, the line started moving again, so Hung looked up from his phone. To his surprise, Paco was no longer right in front of him. Paco was still there, but now there was another man – a giant of man – between Hung and Paco. Hung thought he remembered seeing the man towards the back of the line before, but he could
not be sure. Also since the stranger was white and Paco was clearly Hispanics, Hung felt sure that this was not a friend of Paco, who had decided to join Paco. This giant appeared to be middle aged with curvy, long blonde hair and an aggressive attitude. Hung was somewhat intimidated by the man, but thought that perhaps it was all a mistake and decided to speak up. He tapped the man gently on his biceps and politely, tried to explain how he had been in line forever and that the man was cutting him off by stepping into line in front of him.

However, the stranger did not respond the way Hung thought he would. He looked at Hung and through him as though Hung didn’t even exist, stepped forward and pushed Hung in the chest. In a panic, Hung called out to Paco asking him to verify that what he had said before was true. To his credit, Paco didn't look away. He turned around to face both Hung and the stranger and told him, “Yes, he was right behind me”. Paco's intervention only made the stranger even more upset and he promptly grabbed Hung’s collar, lifted him up in the air, and threw him on the ground. Through it all Hung was screaming and shouting for the man to not touch him.

Paco and others in line were shocked into silence and brought to a standstill. No one dared to come between Hung and a giant stranger who was double his size. Fortunately, the store clerk had called the police as soon as the altercation started and the cops showed up right away before Hung could be seriously hurt. Even then, the stranger didn’t back down claiming that he felt he was in danger because he was surrounded by so many people of color and that he was only protecting himself. Many who saw the stranger attacking Hung had disappeared as soon as the police came, so there were few witnesses for the police to interview. Since Hung’s story didn’t match the stranger’s, the police couldn’t figure out who had started the fight and how and why it got started. The stranger kept saying that Hung might even be an illegal immigrant, and of course with his limited English, Hung was having a hard time telling the police his side of the story. Luckily for my friend, the store had a video camera that had been turned on the whole time and after viewing footage of
the incident, the police took the stranger into custody and allowed Hung to go home. They even apologized to him for their earlier confusion.

I was truly scared by what happened to Hung for I know that it could certainly happen to me or to my husband or to my cousins. I wonder why some white people in the US feel that they can push immigrants around or take advantage of them. After all, we are a nation of immigrants, aren't we? According to history books, the only people who lived here originally are the Native Americans, and I haven't seen too many of them around these days. While I worry that I would be a target of hate and discrimination, I am also hopeful that as more and more Americans become aware of discriminatory practices and behavior that we will all become more tolerant and accepting of people who may not look like us, but like us are simply searching for a peaceful and successful life in the US.
Incident in Middle School
by Pseudonym: Cirrus Clouds

The word “discrimination” often brings to mind something ugly or something terrible, but in my case an act of discrimination directed at me actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise. This incident happened a long time ago when I was still in middle school, but I still remember it as though it happened just yesterday. At the time it happened, I was hurt deeply but found the courage inside me to carry on as though it didn’t matter and as a result it made me stronger and may have actually helped me to succeed. I didn’t know it at the time, but I guess I am living proof that what doesn’t kill you may actually make you stronger. This act of discrimination was partly a result of cultural prejudice against women which existed then and still does today in my culture. It was also a result of personal prejudice that many males in authority have against females like myself. Anyway, here is what transpired.

During my middle school, not only was I good at academics but also I was very interested in the student union. Academics in middle school was easy for me. Most of the time, I shared the first place in all kinds of tests with a boy in my grade. I spent nearly all of my spare time on matters related to the student union. Working in the student union made me feel closer to students of different grades as well as to many teachers and administrators in the school. I enjoyed the feeling that working in student government brought to me. Of course, my hard work in the first two years helped me win a reputation as a good leader among students as well as teachers. I thought I deserved to be the president of Student Union in the last year of middle school when the previous president left for high school.

However, thing went not as I thought. The teacher who managed the student union was also my math teacher. He was an excellent teacher who made the boring math class interesting, made tedious math equations appealing, and math was the subject I liked most. But he may not have been a good student union supervisor. He made a surprising decision: A boy who always shared the first place with me was
assigned to be the president of the student union in our last year in middle school. The boy was smart but he was not interested in student affairs at all. Instead he spent most of his spare time on advanced high school courses and always dealt with the student union only when necessary. He was also surprised when he heard the announcement. Meanwhile, I couldn’t accept the truth for a long time. Obviously I was treated unfairly. My long-lasting emotion of being passed over drew the attention of my math teacher. He explained to me that he hoped I could focus on academic which was the most important thing to enter a great high school. That was the only reason he chose the other boy to be president instead of me. Obviously he didn’t believe I could perform both duties well, but he believed the boy could. I was very disappointed, but luckily that feeling didn’t affect me a lot after my talk with the teacher because I accepted his unfairness as his favor to me.

Finally, after completing my education at the middle school, I was accepted into the best high school in my city. During a break in my high school education, I visited my middle school teacher and talked with him. He frankly told me that he never thought I could enter that high school because very few girls from our middle school had been able to enter that high school considered to be the best in our city in past years. Even without any responsibilities for student affairs in my final year in middle school, he said he didn’t have confidence in my academic abilities and was very surprised to learn that I got into the best high school in our city. I remember clearly that my jaw almost dropped when I heard that. I felt so hurt by his underestimation of me.

