children the values of being Vietnamese. Although life in Vietnam was, at times, cruel and harsh, it made him the man he is today. Although we live in America, we do not really celebrate American traditions. Growing up, we never celebrated Christmas nor have we ever had a typical Thanksgiving feast.

Over the years, my family has moved several times and has interacted with people of other races. Surprisingly though, my father claims that he has never experienced racism. Shortly after arriving in America, the only employment my parents could find was work in sweatshops, making clothes. They worked with many other immigrants, including Latinos and Whites. He said that they were all the same. They all came to America for a better life and it made no difference what color they were. They were all Americans, and that is what counted. I, on the other hand, have experienced racism while growing up in East Los Angeles. When I was in middle school, I was the only Asian American at a predominantly Latino school. I was bullied for being Asian and harassed daily. It was an experience I will never forget.

Finally, I asked how he would compare Vietnam with America. He responded by saying that Vietnam is nothing like America. America is a great country that has done so much for him and his family. If it wasn't for America, he probably would have died in the war and lost his family. This entire interview was a good experience for me because I learned a lot about my father. Growing up, I never really talked to him or had much parental guidance in my life. My parents were rarely home because they had to work from 7 AM to 8 PM. I always blamed my parents for not being there for me, but now I realize what they sacrificed for me to be happy. My father is the hardest worker I know. Even today, he works from early morning until late in the evening. Even though he has been through a lot of hard times, he feels that America still has much to offer. He still strives to fulfill the American dream and in some way has almost accomplished it. His hard work is slowly paying off. My sister is enrolled in medical school and I am now in college. My father's legacy will forever be with me and I will one day pass it on to my children and future generations of my family.

SU AND MAI THAI

Jimmy Thai

Asian Americans have important stories to tell and my parents, Su and Mai Thai, are great examples. My father is currently a pharmacist, and my mother is now a homemaker, and they live in Alhambra.

My parents are Asian American immigrants; both were born in Chau Doc, Vietnam. Chau Doc is a town located 250 km west of Saigon and borders Cambodia. It is surprising that my parents married since they came from such different families. My father came from a hard working, educated family that sold fabric at the local market, while my mother's family was more affluent. In Vietnam, my father worked as a pharmacist while my mother had few responsibilities and did not work outside the home.

At the time of the Vietnam War, my father was a lieutenant in the South Vietnamese army; however, he did not participate in combat because he was a university student. After the fall of Saigon in 1975 my father was imprisoned for three years for being a member of the South Vietnamese military. By the time he was released from prison, my sister had already been born. In 1979 my parents decided to immigrate to the United States so that my sister might have a better life. My grandmother on my mother's side provided them with the money to leave. My parents were part of the second wave of Southeast Asian immigrants that came to the United States, known as "boat people." My parents almost didn't make it to America though because the boat was full. Luckily, the captain was related to my mother, and he allowed my parents and sister on board.

My parents arrived in Houston, Texas in 1980. There they stayed with my aunt who had come to the United States with her family a year earlier. In Houston, my parents worked various odd jobs for an electrical company, light bulb manufacturing, a Circle K, and in restaurant kitchens. This was especially difficult for my mother, who was now earning little money. After staying in Houston for several years, my parents moved to San Jose, California in 1984. Around this time, my father decided to take steps toward providing a better life for the family by going back to school to get is bachelor's degree in pharmacy. The pursuit of higher education led my family to Alabama for a short time. Surprisingly, in Alabama people there were quite nice to my family. An elderly woman who lived upstairs befriended my mother and would read stories to her, even though my mother did not understand much English.

Eventually, my father was accepted at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He attended Temple for two years to earn his

bachelor's degree in pharmacy while my mother stayed in San Jose. In 1988, when my father came back, the family moved to Fresno, California. There my father opened his own pharmacy and saved enough money to buy a house. Unfortunately, the business failed and the family moved again. In 1991, we moved to Alhambra, where we've lived ever since. Eventually my father found another job as a pharmacist, but the position was in Sacramento. He accepted the position, moved there, and came home to visit every few weeks. We didn't move with my father to Sacramento because my sister was attending at USC at the time. After working in Sacramento for a few years, my father found a better job closer to home and moved back to Alhambra.

Even though my parents have lived in the United States for almost thirty years, they are still very old-fashioned. We speak Vietnamese exclusively at home and only a few English phrases are allowed. My parents taught me to speak Vietnamese as a child. They believed that children in America would learn English by themselves, whether through popular culture or school. Since my father is a pharmacist he speaks English fairly well, even though he has an accent. He communicates with his patients and co-workers in English. My mother, on the other hand, doesn't speak English very well. She understands some things and can interact with people with simple phrases and questions; but other than that, she doesn't use much English. Since my parents have predominantly Vietnamese friends, and they converse with them in Vietnamese, and my mother's lack of English language skills is not an issue.

