Asian American Organizing Project Presents:

We Are Not Fighting Alone

Pandemic Experiences of Community Storytellers

Family, School, Discrimination, Sexism, Grief, Health

Edited and Designed by Npaus Baim Her
Acknowledgements

Thank you to our community members who have supported Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP) to make this collected narrative zine possible. Thank you to Tou Saiko Lee, DP Tran, Boonmee Yang, and Center for Hmong Studies Collection for sharing their photos reflecting our community. Thank you to Canva for supplying the other photos. Finally, thank you to the Asian American Pacific Islander storytellers for sharing their experiences.
# Table of Contents

Sonchanty Men. ................................................................. 1  
  Mother's Love and Support  
Xeng Thao. ................................................................. 2  
  A Hardworking Father and Caring Son  
Sarah Gong. ............................................................... 5  
  Sinophobia, Discrimination, Supporting Communities  
Abinaya Ilavarsan. .......................................................... 13  
  Dealing with Sexism at Home  
Xe Goblirsch. ............................................................... 16  
  Grief, Zov Hmo, and a Funeral with Social Distancing  
Abi Chi. ............................................................................. 23  
  Family, Discrimination, Anti-Blackness  
Pai-Feng Teng. ............................................................... 28  
  Stay-Home-Order, Discrimination  
Age 20, Nepali Storyeller. .................................................. 31  
  Working as a Nurse and Distance Learning  
Gaonou Vang. ................................................................. 34  
  Warmhearted and Concerned Daughter  
Dieu Do. ............................................................................. 37  
  Discrimination, Anti-Blackness, and Supporting Others  
Pa Doua Chee Moua. .......................................................... 41  
  Nursing COVID-19 Patients  
Editor's Note. ...................................................................... 45
I am 34 weeks pregnant with a baby girl and have two kids. My first son is 7 years old and my second is 4 years old. I decided to quit my job in February to be safe and to help teach my son while he was distance learning. His school drops off food every week. In addition, my son and I have medical assistance and WIC to support us.

At the moment, my husband is the only one working and it's enough for our family. Hopefully though, a vaccine for COVID-19 will be developed soon. I want the kids to go back to school and I also want to go back to work, so I can help my kids and family again.
I’m a hands-on kind of person. I fix cars for a living and love doing work around the house. I don’t like reading much (even though I have to). To get my day started, I listen to music and motivational videos. I was born in Minneapolis, then in first grade my family moved to Frogtown and I have lived there since last month. So, I basically saw how it developed over the years. Now, I live in South Saint Paul with my girlfriend and two boys of my own, five and six years old. I’m really family orientated. I love my little family, parents, and brothers.

Both my sons were distance learning. It was really hard on my girlfriend and me to keep them focused and get their work done on top of our everyday schedule. I didn’t pick to be a teacher as a career for a reason you know. It’s good that my girlfriend didn’t work in the morning at that time. I worked in the morning, so she would wake them up to do their homework. When I get home later in the day, she goes to work and I finish up with whatever is left. We both worked through it.
What’s good about distance learning was seeing what my sons knew or what they needed to work on. It was nice knowing every assignment references something. For example, it asked what makes them happy and they’ll be like, “Daddy.” That bonding relationship was really nice. It taught me more about my sons, such as how they think and their personalities. If schools were to transition back to in-person learning, that’d be nice.

If it continues online, it will bring up the topic of: “How am I going to find daycare for the kids?” School is like a daycare in a way. My girlfriend just changed her shift to the mornings, so now we both are working in the mornings. If it's e-learning, it will be stressful.

Working outside of home, I have some concerns regarding COVID-19 while living with my mom who has been in and out of the hospital due to underlying health conditions. For my little family, I’m confident we will be fine as long as we avoid public spaces and big gatherings.

There was one time we were concerned one of my sons may have COVID-19 because he was coughing. But even before COVID-19, from time to time, he had a lot of mucus in his lungs and would always be coughing. He has this thing where he likes to eat his boogers and that may be a big cause. So, at the time, his only symptoms were coughing, but eventually we took him in to get checked. He didn’t have COVID-19, but was diagnosed with something else.
Of course, my mom was pretty concerned and lectured me: “Oh you went out too much. Now you have COVID-19;” making a big deal about everything. I tried my best not to go anywhere or do anything. And I wasn’t just concerned for my mom’s safety when it came to COVID-19. I wanted to make sure she didn’t go out as much as she needs to because of the hate crimes and discrimination happening to Asians.