After that talk, I could not regarded the teacher as my best teacher anymore and could not forgive his discrimination of girls for a long time, though I knew the real reason was our culture which has under-estimated women for centuries. In our culture, not only do men discriminate against women but also women often underestimate themselves. If I didn’t have that experience, I may underestimate myself like other girls who think girls can only succeed in the kitchen or childbearing areas. However that experience has made me gain more confidence in
my own abilities. When people say girls can’t do it, I know I can do it as well as boys. Though that bad experience didn’t defeat me and made me stronger in a way, I still hope the discrimination of girls in my culture will be replaced by appreciation of women and respect for women because not every girl in my country maybe as lucky as me.
Incident at a Pool

by Tran Doan

Is it true that we live in a modern city where all the people are open-minded? Of course not, there are still some people who are conservative with regard to religion and marriage but the most controversial thing is still sexual orientation. Not only old people but also young kids have an aversion against gays and lesbians. You could believe that even young kids would discriminate against you. How embarrassed would you be at that moment? That’s what my best friend and I experienced. It destroyed my beautiful thoughts about people around me and taught me that: ”Those discriminatory assumptions and beliefs about the LGBT community which we had tried to eradicate from society for many years are still there.”

To be honest, it was one of my lovely memories with my best friend, Huy. At that time, my best friend Huy, had just broken up with his girlfriend. He was very sad. He didn’t know how to get over it. I tried to talk with him and take him outside to make him forget about that break-up. One day he asked me to go to the swimming pool. I was hesitant at first because I am gay and he is a straight boy. We had never hung out like that. Usually there were other friends who joined us. It was the first time when there would be only the two of us. I couldn’t decide immediately whether to accept his offer or not because of the place he wanted to go with me. It was a swimming pool. I imagined when he would be shirtless in front of me. I would be shy at the moment because he was my crush during high school. I lied to him all the time when he asked me whom I loved. I told him that I liked another boy in a different class. I hid my feelings for him because I didn’t want to make him feel awkward when he was with me. When he asked me to go out like that, I was very happy. Finally, I could get a little bit closer to him. After he persuaded me by saying he would teach me how to swim and made a joke that there would be a lot of handsome and well-built boys at the swimming pool, I decided to go there with him.

Everything was fine at first. I was a little shy to see him shirtless. He made a lot of jokes to make me feel more comfortable with that situation. He taught me how
to swim. I swallowed a lot of water. He laughed at me all the time. We talked and shared our stories about our life, studies or games. I was surprised that we had a lot of similar hobbies. He and I enjoyed the time we spent at the swimming pool. I could see at times that there were some strange glances at us maybe because both of us had fairer skin than the other people and Vietnamese people usually consider a fair-skinned boy as a gay. I asked him if he noticed that. He said that he had. Regardless of those eyes, we continued to play some mischievous games in the water with each other until one day we got schooled by a kid. That day as usual, we went to the swimming pool and were chitchatting with each other in the water. Suddenly, I heard a conversation about Huy and me from a kid and his father. The father asked that kid “Where are those gays?”. The kid tried to point out those persons his father had just asked about. He turned toward me and his eyes met my eyes. He felt a little awkward and tried to avoid my eyes. I realized that “those gays” were us because the kid didn’t know how to hide his expression. I could easily understand that he meant us. The kid told his father that he didn’t pay attention to those gays. Huy was near me. I didn’t know how to react to that situation. Suddenly, Huy swam away from me and stay at the other corner of the swimming pool. He pretended like nothing happened. He said he was tired and wanted to relax. After that day, he didn’t ask to me to go swimming anymore. Sometimes I actively asked him, but he always made some excuses and refused my invitation. I felt horrible like I just did something very bad to him. People assumed him to be gay because he played with me. Because of me, he got involved in that awkward incident and people got suspicious about his gender.

Later I found out from my parents that I would go to the US. I told him about it, and I waited to see how he would react. His reaction didn’t meet my expectation. The warm friendship we had before the pool incident was gone and I was very sad about that because I didn’t mean for it to end like that. Homophobic people ruined my beautiful relationship with my friend. I hadn’t done anything to hurt him, clearly he was hurt. Life wasn’t fair to me. That’s what I thought until a few days before my
departure to the US, he appeared at my house. He said he wanted to say something to me and asked me to come outside. Once outside my house, both of us felt rather awkward and we were silent for a long time. I didn’t know to break up that silence between us. Suddenly, he took from his bag a present and handed it to me. He said: “Sorry, I know what you must have felt during that time I stayed away. I apologize for being so cold with you all this time. You didn’t do anything wrong. I was wrong. I hurt you and hurt myself. You’re my best friend. That will never change.” I burst into tears after hearing what he said. At that moment I realized that true friendship could survive homophobia. They could try to come between us, but we would not let them with true friendship.