Family plays a very important role for my parents. We have always eaten dinner together, even when my father worked until late in the evening. My parents still help support their parents back in Vietnam by sending them money as often as they can and they call my grandparents every week. Since they come from traditional Vietnamese families, my parents believe men should be hard working and successful and women should be good wives and mothers. However, their views on women have relaxed considerably since immigrating to the United States. They understand that women can be professionals as well as being a good wives and mothers. For example, they are proud of my sister who is a pharmacist and also takes care of her family.

Religion plays a significant role in my family as well. Buddhism is my family's religion. My mother is an especially devout Buddhist, and she thanks Buddha for getting them through their many hardships. Every time there is a Buddhist holiday we all pray and give thanks by offering food and lighting incense. To commemorate the anniversary of the death

of my grandfather, we offer our respects by setting a table of food, praying, and inviting him to come home and eat.

My parents have a very strict view on education. They want each of us to go to school, get good grades, go to a university, and continue on to graduate school. My parents are especially persistent about all of us becoming pharmacists. They feel that it is a job that will always be in demand and will pay a decent salary. They push education because they do not want me to have a difficult life as they did. They want me to be prosperous and successful, but sometimes they push so much that it conflicts with what I want.

It is also important to my family, or at least to my mother, that I marry within my own ethnicity, preferably Chinese-Vietnamese. She isn't adamant about it, but she definitely "prefers" it. My parents want to get along with their children's spouses and believe that if they're not from similar cultures then they may not be able to converse and get along. My parents believe it is very important to preserve language because they feel that without a native tongue, a person loses part of his heritage. My mother has jokingly said to me, "if your child doesn't speak Vietnamese, then it doesn't exist to me." This may be partially true, because my parents don't really know how to communicate well than through Vietnamese. If their grandchildren do not speak the language then they may not be able to pass along important parts of their culture.

Clearly, my parents see themselves as Vietnamese first; but they also see themselves as citizens of the United States. They hold on to their Vietnamese identity because it would be shameful if they abandoned it. They do not identify with American culture as much because they see Americans as too concerned with looking out for themselves. Most Asian cultures focus on the group looking out for each other. On the whole though, they believe America has a place for everyone. Even though views might clash, they feel America is a place where many different people can get together to form a nation.

My parents have also preserved their Vietnamese culture through food. Every day the family gathers to eat rice and various savory dishes. They keep their culture intact by practicing the religion of the homeland. They've adapted to American culture in the sense that every family member is self-sufficient. My sister's family is more Americanized. They do not practice Buddhism much, they do not cook at home every day, and they eat different types of food. Personally, I find my sister's family a little too assimilated. It is possible that my upbringing has made me a more traditional person.

My parents have not experienced much racism since they immigrated. Even in Alabama, which is perceived as mostly white and not very welcoming to different ethnicities, they were welcomed. I do feel that prejudice exists, but more because of cultural differences than because of race. My parents feel that America is a place where everyone is welcomed. That, they believe, is its greatest attribute. They think America is great for letting people from all backgrounds come and make a life for themselves. They find it amazing that people from poorer backgrounds and different countries can come to the United States and become successful.

I feel that my parents' lives are rich in history and experience. These experiences have helped shape them into Asian Americans. I find it admirable that they have stayed so true to their roots by preserving their culture and traditions. However, since I have grown up in a western society, I find that my views often clash with theirs. I find it difficult to argue with them because somehow, I have to prove my worth to them. Their conservative nature often goes against what I consider to be the norm. Yet standing up to them would be disrespectful.

YUCHANG HUANG

Xinzhe Huang

Everyone has a story, and the experiences of Asian Americans seem to be very special. I realized this by interviewing my grandfather, a 78-years old U.S. citizen, who is living in Los Angeles now. From this interview, I began to understand the difficulties, struggles, and confusion my grandparents experienced.

My grandfather was born in 1931, Meixian, Guangdong Province, mainland China. As he recalled, he became ill with smallpox at the age of two. Since there was no adequate medicine available at the time, he almost died from it. Luckily, a very famous doctor saved his life. When he told me about this, he said that, "one should appreciate those people who helped you, because you can not become who you are without the help of others".

He was a good son and a good student in the school. Since my great grandfather used to have chronic diseases, my grandfather earned