My brother’s father-in-law, who is Hmong too, lives in Frogtown and it’s a ghetto area. I think he was walking one day, minding his own business. Then, he got jumped and busted up pretty bad on his head. My brother and them made a post about the incident on Facebook. It went viral among the Hmong community. These hate crimes and discrimination happening to Asians is a safety concern for elderly and women. For men, it's safer.

And not everybody is hating on Asian people. There are people out there, nice people, who do contribute to the community and try to make it more peaceful. Especially in Frogtown, where it’s really bad. You know, giving out free food and what they can. I do appreciate that too. I do hope as a community, as a nation, discrimination is less than what it is now. It will always be there, but I want it to get better.
When COVID-19 first started, my dad was really encouraging us to wear masks, but I felt really uncomfortable wearing it. My mom and few Asian American friends felt the same way too. When a lot of us (including myself) went to public spaces, it was very noticeable that some people would back away from you. I went into a store, stepped inside it, and when people saw me, they walked away. It’s like they thought I was carrying the disease and it was very hurtful.

I’ve seen people walk past me and lift their shirts up. I’ve been asked little weird comments like, “Do you have COVID-19?” from people. I’ve seen someone say, “Oh, you bats eating Muslims killing pandemic starters sure are something.”

I see a lot of headlines that aren’t discussed in mainstream media about elderly Asian Americans being attacked, such as hate crimes and fear of COVID-19. I’m personally worried about the increasing xenophobia across the United States. The COVID-19 epidemic and current socio-political relations with China are increasing xenophobia.
The other week I was in Tomah, Wisconsin driving back from Milwaukee, and I walked inside of a restaurant to go into the bathroom. There was this white family with blue lives matter stickers and American flag hats and they all just turned to look at me, glared at me. My friend, a Filipino American, was picking us up there and he said the same thing happened to him. Another time, the same Filipino American friend and I were at a counter protest. It felt really weird that this one old white, Trump guy was yelling at us and he asked why we were wearing masks. Although everyone who was counter protesting was wearing masks. Although everyone who was counter protesting was wearing mask.

A lot of the youth I know have been very, very scared, as have the elders. I’m honestly a little scared to walk alone. I don’t trust white people. Currently, I live in Minneapolis and it’s safer there for me as a person of color, but I’m from the suburbs. If I go home there, I don’t feel comfortable being in public alone because of personal past experiences. I know white people there would not hesitate to say something very racist to you. It’s very unfortunate we, Asian Americans, have to feel that way. It shouldn’t be a thing.

When COVID-19 first started, we met Asian Media Access. I work with the Metropolitan Council in the Twin Cities and I am a Social Researcher. We’ve built a relationship with Asian Media Access. They were part of a huge study that we did. The founder and girls there were telling me that there aren’t a lot of Asian Americans in the Twin Cities and it was really important for us to build a community. As soon as COVID-19 happened, I reached out to them and we were able to help each other with it.

So, I’ve been doing work with Asian Media Access. I wrote them grant requests because they serve primarily low-income youth who are Asian American. Most are first generations of Hmong
refugees so when COVID-19 started and all the classes went online, they were not able to keep up with their education. With low-income families, they only have one laptop, but their parents are using it. Other reasons could be they don’t have access to the internet, couldn’t go to the library because public spaces are shut down, or it’s a risk to go to public spaces and they live with elders as well. So, I was able to help them get $45,000 in grants to get Macbooks. I wish we didn't have to do that though.

Something else I get a lot of are white people asking me how I started the pandemic or how my people started the pandemic and it’s really obnoxious. I have family in China and they’re doing great! The government sends them amenities, food, and water. They stay at home and nobody is getting evicted like they are in the United States. China COVID-19 cases are going down exponentially while United States’ cases are increasing exponentially. It just baffles me that Americans think they’re doing way better than China.

There's just such media bias. It goes back to the Sinophobia I was talking about earlier. I saw some person posted about how well some countries were handling the COVID-19 epidemic and they only highlighted women who were doing it. You know, yes, women leadership is great. However, they included the prime minister of Taiwan, and they didn't include the president of China when Taiwan is literally replicating China's methods. There’s just a lot of Sinophobia.

I’ve seen some white girl. She wants to be a politician-- not a public servant, like a politician type person. She posted this photo as soon as COVID-19 started. It was her wearing a mask and she said this is “Wuhan chique.”
(She spelt it wrong cause she's stupid. It’s c-h-i-c). There’s petty jokes like that out there. I’ve even seen Lululemon release this print that had a takeout box with bat wings on it. And it said something like about COVID-19 and the stereotypical Chinese takeout font. It’s absolutely disgusting.