One lesson I learnt from that incident at the pool was that similar incidents of discrimination may happen to me in the future because of the way society views gays. There are some people who are prejudiced about people like me and nothing I do or say could ever change their mind. All you need to be is brave. You don’t need to be scared or worried about them or the way they think about you. No matter you’re gay, straight or bisexual, you are who you are. You are on the right track. You don’t need to hide your true identity. You just need to love yourself. You were born to survive, rejoice and be happy. I hope in the future we will all be more open-minded and understand more about the LGBT community and have positive views about gays and lesbians. It will take a long time for people to accept it, but we will all be happier, and the future will be brighter if we could eliminate all forms of discrimination and learn to love people for who they are, not who we want them to be.
Have you ever faced discrimination because of your ethnicity or religious beliefs? Do you think anyone has the right to vilify a group of people as criminals and drug addicts without any evidence at all? Do you think it is acceptable to call recent immigrants hateful names when apart from the Native Americans we are all immigrants? Ignorance and hate fueled by fear has many Americans believing in stereotypes and spewing micro-aggressions and insults at people they see as different or non-white. While I am fully aware of the ugly political and social situations existing in our nation at present, I admit I was blindsided when I encountered discrimination. In November last year, I experienced discrimination at my work.

I work in customer service in a retail business so I’m always trying to help customers to find one or several specific items or explaining policies about returns and refunds, pricing and ecommerce. One day I was helping a couple of customers to find a pair of headphones. After I found the one they were looking for and explained the specific return policy, the husband asked me where I was from. The question itself surprised me because it’s not a common thing to ask at all. I answered that I was currently living in San Jose, but my country of origin was El Salvador, which is located in Central America.

I guess he didn’t hear me or didn’t understand me so I repeated myself. Again he looked confused. I wasn’t sure about what else to say. His next comment came out of nowhere and I wasn’t prepared for it. He said: Yeah in Mexico right? I answered, “No”, Mexico and El Salvador aren’t the same countries”. Then he said: “it is the same thing.” At this point I wasn’t sure if I should keep the conversation alive or just excuse myself and get away. I decided to just answer in the same way and say, “No it’s not”. I suppose his wife, who wasn’t paying attention to our conversation, said it was late already so they started to walk away and I just stayed right where I was.
It wasn’t the first time that an American thought that I was from Mexico and because of my appearance it may be a safe bet for them. But I know that I’m from El Salvador and I love my country, I don’t have anything against Mexico or Mexicans but I just don’t feel attached to that country. I felt very upset at the time that this incident happened. I like to think that I can overcome commentaries like this fairly quickly, but I just couldn’t forget this particular one. It wasn’t just that he thought I was from Mexico. It was that even after I corrected him, he continued to insist that I was from Mexico. Instead of admitting his mistake, he continued to say that Mexico and El Salvador were the same.

It amazes me how many Americans believe that every Latino is from Mexico and that’s absurd. It’s like saying that every Asian is from China just because it is the biggest or most influential or most well-known country. I believe that a question like “where I am from?” is not important as long as I am providing a quality service and I am delivering the results that are expected.
Incident While Attempting to Rent
by Xin Guang Li

Everyone needs to rent a room to live except a house owner. If we have not
enough money to rent a whole house or apartment, we only can afford one
room which we must share with other people. Do you want to share with a man or
a woman? What if you are the owner of a house? Would you share with a man or
a woman? When I wanted to rent and started looking for a place to rent, “only for
single woman” was a very common ad that saw almost everywhere. It was not an
ad for marriage for a date. It was a posting on Craigslist for people interested in
renting a room. How can a man find a room to rent under such circumstances?
Sexual preference is a form of discrimination we commonly face in America.

When I decided to rent a room, I checked the Craigslist.org to find a room to
share. “A clean, responsible, female working professional with proof of income,
employment, and good credit” was one of the ads I found. 70% of ads were seeking
a single woman or looking for a female housemate. Finally I found one ad which
didn’t mention gender. I called to make an appointment. The person on the phone
recognized my voice as male and told me she wanted to rent only to a woman.

When I was in China, 90% of rental rooms were for women only, so men
sometimes dressed like a woman to rent a room. The male landlords wanted to
rent only to women because they are looking for love and hoping for an
opportunity at romance. Actually, I want to live with a beautiful girl too. The
female landlords wanted to rent only to women too. Perhaps a woman is quieter,
safer and cleaner than a man.

I felt disappointed not to find a room to rent and had to give up looking for
one. The bay area house market is very expensive. Only engineers with a salary of
over 100 thousand dollars per year can afford to buy a home. I cannot afford to buy
one. It is also not affordable for me to rent a whole house by myself. I finally found
2 male friends willing to rent a whole house with me. Then, we rented it to out
other tenants.
When we think of discrimination we may not think of a problem like mine, but I believe it is a form of discrimination to rent only to females and not to males even when we are willing to pay a little extra. Some people may laugh at my problem, but the reality is that “shelter” is indeed a real problem. We all need a safe place to stay, to sleep, and to call home. Our gender should not prevent people from renting to us. After all, our money is the same as anybody’s. Hopefully, something can be done to prevent such discrimination in the future.
Incident at a Tax Preparation Firm
by Trung Nguyen

Discrimination defined as the result of prejudice against one group by another is a serious problem and has been a recognized problem for decades. I have never encountered this problem before. However, a year ago, I applied for a job in a small tax office and was accepted. For the first few days, I was very happy and satisfied with the job but then I soon realized that due to my young age and my race I faced discrimination. I was so shocked that I did not know what to do to resolve this issue.

