

You Are So Special

By Diane Phelan

Growing up mixed race, of Filipino-American ancestry but having grown up in Taipei, I always had a lot of pride growing up in how different I was. But I realized, now as an adult, how carefully my parents and my grandmother were to really kind of impress upon me how special they felt I was, myself and my brothers. I think they knew about the possibilities of discrimination in my life, and they made sure to tell me all the time, "Wow, you are so special Diane. You know there are not very many people like you because there are not a lot of mixed-race folks or not a lot of third culture kids like yourself." And they just drilled it into my head that being mixed race was very very special. It didn't occur to me until I was older that not everybody was brought up this way, and it just seemed very intentional on my parents' part.

Now I realize it was. Because I have faced quite a bit of discrimination and I had faced a lot of racism for being Asian or for being different for being mixed, and I really commend my parents and my grandmother for instilling within me this sense of self about my uniqueness or my inherent worth, that being different was something beautiful rather than something to be ashamed of. Because I really did not feel like I fit in most of the time; I was kind of nerdy, just very very science nerdy growing up so I was already kind of different. I was in my own world growing up as a kid but looking different and being different culturally and moving around a lot as a kid really set me apart. And I really owe it to my parents for helping instill in me that being mixed-race, being Asian, and being third culture was something special instead of something that many folks have grown up as a point of shame because they felt so different. So I'm very grateful to my parents.