I’ve seen a lot of other Asian Americans who aren’t Chinese. Their parents are telling them, don’t speak Mandarin. The first-generation responses are like, “That’s sweet and naive of you to think white people will stop to consider who’s Chinese and who’s not.”

I was at another protest and there was some neo liberal white guy with a mask. The mask was talking about how the COVID-19 epidemic was some Chinese conspiracy and the Republicans were reacting poorly to it.

Some other Chinese American friends and I asked him, “Could you please explain that to us? He was like, “The Americans were responding poorly to China” and whatever. Then, I replied, “I understand that, but don’t you think that’s kind of xenophobic?” He thought about it and when I saw him at another protest, he actually got rid of the mask. I’m glad that some people listen.
A first step to change is in culture -- easier said than done. Overall, there needs to be a change in the way COVID-19 is being handled. In a perfect world that we would have centralized planning. We would cancel rent. We wouldn't be evicting people -- mass evicting people is abuse and torture. It's just so wrong, but that's what the United States is doing. It's disproportionately impacting black, brown, and indigenous people. Also bettering the conditions of incarcerated people and incarcerated facilities. The COVID-19 deaths there are huge and never get addressed.

The first step is addressing the disparities that are happening. Consider who is getting impacted the most and why?? And then have a socialist planning that appropriately and equitable distributes food and resources. As well as ensures that there is housing for people and adequate testing equipment, and home supplies. I can’t stand when people panic buy and horde supplies. It makes it difficult. Making sure people get adequate resources to ease that fear of the pandemic itself.

Let’s be real. White people were pretty excited to have some excuse to be more outwardly racists to Asian people. I think that fear in racism really manifests -- fear of COVID-19 pandemic manifests in ignorance and racism then is taken out on us. If you address the epidemic itself and make sure people are getting the adequate care that they need (instead of making them go bankrupt or in debt to survive and putting them out in the streets, or letting them die) then that would ease a lot of the fear.

The other step is changing the way we present media in the United States. There’s so much Sinophobia. I feel like it’s only going to get worse. Biden’s first campaign ad was incredibly Sinophobic.
I saw a Chinese state media and they posted a video making fun of the Americans regarding COVID-19. China warned the United States and the Americans were like no you're lying. When COVID-19 happened, China took all these precautions, quarantined their people, and built a hospital that helped 6,000 people. They have essentialized planning and the numbers went down. Then, the United States said they lied again. When it came to the United States, they were like, “China you didn't warn us.” Instead of demonizing China and accusing them of lying -- just stop blaming China and address the systemic xenophobia that exists in our society and American culture.

Don't go out alone. If you do... I carry a taser on me. One time, my best friend and I were waiting outside for our other best friend outside a Canes or something. It's on the U of M Twin Cities campus and is right on frat row. It's exactly what it sounds like. It's disgusting. It's all these frat people who are very racist and they tear down BLM (Black Lives Matter) signs. Really gross. As we were waiting, there was a line outside. This is when COVID-19 was starting to pick up in the United States and there were these white frat guys staring my friend and I down. They were pointing at us and whispering. So, really loudly to my friend, I said to them, “Hey, I got a new taser. Do you want to see how it works?” I took it out and the guys just stopped immediately.

Unfortunately, it's one of those things to mitigate or combat xenophobia. Have self-defense techniques. I hope people don't have to use them. Also, find a community and talk to other Asian Americans. This past year, I wrote an honor thesis, and we had a cohort. One of my cohort members was a Vietnamese American and I asked him, “How you doing?” And after, he told me he was really glad to have that conversation.
He doesn't have many Asian American friends as well, so build a community as best as you can during COVID-19 and reach out. Also, have people who aren’t Asian empathize and listen to you.

I am the type of person who can speak out and challenge, but I know it's not like that for everyone. A lot of us have white friends who talk about how “woke” they are or anti-racist they are. But now it's the actual time to see who's going to show up. So, if you are out with a white person, and see that an Asian person is too scared to say something about the xenophobia happening (which is completely valid); then encourage your white friend who benefits from white privilege, anti-Asian racism, and xenophobia to stand up for us. If they need to defend us, tell them to speak up, but not in a way that silences Asian American voices. Help keep us safe.
I’m really fed up. Just the way the United States is handling it, so much misinformation going on. My partner told me that the pandemic might have started in Italy where there was a huge soccer game and a bunch of people got some strain of pneumonia from the soccer game. Doctors were not sure what it was, but it got to China and mutated to what came to be COVID-19, then went back to Italy. There's just so much deeply systemic anti-Asian sentiment and the whole yellow peril stuck in the United States. Other factors are not being considered. Instead let's just blame China and other Asians.