In the office, I was the youngest person and the most inexperienced. My coworkers treated me very well. I felt like a part of the team. Preparing tax files for customers was my job and I was a very responsible employee. One day, a Hispanic customer came to do her tax return and she threw all her forms on my table and told me to get the maximum refund for her. I guessed she had a rude personality but I couldn't believe that she acted like she was my boss. Under my office's policies, I could refuse service to any person for any reason, but I told her to calm down and we would talk about her tax return.

Then, she finally took a seat. I asked her for information like address, phone number, and email, but she said she did her tax return here last year, so her information must be in our system. I had to tell her if she didn't trust me she could work with another person at the office or do the return by herself for free. Although I spoke very gently, she got angry and made annoyed noises. I tried to explain that I just wanted to ensure her information hasn't changed since last year, but it didn't calm her down. She shouted at me in Spanish, a language I didn't know since I am Vietnamese and I was not able to understand what she said.

At that time, our office was very busy with many customers waiting to do their tax returns and there was no one else to deal with her problem. I called my boss and asked him if he would like to help me defuse this situation. Unfortunately, he was with another customer at that moment and told us he would be with us in 15
minutes. So, I kept doing my job and told her the amount of refund she was entitled to. For some people, their refund amounts are the same as the year before. For others refund amounts may differ because of various reasons. For this particular lady, because she was over 65 years old, she would lose some benefits from government and get less money than she did the previous year.

Now, the problem became more serious. She asked me where I was from, if I had a license for this job, and how old I was. I asked her what did she mean by asking me those questions. Finally, my boss showed up and tried to find out what was the problem. She told him that I was not good enough to handle her tax return and also that I was rude and didn't show her any respect. She told him that I was too young to take care of her tax return. In addition, she said that my English was so bad that she couldn't understand me. I explained what happened to my boss exactly the way it happened. After a long argument with my boss, she finally left because my boss told her to leave the office or he would call the police.

That was my first brush with discrimination due to my age and my race, but it would not be the last time. I knew that. My boss reminded me that I should refuse service to people who are not nice or polite well before I prepare a tax return for them. It would waste our time and money like it did in this case. He also said that some people don't like young tax preparers and immigrants because they don't trust a person from another country and may suspect that such a person has no experience doing tax returns even though I have a license for this job. After that day, I really wanted to improve my English in order to interact better with customers and others.
Incident at Church
by Martha Flores

It is incredible that even in this day and age, people will discriminate against someone they hardly know simply because of that person’s skin color, appearance or speech. While I am aware that discrimination does exist today, I have not encountered it myself nor have I ever thought that I would be a witness to a discriminatory incident. In fact, discrimination was the last thing on my mind when I went to church one Saturday in January. After all, are we not always told that God loves us all and that to love God is to love all of his creatures - big and small, short and tall, and white and dark, regardless of race. Yet, it was in this place of God—this Holy Sanctuary— that I became a witness to such an ugly incident of discrimination that left me shattered, shocked, and pained.

The day the incident happened, I was at church with my children. Usually we go to a different church on Sundays but that day we just decided to go to this place, which is a bit closer to our house. When we got there it was like 10 minutes before mass celebration time, so we had some time to say “Hi” to a friend of us that we haven’t seen in quite a long time. We spoke for a few minutes, and then we went inside the church to look for a place to sit down during mass. Somehow, she ended up sitting down a few rows in front of us, not in the same row that we were, as I was expecting.

When my friend chose that place to sit down, I noticed a lady next to her in some kind of discomfort. We had never seen this person before, but her reaction when my friend sat next to her was obviously not a pleasant one. Well, mass celebration began and when the time to say “Peace” to each other came, I saw my friend extending her arm towards this person. My friend was expecting this person to take her hand but instead this lady decided just to ignore my friend. I saw my friend pulling her arm back with embarrassment and looking down. She just turned around to face the Altar.
I don’t think my friend realized that I saw the incident, but that did not change the way I felt to see that very uncomfortable and disappointing incident. Indeed, I was disappointed to see this person act that way, especially in that Holy place, where we are supposed to show love and respect for everybody. To see my friend’s sadness made me upset that whole day. I was just looking, away from her and I could not do anything. I was shocked and shattered imagining how she felt at that moment because of this uneducated and ignorant person.

A church is a holy place and it is meant to be an inclusive place where love and peace should reign supreme. Yet, even here some people cannot get rid of their prejudice and instead choose to discriminate against others who may be different from them in the color of their skin, their ethnicity or appearance. Although I was not the victim in this story, the pain I felt was no less hurtful than the victim’s not only because the victim happened to be my friend, but also because the incident took place in a church where we are all supposed to show love and empathy for one another.
Incident in Extended Family
by Lam Pham

Have you ever been a victim of discrimination? Many years ago, my friend was a victim of discrimination due to his perceived ability or inability to learn. Sometimes, we don’t know how badly we could harm others. My friend’s aunt, who discriminated against him didn’t understand how much she hurt him with her act. She was probably trying to teach him a lesson – to pay more attention to his studies – but she didn’t realize the harm she was causing with her thoughtless and cruel act of discrimination. To cut a long story short, here is what happened between my friend and his aunt.

