

In my upbringing, the clash between my heritage and the pursuit of success in the United States left me with a built in sense of disconnection. My memories of struggling to communicate with visiting relatives from Nepal, leave me with lingering feelings of guilt for not being as connected to my culture as I could be. However, instead of reprimands from my family and relatives for not being fluent in Nepali like my cousins, I received praise for my academic achievements, as if I were excused from embracing my heritage to work towards a “better future.” Amidst the unconditional support from distant relatives, I grappled with the weight of proving to my parents that their sacrifice of moving to America was worthwhile.

When I was younger, I often wondered why my mom named me पेमा (Pema), which directly translates to lotus in Nepali. I never thought that the lotus was fitting for me. It's a flower that can bloom and flourish in murky water and still look beautiful. Now that I'm older I realize that she must have been reflecting on her own life. When my mother immigrated to the United States she experienced the lotus flower's symbolic rebirth. She did not have access to her birth certificate, so she created a birthday for herself, 07.07.1964. July 7th may not be my mom's “real” birthday but it's the birthday that she claims for her life in America, as well as the day she lost the life she had in Nepal.

Through my sculpture I delve into the complexities of indirect grief and loss. Sometimes I reflect on how life might have been different if my family had remained in Nepal, and feel a sense of loss over that past life. The centerpiece of my project is a sculpture of a girl, resembling a younger version of me, standing atop a lotus. Soft pastel colors, delicate bow detailing, and youthful accessories evoke a sense of innocence and a new beginning as well as the lotus and its religious ties to rebirth. However, the girl in the sculpture cries, symbolizing the subtle yet persistent feeling of loss that I carry. Her tears fall as droplets, mirroring the weight of the "other life" I envision, a subtle accumulation of emotions over time, much like the act of the droplets forming the pond beneath her.

07.07.1964

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