I grew up in a white rich suburb and they would not hesitate to say something racist and giggle about and trivialize your humanity. So, seeing all those stereotypes again: “Oh, Chinese and Asians eat weird shit things." They’re very hurtful and I also worry for Asian Americans who don't have the privilege of the protection that I do. I've been really worried about low-income/elderly Asian Americans. Someone I know, her family has experienced a lot of COVID-19 deaths and haven't been able to get adequate treatment because not enough money. You see disparities like that, then you have white people making jokes about it.
I am a bisexual, cis gender woman and a college student who is passionate about social justice. I love being in community, supporting community, and capturing stories within community to build each other up that way.

Recently, I have been going through a lot of emotional abuse (particularly with my brother) and I just haven't been able to know how to deal with it as much. When I talk to my parents about it, they'll respond, “It's something you did to make him act that way.” They're basically saying, “You probably deserved it. That's why he's doing it.” It's placing blame on me when I genuinely did not do anything. I know I didn't deserve it and it's kind of makes me feel like I am at fault, sort of like gas lighting me.

Before COVID-19, I did experience emotional abuse from my parents and not so much my brother. It wasn't as intense because I had things to do and places to go outside of the home. Even if I was at home, it was always like homework and other things to do. The little time I did spend with them, it wasn't as toxic. But now it's always. The more we spend time together, I'm always feeling attacked.
Again, before COVID-19, he has never done that ever. After COVID-19, he's just been attacking me, saying things about my experience, about how to be myself, and saying misogynistic things too. My brother is 13 years old, much younger than me. With him, the emotional abuse started off as “Oh the music you listen to is trash” or “The clothes you wear are trash.” I did think it was his age, but I felt like he was just being mean. I was like “Maybe it's a middle school thing. Maybe I have nothing to worry about.” But then, it just became so much where he kept on shouting or snapping at me even if I asked a simple question. Or he would just not let me talk to him or make me think that I’m a bad person for wanting to talk to him.

There’s not a lot of improvement to have him understand me. He’s very set in his ways. A part of me is like, “Maybe he will grow up.” The social justice part of me is like, “I wanna teach him.” But I can't teach him if he's attacking me all the time and very set in his ways. So, I have to let him grow on his own and put that boundary between us.

I get very overwhelmed. My immediate reaction is kind of outburst, then just like “Why don’t you understand this?” It's one of those things I don’t address each and every time. I build it up and it goes out there all at once. Sometimes, I have to separate myself from my family and not talk to them for a while, which is very hard to do over COVID-19 because we are all in the same house all the time.
Self Care
I go to group therapy and talk to others about my experience. It can be a very scary experience going to therapy. However, it helps me. Especially talking to others who had very similar experiences. We just collectively talk to each other about it.

Another thing is taking time apart and not talking to my family for a few days. If I do, very minimal conversations just to put that boundary in. If I talk, it's not about the issue or anything, it's about other things. I try to not have a lot of conversations about the issues cause I don’t want to get hurt.

Advice for Others
Emotional abuse is so hard to identify. It’s as simple as, “I feel uncomfortable when someone says this to me” or “I don't feel good when I’m around this person because this person doesn’t make me feel good.” There's so much gaslighting that happens. If you feel unsafe or if you feel targeted or attacked, learn how to navigate the relationship. I don’t have a “one says all” advice, I think everyone has their own way of navigating a relationship. Especially as an Asian American person where I think family is very important to me. But at the same time, it’s a lot where my distress comes from.
I was born in the Thailand refugee camps. When I was five months old, my family and I came over to Minnesota and we’ve been living here ever since. I’m the oldest out of my siblings: four biological brothers and three half siblings from my dad’s 2nd marriage. I love my blended family. From our younger to adult years, we have always gotten along pretty well and taken care of each other. Currently, I’m married and live with my husband and my brand-new adopted rescue dog out in the suburbs of the Twin Cities. I currently work for the state and oversee construction projects around the state grounds at the capitol complex.

My dad passed away in February 2020 (not related to COVID-19). At that time, we were kind of hearing about coronavirus on the news and it wasn't in Minnesota, just the coast of the United States. My family and community hadn’t taken it very seriously. My dad had been in the hospital for three weeks before he passed away. We were going to visit him every now and then. He seemed to be getting better and then at one point, he wasn't getting better. He was at St John's Hospital then was transferred over to the U of M Hospital.
That’s when we were told he wasn’t going to have a normal life anymore. His diagnosis was that his kidney and livers were failing. 16 years ago, he was a recipient of the liver transplant. His liver was just at the point that it was not working anymore. Liver transplantees, they have an average of eight years when they get a new liver and my dad happened to live twice as long, so it was just at the end of his life. The kidneys were also at the end of its life. My dad just went into multiple organ failures at the end of February and he passed away. It was really tough on my brothers and I, my step mom and the rest of my dad’s family.