12 years ago, my friend studied in a fairly good high school in Ninh Thuan Province in Vietnam. After three years of studying in high school, he took two important tests. The first one was for graduating from a high school to get a diploma. The second one was for getting accepted at a college. My friend passed the first test, but he failed the second test. In Vietnam, if we want to study after having a high school diploma, we can continue at three kinds of schools depending on our results on the second test: the highest is universities, next is colleges and the lowest is trade schools. If we want to try again, we could take that test again the following year. However, my friend’s scores were so low and he knew he couldn’t improve his scores by taking another test. Therefore, my friend decided just to study in a trade school.

In Vietnam, adults usually give money to their children, their nephews and their nieces on Lunar New Year Day to congratulate their coming of age. At that time, my friend’s aunt gave money to all her nephews and her nieces. However, she refused to give him any because he didn’t study well and didn’t get into a college or university. To make matters worse, his cousins were all studying in good high schools or middle schools and they were all going to get into a university or college after obtaining their high school diploma. They were all good students. His aunt might have thought that act of withholding money from my friend would help him study harder or would serve as a warning to her other nephews and nieces not to
slack off. However, it didn’t help him. He felt hurt and inferior. Once, he cried when
he told that story to me. He told me the story over and over. It obviously left a bitter
taste in his mouth.

He still studied in grade school to finish the program and get a diploma. After
that, he took tests to transfer to a medical university, but he failed a few times. He
tried his best not only to show up his aunt but also for his future. In fact, he wanted
to be a doctor. In Vietnam, to be a doctor, an engineer or a bachelor, one needs to
graduate from a university. Attending a medical university is hardest and almost
impossible for someone with only a diploma from a trade school. In the end, my
friend did not get into medical school and did not become successful in life. If his
aunt had intended to spur him on to better and bigger things, she didn’t achieve her
goal.

I think we should be careful to avoid hurting others. Especially those of us who
are older and more experienced should be careful to encourage young people and
not discourage them. My friend’s aunt with her discriminatory behavior based on
grades really hurt my friend deeply and made him believe that he was a loser. I
believe that not everyone is cut out to be an intellectual or a doctor or an engineer.
Nevertheless, we all have a role to play in society and we can succeed with the right
amount of encouragement. If we could reduce discrimination in our family and in
our community, our life would be better.
Incident on the Soccer Field
by Alex Phan

According to Nelson Mandela, “no one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion.” I have always wished that discrimination would not exist. It is still found all over the world. This modern life has given people many advances in medicine and technology. The ways they are thinking and doing things haven’t really changed. For instance, in spite of advances in the world, gender discrimination still exists in my country where people value men above women.

I played soccer when I was in high school. By chance, I found that I was really good at soccer. Soccer became one of the important things in my life. I started playing when my school organized soccer matches for girls. My school was a big school in the district, but the teachers only focused on studying. They didn’t like to organize any activities. But some schools in our district had a competition involving soccer, dance, and volleyball. My school didn’t participate so students were unhappy and sent a complaint letter to the principal. In response the teachers decided to let us plan and organize sports activities. Every class was given extra credit if they participated. All the students were happy about it. My classmates started to teach me how to play soccer. They taught me how to control, pass, and shoot. They were surprised because I was very good. They took me to our PE teacher who was also a soccer coach. After he saw me play, he agreed to train me. He combined some students from different classes and created a girl’s team. In the beginning, my position was DF and later on, I played as WF. My team won the state championship for 3 years in a row. It was not easy for my team. We had to convince our family and teachers to let us play soccer. It was a hard to let them know that soccer was not only for boys.

Before all this my school never had a girls’ soccer competition. They usually organized it for boys and but all of a sudden everyone appeared to be advocating equality between boy and girl. That’s why my school started to organize a
tournament for girls, but they had some rules. If we had injuries, the teachers could shut down the tournament immediately. And also some students didn’t want to play. Because of the extra credit, they had to play soccer. I remember in one of the competition when I was running very fast and I was trying to score a goal, one girl from the other team kicked my leg while trying to kick the ball. It was so painful. I fell down on the ground and I couldn’t stand up by myself. I could feel bleeding around my leg. And I knew that if I could not stand up, they would stop the game. So I pulled myself up enduring intense pain to let the game continue. Why could a boy play soccer, but a girl could not? It hurt my feelings more than once. When our team of girls was on the soccer field, a lot of boys came to wait for their turn. When they saw us, they yelled, shouted out, and made crude jokes because they rarely saw girls playing soccer. It made me angry. Every time we said “shut up” to them, but it didn’t have any effect on them. If anything it just made them tease my team even more. It was not only gender discrimination but there were also crude jokes and sexual innuendos. After practice, my team always hung out with one another. Anytime people saw us, they talked about us. Some were positive, but most were negative. One time we went to the coffee shop in our soccer uniform. Some women and men were sitting together there. They saw us coming in and they started to make comments loud enough for us to hear. They said things like "don’t let your child play with these kinds of friends. They will negatively affect your child". After they saw my teammates with short hair and soccer uniforms, they looked at us like we were rebels. It was ridiculous. While we could not change everyone’s mind, I think the success of our girls’ soccer team did change the mind of some students at our college. Many boys who played soccer no longer saw me just as a helpless girl. Some actually acknowledged me as an athlete and one boy even told me that he admired my prowess as a soccer player.

