

In My Shoes

By: Moragaut S.



["SB54 \[California Values Act\]"](#), I painted that statement on my shoes to show my people that I have hope and faith in them no matter where they are.

Everyone makes mistakes and when you're young you don't think straight. They say your teenage years are the hardest and also the best years of your life. They are the hardest because the teens themselves don't learn properly to express their feelings. They are

confused and they feel pain in much more ways than adults can understand. What makes it even worse is that this pain doesn't just tackle us overnight...in some cases it does, but for most, the suffering has built up over time. Yes, you may be an adult reading or hearing this thinking, "Oh she's just a kid, she doesn't know what she's talking about."

Truth is, I knew some of that pain. I felt that pain, that pain that no one can stop no matter how hard they try, the pain that everyone feels at some point in their life. My pain wasn't just about my father being deported, even if he left, I knew we would be okay and we would try to live life to the fullest, but the pain was thinking my siblings would grow up without a father. I couldn't imagine how that would end up, how confused they would be growing up. Some of my cousins don't have fathers instead they have uncles to fill their place. A "father figure" they call it which isn't the same, it's not like they come home every night, it's not the same father and child bond. And it is so upsetting how many children in our area and in our community that are left without fathers.

And when I think about my Mother through all of this I can't believe how strong she is. She doesn't know this, but she came home from work one night, I could tell she was tired, I had already set the kids to sleep and she was too tired to eat. She tells me "Thank you for watching over your sisters and brother while I'm out there saving the world." That same night I went up to my room, and all my bottled up emotions came out, I was so happy to find my own way of letting it out without hurting anyone. I guess I still feel lucky, unlike other kids, because I feel appreciated and just knowing my Mom had felt proud of me filled my heart. And the fact that she is literally a superwoman in my eyes made me realize so much.

Honestly, I was mad at the world. I was mad at the privileged people. I wasn't jealous, just mad. Mad that the "all men are created equal" declaration was the biggest lie ever told. The crimes committed by young-ins shouldn't make them deportable, like I said everyone makes mistakes. It's not like a kid from Beverly Hills who commits the same crime would have to worry, no they get to go to college, they get to continue their life, they still get a better life. What do we end up with.....what do I see? NOTHING. What's out there for the people being deported to Cambodia? Think about it, why are we here in the first place? I'll answer, our people came to the U.S. because we thought we could build a better life for ourselves, for our kids. But this is the reality we live in and now we see the outcome. I am strong now and I'm going to stand and fight for my mom, my father, my sisters, my brother, my community and my Khmer people. For all that we have gone through we deserve to be heard.

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About the Author and CERl's Youth Leadership Program:

Moragaut 2nd generation Khmer American, 8th grade student, is a participant at CERl's Young Asian American Storytellers (YAAS) program, funded by Oakland Fund for Children and Youth serving youth (ages 11-24) from the Southeast Asian community. This program is based on three pillars: Community Organizing & Leadership, Health & Wellness, and Storytelling. This program strives to empower young folks to critically engage with the world, tap into their community and intergenerational healing powers, and share their stories through creative expression. These young folks are raised in systems that make them more vulnerable to at-risk behaviors, incarceration, gang violence, sex trafficking, substance use, self-harm, and suicidality. Yet, amidst the adversity, we are also discovering the protective factors and the powerful bonds that keep our youth and community together. During the shelter-in-place directives, YAAS Leaders continue to engage in social justice actions. They have been joining political workshops to learn more about the anti-deportation movement, writing letters to detainees, calling the Governor's office and ICE detention centers to release community members. From the collective efforts of this anti-deportation coalition, 7 people were freed from ICE in the past months.