My dad was 57 years old. He’s pretty young. A good man. When he was younger, he lived in the hills and jungles of Laos. He was just a boy and was separated for a while from his parents (my grandparents) running away to escape the bad soldiers. He was a good man. He met my mom and had me and my four brothers. Then divorced when I was 18. He remarried and had 3 beautiful little kids. I thank my dad everyday who gave me, my brothers, and sisters so much.

Towards the end of his life, he had a lot of health issues. He did his best to take care of himself. Once he had his liver transplant 16 years ago, he made a huge lifestyle change, such as walking every day and watching what he was eating. He even tried to get my brothers and I to get into what he was doing, and we never wanted to do that haha.

He was just a good dad. Today, I was thinking about how some kids my age, they still have their parents and their parents will live until the kids are 60 years old. I’m only 31 and I lost my dad already.
I also think about my brothers and they’re only in their 20s. Then, I think about my half siblings and their 8 and 7. They don't have their dad, they are going to have to grow up without their dad. It's a big hole in our lives right now. As the oldest, I feel responsible that I have to step in; try to step somewhere, where I can. I'm never going to be their dad. I just want to teach them to be the person they're supposed to be and that's one thing my dad taught my brothers and I was to be the person you're supposed to be and you don't have to apologize to be the person who you are. I wanted to be able to listen to that.

Losing my dad was hard, but the aftermath of planning his funeral during the COVID-19 time was really hard. In the Hmong community, we have a zov hmo* and so at first, we had three nights of zov hmo leading up to the funeral. The first two nights were normal. We had my dad's care crew, family, and friends come and visit. We also had food. For the third night (the last one), the governor just issued the executive order of no more than ten people (or whatever the number was at the time) and that we had to stay 6ft apart from each other, then less people showed up. The people that did, we were grateful and blessed to have those family and friends come, but it was less.

For the funeral, we were planning to feed 2,000 people for the entire weekend. It became apparent as we got closer and closer to my dad's funeral in March that we weren't going to have that many

---

*zov hmo: a gathering to support family (who lost a love one) with prepping for the funeral, such as folding paper money.

Image: funeral paper money
people because they weren't going to come due to the coronavirus. We had a lot of issues buying water and rice because that was when everyone was buying rice from the Asian stores. It was a struggle. We had to have multiple family members go stand in line to buy rice just so we could have our goal of 10 bags. In the end, we only ended up with 6 bags. Right before the funeral, my uncle who brought the rice only brought four out of the six bags because we just knew that there weren't going to be a lot of people coming to the funeral.

Right before the Friday of the funeral weekend, Governor Walz issued an executive order to not feed, provide, and serve food in a public area. After we had already gone and killed the cow and chicken (a lot of money on that), the funeral director told us that we couldn't serve food to our family and friends. That was really hard on us. At that time, we had already condensed the whole weekend into one service on Monday before we brought my dad to the cemetery. We couldn't have it on Saturday or Sunday anymore. We had the place already decorated and already bought all the flowers. So, it's really tough to have a funeral for my dad when we couldn't have the people to celebrate his life.

This is the part that is most sad. We couldn't have more than 50 people in the funeral home. So, we had to have a counter at the door and we had to put our seats 6 ft apart. That's hard because when you are crying or grieving, you want to be around the people that are close to you...to be physically close to them and hug them. We weren't able to have that at all in my dad's funeral. We sat 6 ft apart. I cried alone at my chair without my husband, without my brothers... Without my stepmom. It was hard not to be able to be next to the people I love during this hard time.
That's something I think about for all the people who are dying during this time either related to coronavirus or not. Especially for Hmong families who do have large gatherings or celebrations of life for their deceased love ones. It's very hard because we are not able to cry, laugh, or talk about our deceased loves one like we normally do. I do not even know how some of the Hmong funerals are going right now. But after we laid him to rest, that time, the governor had already issued the stay home order, so we were not even able to see how my little siblings and stepmom were doing. Everything has to be done over phone and Facebook message. Even now, it's been hard. When you're grieving, you want to be with your love ones. Due to the virus, we can't do that at this point. It's been difficult to grieve, and it comes out in many ways: in Isolation, in anger, in loneliness, and in acts of any ways you normally think you would. Grieving during this time is hard. I know there are a lot of other people who are grieving as well. I hope there might be some sort of outlet to get that grief out.