By the eleventh grade, I knew that I had to do something to break this vicious cycle. I encouraged girls in my school to participate in activities such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball. In my opinion, girls and boys are equal. We can do
anything we want. I know the challenges we faced playing soccer are just a small example of gender discrimination. There are bigger issues out there where girls can’t stand up for themselves. In my country, we have a lot of successful women and they are standing up for women rights every day. But I know it is hard to change people when the influence from the past is huge. Gender discrimination in my country still exists. I hope young people will have more awareness about discrimination so that like me they can overcome it successfully.
Incident in Family 1
by Lisa Hua

Discrimination can be described as unfair action of someone against another’s rights. It has been among us for many decades, and there seems to be no way to get rid of it. Discrimination actually could happen to everyone, and everywhere no matter what age, gender or race you are. I could not believe that it happened to my mother many years ago. Her situation was the result of a personal issue between family members but actually it was a rather common problem that many women have encountered in my country. My mother faced discrimination due to her gender when she was a young girl. Back then, ladies were expected to play a role as a housewife or a housekeeper. They had no rights to study or work as men. Moreover, they had to struggle with cultural prejudice against women. Views such as women should not have a high education, should not work at jobs that are reserved only for men like engineer, lawyer, or politician. They could not have freedom or be self-reliant because they were expected to depend on their parents or husband. My mother’s plight was a perfect example of what happened when the role women were expected to play in the past collided with the dreams of a young woman. When she was a young girl living in a small town, my mother desired to leave her hometown and move to the big city where she could enroll in a law school. She thought if she studied so hard, she would achieve her dream of becoming a lawyer. Therefore, she made sure she was an excellent student with a very high GPA. She was pretty excited to tell her parents about her decision and her dream career in the future and believed that they would encourage her. To her huge disappointment, however, her carefully laid out plans were immediately rejected by her educated father, who had in the past always supported and encouraged his children’s dreams. My grandfather explained that he did not want my mother to stay far away from family and also that being a lawyer was not an acceptable career for a lady. It was a career suitable for men only. Moreover, he really wanted my mother to become a teacher like his other daughters. In his view, being a teacher was the
best choice for my mom because she could easily find a job in the town and would have enough time to take care of her children and her small family when she is married in the future. The unexpected denial of her dream by her own father affected my mother for a long time. At first, she tried to fight against it. She starved herself for a few days, but it did not bring about any changes in my grandfather’s attitude. Instead, he forced her to take an exam to attend teacher training school. My mother did not put a lot of effort into passing the test, and she purposely did not answer some questions in order to fail the test. It made her father more upset. She became known a most stubborn child. Her father was used to getting his way and would not tolerate any dissent. Therefore, the relationship between my mother and her father soon reached a critical point. Finally, Grandfather told my mom to make a choice – give up her dreams or give up her family. If she would not attend teacher training school to become a teacher, he would no longer support her, and she would have to try to survive on her own. In those days, it was not safe for a young girl to live on her own, let alone find a job and go to college part-time. Since she had no other choice, my mom had to submit to my grandfather’s wishes and go back to school become a teacher. She felt frustrated and at the beginning did not take her studies seriously. She failed some subjects in her first year of teacher training college. Eventually, she realized that she was simply wasting her time by not giving her best effort. Becoming a teacher was the only chance for her to escape living under her strict father her whole life. Otherwise, she would be stuck with her parents and be expected to do household chores her whole life. Thus, she worked hard to earn a degree in education. She still detested her father for forcing her to become a teacher though. After four years of college, my mother became an elementary teacher. Teaching at least at the beginning was certainly not her passion. She got a job in a rural school which was ten minutes away from her house. Day by day, my mother gradually found interest in her teaching job. She told me that discrimination in her case actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Now, she feels happy with her students and with her family especially her two amiable
daughters. In addition, her experience with her father taught her that we can turn disappointments into opportunities. Even when we don’t get what we want, giving up on life is not an option. My mother’s story had a happy ending, but it could easily have had a tragic ending. Prejudice against women at that time was very common and many other women like my mom were not as lucky as her. Discrimination has left many women desolate or scarred for life. I feel very fortunate that living in the US, I will not face the kind of gender discrimination that even today some women are facing in my country. Therefore, I am determined to do all I can to eliminate any forms of discrimination in my country.
Nowadays many people would like to be a celebrity. Celebrities in general and actors and actresses in particular are welcomed everywhere and their fans adore them. However, let us consider how people perceived actors in the past. During 2000 years of Chinese feudal society, the population was divided into three classes. The first class included noblemen, scholar-bureaucrats, landlords and merchants. The second class was made up of doctors, artists, poets and monks. Actors, singers, matchmakers, witches and prostitutes formed the lowest class. Rich people treated them like toys. Those in the lowest social class faced unbelievable discrimination from people of the two upper classes. Men and women of the lowest social class were not allowed to marry anyone from the upper two classes since they were not considered worthy of “true love”. Such a misconception and division of society not only caused tragedies for individuals, but also retarded the progress of society.

Since love knows no boundaries, there were many stories of tragic love between men and women belonging to different social classes, but one such story resonated with me strongly. About 100 years ago, there was a very famous clan in Peking. The clan had many medical stores and they served the royalty. The head of the household was a woman who was proficient in traditional Chinese medicine and managed hundreds of family businesses. It was very uncommon for a woman to have such a high place in society in those days. She had a son and a daughter. The son was going to be the inheritor; therefore, she paid more attention to him. He was the elder brother. He had three wives. The daughter was single. She wasn’t interested in business and spent a lot of time watching the Peking opera. In particular, she liked to watch one romantic opera that had a handsome leading man; pretty soon, she was just there to watch the scenes that had the leading man. During other scenes, she would be absent. When the show was over, she always left her seat and waited for him at the back door of theatre. She asked him to be her private tutor and to
teach her more about the opera. They always got together to study Peking opera. In her dreams, she fantasized that she was the leading lady and that she performed on the stage with him as the leading man.