Self Care
When a person goes through a stressful and traumatic time, the very basic, basic thing is to fall asleep, get up, and shower. There was a period of time when sleeping was really hard. I couldn't fall asleep, and when I did, it was so hard to get up in the morning. I think I went through two weeks of that and was then able to
accept that this is fine. “I lost my dad and I have to take care of my siblings. I can't beat myself.” So, on a very basic level, just getting sleep and waking up. For me, also taking care of my hygiene, showering, and washing my face. Those are the very basic things I have done, so I could feel normal again.

Other things were to try to have a normal schedule. Since the stay at home order issued, I have been able to work at home which is a great blessing. So, I've just been able to open my computer and just go through my emails, as well as do regular check in calls and meetings. I just try to have that block of time to be able to think about something else that is not losing my dad or not being able to be with my family. That has been a good balance to everything.

Another thing I have done is meeting with the therapist and that has been a little bit different because of the stay home order. We use this telehealth where you talk with the therapist over skype or some online system that's secured. That has helped. It's just good to have that one-sided conversation with someone, knowing they are listening to you, and want you to get better. Depending on what you're looking for, they're willing to give you resources and able to bounce off of your head. This isn't the first time I've seen a therapist. I have different needs this time and have been able to get a lot of good feedback through the conversation with the therapist.

My goal has been to just be able to get to the next day because it was extremely hard to get through the day. Now, it's been five months or so since my dad's funeral. I have gotten better at adding things to my day and not thinking so much about how close I want to be with my brothers, sisters, stepmom, aunts, and uncles. The tiny little things have been helping.
Advice for Others

If the grief is very raw, the first thing is to get to the next step. Maybe the next step is to leave your bedroom or put on some new clothes. If you have grieved for a while, maybe the next is to go visit your love ones at their graves or something like that.

I think that grief in itself is a very taboo topic. People (in all cultures, not just Hmong or Asian) think that you are just supposed to move on and forget about this person or never talk about the person again. As you go through the grieving stages, find a person or your community of faith where you can talk about your love one and know that they are going to listen. They won’t say insensitive things or say the wrong things to you. I think that’s really important and it could be some time before you find a person or a couple people to listen to you. But it’s important because when you grieve, no one wants to be alone.
COVID-19 and Discrimination

I am a mix of Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, and Chinese. I am also bisexual and the oldest of 5. Currently, I am attending the University of Minnesota, the school neither of my parents were able to finish, but that I plan to. Nowadays it’s not as much of a racial stigma to wear masks in public since more people are wearing them, but I know at the beginning it was intimidating. There are a couple of specific moments that I can remember.

When this whole thing started, I was in California visiting my grandparents. So, we saw these things online or in the news unfolding. Like there was one Asian woman who was attacked because she wasn’t wear a mask. That did scare us. My grandparents didn’t really show they were scared. They’re religious and say things that are comforting like “Pray to God and He’ll help protect us,” that kind of thing. For me, I was really scared. When I was there, I made sure that when they went out, I was there. If anything did happen, they couldn’t physically fight for themselves. I have a baton (a hard object) just in case. I hope I never have to use it, but it’s just in case. It seemed like I was more scared than they were honestly.
As I was on my way back home by plane, I made sure to wear a mask. At the airport, most of the people wearing masks were Asian. I noticed the whole time that on and off the plane, people were staring at me. It was as if they thought the virus was going to erupt out of me like in Alien (a movie). The whole time, I felt like the other Asian passengers felt similarly and I felt a sort of solidarity. We were wearing them to protect us and others from the virus, but I couldn’t help and see the irony that we were also wearing them to protect ourselves from becoming the next harassment case on the news.

Luckily, my family and I have not experienced much discrimination due to COVID-19 more than stares most of the time. But in March, when they had just started talking about COVID-19 in Minnesota, my mother was working out at our usual gym. She got up to go to another machine and a white man got up in her face. Then, he yelled at her for not wiping off her space while not saying anything to the other non-Asian patrons, most of whom don’t even put down a towel like she had.

I think it’s at least worth a try to challenge and change these stereotypes. It seems as time passes more people realize it’s not a race-targeting or Asian-sourced virus. For everyone though, I think it’s important to call out anyone who says something that could stoke the fires. Calling it the “Chinese virus” or “Kung flu” is not only inaccurate, but gives racists an excuse to harass or hurt Asian people. I’ve heard arguments that some diseases
are named after where they originated, and while that's true, it's not the case for COVID-19. In addition to that, I don't think people should want to continue calling it something that creates more division anyway.