Gradually, she was falling in love with the actor. The artist told the lady that he loved her too, but his social position was very low. He had an inferiority complex and he worried for his life since back them it was taboo for someone in his position to fall in love with a lady like her. Consequently, he tried to evade her and began avoiding her as much as possible. Yet, she continued her pursuit and in the end he was forced to admit that he loved her too. They loved each other very much, but the wealthy lady feared to tell her mother the truth. Her mother had introduced her to wealthy and suitable men frequently, but she always made excuses not to see them after the first time.

As time passed, the lady decided that she couldn’t hide her love and desire for the leading man from the opera anymore. She told her brother that she was going to marry an actor and she hoped her brother could help her to convince their mother. Consequently, their mother found out and she was very angry with her. All of the family members were against it. She told them if she couldn’t marry him, she would become a nun. Even though she threatened with death, her family wouldn’t budge. Such a union was definitely unacceptable at that time. Her brother secretly purchased a rural girl to pretend to be the actor’s wife and also threatened the actor to move away from Peking. In addition, he kept his sister under lock and key at home until the actor had gone away. Finally the lady became mad; no doctor could cure her madness and she had to be allowed to marry a picture of that actor, since the real person could not be found. Not long after that sham marriage, she passed away.

History is both a mirror and an alarm bell. We should learn something from it. Confucius said: when three men meet together, one of them who is anxious to learn can always learn something from the other two. Everyone can do their share for the progress of society. Today, the players have changed, but social classes remain and
those at the bottom of the social ladder can still face discrimination from those high above. We should all learn from history and do our best to eliminate both social classes and discrimination.
Incident at Work 2
by Huy Tran

Are the gentlemen always considered to be perpetrators of discrimination? It may be true if you are only thinking of some parts of Asia, or the developing countries. However, we are living in the 21st century, when people are aware that gender may not be a factor in determining one’s abilities. There are lots of organizations established for protecting women’s interests and women’s rights. Therefore, women have become more respected in the communities. As a young man, I totally agree with what women are fighting for; however, there are some people whose desire to promote women’s rights have led them to treat some men unfairly. My story took place at my workplace.

The story began a few months after I came to the U.S. I tried to look for a job because I wanted to help my parents to make a living. However, limited English was my big problem at that time, so I only looked for a job where I would not have to communicate much with people. Fortunately, one day, my friend referred me to interview at one company which had a lot of immigrant employees, especially Vietnamese, so I didn’t have to worry about the language problem. A few days later, I got hired, and started work the following week. The interviewer arranged me to work in production department. Of course it was the kind of work which I have never experienced before. “Production quality control” was the name of the station where I worked. The team leader was a Vietnamese lady. Her name is Chi; she looked young but she was not really friendly. She asked me in my native language in an indifferent tone: “Vietnamese huh?” I nodded my head lightly, and then she brought me to sit next to one middle-aged man and told him to train me. He was a Chinese-Vietnamese. His name was Thanh, and he spoke Vietnamese very well; therefore it wasn’t hard for me to learn and communicate with him. I spent all day training and came home with a gleeful feeling because my first job in the U.S wasn’t as hard as I thought it might be. However, I didn’t know that it was just the first page of my story.
After a month working with the team, I learned and could do everything in the line because I was very good at computer skills, and most of testing stuff was run by the computer. The job was quite easy for me. However, the leader only asked to do the heavy tasks such as pulling pallet track, and carrying products. I was a little unsatisfied with her arrangement, but this wasn't a big deal. The only thing made me upset was the leader didn’t let me work over time. She always kept only two guys and the rest of the women on the team working overtime. She explained that she didn’t need many people. She promised me day in and day out that if she ever needed more people, she would let me work overtime. A few weeks later, we had new hires. They were two ladies, and they were allowed to work overtime immediately after the first day of training. The leader justified her action by saying that that she only needed women for overtime work. I was very shocked when she said that, but then I tried to stay calm and asked her what was the difference between men’s work and women’s? She glared at me and said: “That’s our rule, and I don’t want a slacker working over time doing nothing”. Some ladies sitting around her didn’t say anything, but they smirked at me to show they agreed with what the leader said about me. I was furious. My face turned red as if it was set on fire. Although they knew that I wasn’t lazy at work, no one wanted to speak up for me because they didn’t want to have trouble with the leader. Fortunately, it was a break time; I stood up and went straight outside because I knew that if I stayed there longer, I might lose control. I don’t remember how long I stood outside the building. I asked myself should I go back to work or not. Suddenly, the man who had trained me – the man I called “uncle Thanh” appeared, slapped my back and stood beside me. He tried to calm me down and talked to me. He said that he had also been upset because of the team leader’s behaviors. She knew that most workers were immigrants, and they weren’t good in English; furthermore, they didn’t want to risk looking for another job. There were so many reasons that made people afraid to speak out against her. She abused her power and treated people unfairly. No one knew why the leader degraded men like that, and why she practiced discrimination
against male employees, but they accepted it because of their need for a paycheck for their family.