**Anti-Blackness**
My parents luckily haven’t voiced any opinions on anti-Blackness, but my grandparents see the news and can sometimes simplify what they see. They have prejudices against Black people because they see the inequalities of our society affecting them and victim blame, even if that’s not the truth. When they came here, they were force fed the notion that being “American” and close to whiteness was what they should strive for. It’s the reason neither I nor my mother know any other language but English and also where these prejudices come from.

Unfortunately, there is a partial language barrier between my grandparents and myself. But whenever they say something anti-Black, I just try to get them to understand why that isn’t the case. For example, my grandmother said “Don’t go where the Black people are, it’s dangerous,” and so I just remind her that it’s not the Black people that make those places dangerous. It’s usually something more like poverty caused by redlining. That’s a long history lesson for another time though.

It doesn’t matter what race, sex, gender, orientation, etcetera you are, we all have our prejudices, unfortunately that is intersectional. There’s a lot of people expressing anti-Black or anti-Asian sentiments. So, I am not surprised that amongst the people lashing out at Asian people, there are Black people because there is a lot overall anti-Asian sentiments. For me, I just see it as a
microcosm of the bigger issues of division and racism, not a Black versus Asian issue. People of all races have a part to play in it. So, when I see a Black person attack or harass an Asian person, I don’t see it as “Because they’re Black, they hate someone who’s Asian.” I see it as a result of the anti-Asian sentiment in general. Feeding that it’s a Black versus Asian issue only furthers a divisive hierarchy where races are pitted against each other. Some people might see it as “Oh Black people can be racist as well” or “Oh Asian people can be racist as well,” and while there is some truth to that, that argument often is brought up to ignore that we want to get rid of racism in general.

Self Care
In my family, I’m probably the most in the loop in terms of all the stuff you see in the news. This unfortunately does have an effect on my mental health. I think it’s important to stay informed even though it is sometimes painful. Sometimes I have to take a breather or focus on something else positive. I have been doing some meditation to deal with those negative thoughts and feelings, not just blocking them away. I also talk to family and check in with friends, as well as anyone else I know who is also informed, because we are in this together.

As for my grandparents, they’re religious, so they go to church and ask for support and help. I also call them about once a month to check in on everything that is happening. I think that helps as well. My family is pretty close and open with what's happening in our lives. We stay together as a family and are there for each other. It’s the only way we get through everything especially with all that’s happened this year.
Advice for Others
If you are religious, it's nice to have that to fall back on. A lot of people, they get comfort from that.

If you aren't religious, I definitely recommend meditating. I think it helps a lot with figuring out what to do with your feelings, especially in such a volatile time and a lot of us are separated from our support systems. In times like these it's so important to have coping mechanisms.

Lastly, rely on your friends. Have positive thinking and affirmations. Remind yourself why you keep going. Stick to the people who have your back.
I was born in Taiwan and I have been in the United States for 18 years. I am currently a 2nd year Ph D graduate student at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. I’m still single. Right now, I realize that it’s not the time for me to do anything about it.

During the stay at home order, I was developing my written oral exam for the preliminaries, so I can move on to become a PhD candidate. So, most of the time, I was staying at home and I am glad to be unlike many of the workers in the health service or even the public health who have to work for a living right now. I just stayed home and did what I have to get done, done.
I live in a house and rent from my landlord. She’s actually worried right now. Many of my housemates have left in the spring. Many are foreign exchange students and returned to their home countries and do the online program. I feel like right now can be a hard time for the landlord who may have lost a potential income. Many people, who had businesses right now too. I have money right now because I’m a Graduate Research Assistant for the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. At this stage, I’m glad I still have enough money to currently survive and get everything I’m supposed to get done.

For the times I do go out and come home, I make sure to wash my hands and sanitize; making sure everything will be fine, as well as keeping distance. I do meet some people and have some hangouts. I make sure to keep distance and do what others are comfortable with. We all just do what we already know about safety procedures and keep distance. I’m not an extrovert, but maybe this personality is good right now, so I don't have to worry about intentionally being with people for the sake of it.