I forced myself to work in that company for a few more months, and everything became worse. She always kept her eyes on my every movement. She said bad things about me behind my back to the other ladies, and treated me badly. I finally gave up and tried to look for another job. Fortunately, I found a company which was close to my apartment, and they were hiring 200 technicians for a new product. Although I still lacked confidence in my English, I willed myself to try to pass the interview for the job rather than continue to work with an unfair leader. Therefore, I made up my mind to go to the interview and luckily I got hired. I quit the job at the old company and jumped to the new one. I tried very hard in the new company and after 6 months, I could sign a permanent contract with a lot of benefits which were a lot better than those in the old company. I enjoyed working in the new company and I am still employed there today even though discrimination exists here too. However, it is never as bad as it was in the old company because of the kinds employees I’m working with. They taught me how to protect myself, and showed me what to do when prejudiced people tried to discriminate against me. I am grateful for their help because no one taught me such things when I was working in the old company.

To sum up, we cannot deny that discrimination is a part of the social fabric in the US. It can happen anywhere, anytime, and to any gender. If you cannot prevent it, you should at least learn how to protect yourself from people who may discriminate against you by taking proper action before it becomes worse; no one can help you but yourself. Furthermore, be brave to protect your friends, your family, or even a stranger from discrimination. Otherwise, you may be the next victim of discrimination.
Discrimination and inequality among family members continue to be an issue in our society. Regardless of the technological advances we make in our society, discrimination is something we simply cannot erase. The story I am about to relate happened when I was a child. It is a tradition in my country for sons to continue to live together with parents even after marriage. Unfortunately, this arrangement can lead to awkward moments for the daughter-in-law and provide plenty of opportunities for the mother-in-law to unfairly treat this one “stranger” living among her family members. This is a story about my mother who was that “stranger” forced to live with her husband's family and how she had to endure unfair treatment at the hand of my grandmother.

Most people have good memories of their childhood, but for me one memory that stood out the most was how everyone in my dad’s family seemed to discriminate against all of us – my dad, my mom and us kids when we were all living together under the protection and control of my grandparents. My grandparents had a big two story house and our family lived in a single room in that big house. It was like living in a glass bowl. I remember feeling that I was being watched, observed and judged at every moment of the day. There was always someone there watching me, observing my every movement and judging me for what I say or do. It could be an uncle, an aunt, a cousin, or even my grandparents, but there was always someone there and there was no sense of privacy at all. It wasn’t simply that they were watching us. It was that they were trying to catch us doing something wrong. It didn’t help that my dad was the only son and he had many sisters, so he was always the odd man out and he didn’t really have a voice in his own family.

One terrible evening that I will never forget, my aunt – the younger sister of my dad – accused my mom of stealing her money without any proof. Although my mother denied the accusations, all of dad’s sisters ganged up on her and with grandma’s support started calling her horrible names in front of us – her children. I
think if dad had not come home at that time, his sisters would have physically assaulted my mom. During all that time, all my grandma would say was “That’s why we shouldn’t let outsiders stay in our house”. Once dad got home, he helped his sisters look for the money and they eventually found it. My aunt had actually misplaced it, but instead of looking for it in her own room, she had immediately accused my mom the moment she thought it was lost. My mom cried that day and we children cried with her. My aunts did not bother to apologize even after they all realized that they had made a mistake. Grandma also did not seem to care about us.

Things steadily got worse after this horrific incident. My mom was allowed to use any electrical appliances although dad’s sisters could do whatever they wanted. They also had complete control of the only fridge in the whole house with the result that often milk and other perishables mom had bought for us kids would be gone before we could get to them. It was no use complaining. Grandma would always side with her daughters. Finally, when I was around eight years old, dad finally found us our own place. We moved to a very old house which we were able to rent cheaply from the owner who needed help financially. On the surface, it was nothing like grandma’s house. It was old. It was dirty and it needed a lot of repairs. It was a hard time for us since financially we were not well off and the rent though cheap still put a sizable dent in our small budget. But we were all happy. We children felt free for the first time. We could shout, we could scream, we could run around the house and there was no one to stop us or tell us what to do or what not to do. I remember those days living in that crappy old house as some of the happiest days of my childhood.

Among the different types of discrimination that exist in the world, I think discrimination by one’s in-laws is probably the worst. My mother endured extremely painful experiences at the hand of my dad’s family. Even after we moved out of our grandparents’ home, she still had to face with discrimination. Anytime there was a family gathering, my mom would be the one cooking the food, washing the dishes and cleaning up afterwards and instead of praise she could expect to get criticism. “The chicken wasn't done right, the dishes were still dirty, and sweeping the kitchen
took forever” were the kind of comments she got for all her trouble. Yet, mom continued to soldier on and always told us “respect your grandma. After all, she is still your dad’s mother. Respect your aunts. They are older than you” were words she used constantly to make sure that we didn’t grow up disrespecting our dad’s family. In closing, I wish that everyone will remember that every person is someone’s child and that we will all treat everyone – not just our own children – the way we would want others to treat our own kids. Grandma, thanks to mom, I still love you, but I think you were wrong to treat my mom differently from the way you treated your own daughters.