I don’t have the first-handed experience of being discriminated against. I don’t have any direct, personal experience of being discriminated against because of COVID-19, but I read about many people who are discriminated against for it and understand why such a survey exists for the UMN. I’m a research assistant at Water Resources Science right now. I do hear stories about a lot of people starting to ritualize this whole covid-19 because it being an illusion that only in the Asian world were getting sacrificed. That was a big mistake. “Oh, all the old people will get it” or “Oh, the Asian people will get it because they're physically weak. They're used to being sick like that.”
We had the lockdown early, so I actually tried not to go out as much. I always make sure to wear masks for the business and other people. That’s the thing I will always do. I don’t experience much discrimination or others who have showed racism to me openly, directly. If it’s not direct, it’s mediated. Just quiet enough, not public. I’m glad that I don’t have to deal with those directly. I have not directly encountered anything yet, maybe later, but not yet.

There are people working right now, like Asian health workers that got downplayed or got mediated out in the public from people thinking they can do that. I’m glad that I have been in this country long enough to know there are some people (bigots) you can find some of those people everywhere and know how to deal with it. When people move to a different country like to study (such as foreign students), they probably have more difficulty dealing with nasty people.
I am a psych major student going into the medical field. People think I’m Indian haha, but I’m not. I’m Nepali. My family members and I work at the hospital. The unit I work at, they don't deal with COVID patients, just general care. The hospital is doing what they can to ensure the safety of their workers by not allowing visitors, providing masks, and other resources if needed. When the pandemic first started, we were only wearing masks because they were running short on stuff. Eventually they started giving us face shields and goggles. We have the reusable, science lab looking goggles. You have your own and you clean that before and after your shift. As for masks, you wear your own when once entering your workplace or hospital. Then change to the surgical mask and throw that at the end of your shift and switch back to your own mask after you step out of the hospital. It’s a very routine thing now. You deal with different kind of people with different kind of health issues. So even before the pandemic, you always have to shower after the shifts anyways.

The way we give care to our patients has not changed. The only thing is the patient and their families. Usually, a lot of families are there to give patients more support, but during the pandemic, they don’t have that anymore. We do help patients and families with video calls and they talk for a while. However, it's not the same as being physically there with their love ones.
I did hear concerns of a second wave. As long as people maintain distances and maintain wearing masks, COVID-19 will be better handled. I know it’s hard to breathe in them. Only people who work in the medical field will only understand how essential it is. We have to wear a mask our whole shift and we can’t even complain. On top of that, we have other safety precautions like goggles and face shields and stuff like that. People who complain about wearing a mask for a few hours, I don't see why they would do that. People who deal with patients have to wear that for 8 to 12 hours, however long their shifts are. As long as people take their precautions by maintaining social distance, washing hands constantly, wearing masks, and talking to people with masks, that would help.

Distance Learning
Some of my classes are virtual, not all. In a way, virtual classes are good because it's online, so I can take my own time and do my own thing. I don’t have to be on campus at a certain time. In another way, it's hard learning things online when you need to see things physically, like labs.

Distance learning is not too stressful. The professors give very good, detailed information on what to do, how to do it, and how to get things from where. It’s not so much a hard thing.
But it's just very different being in person with your professor who is in front of you teaching versus hearing their voice electronically. It makes a big difference.

The professors are very supportive. They're constantly emailing. If we email them when campus is open, they take a good time to email back. During the pandemic, they respond super fast. You know they care.

With the stay home order, I got to spend more time with my family. We were all at home. Everyone was there. It is very depressing that you are at home all the time. You can’t step out because of precautions and stuff. But, we are doing things that are going to help others and ourselves. To cope with staying home all day, my family and I make food and play with different card and board games or chess. We did that for almost three months haha.
I am a second-generation Hmong-American woman, as well as a daughter, aunt, and sister. I have six siblings but only my younger brother lives at home with my parents and I. The rest of my other siblings are married and live on their own. I'm fluent in both Hmong and English. In my household, I am the one who handles my parents' paperwork and does all the translating. My parents like to get on my case about cleaning. Luckily, they don't force me to cook since my dad does most of the cooking.

The thing that makes me who I am is that I embody opposing desires and realities. I'm at the age where I'm no longer young, but still have a lot to learn. I'm a role model and mentor to some younger folx, but still a child to those who are older than me, like my parents and my older siblings. I want to be independent, pursue my career and only think of me. But, at the same time, I want to be a dutiful daughter and stay home to take care of my parents as they're getting older. I have many different parts of me that want different things, and they're always at odds with each other, leaving me never truly satisfied with where I am. However, regardless of my confusion, I always stick to my values of honesty, integrity and hard work.
When it comes to COVID-19, I’m concerned about the older population’s safety because I have countless people in my life who’re in that age bracket and vulnerable to the virus. My parents take the virus seriously and are pretty diligent in wearing face masks, sanitizing, and only stepping out of the house when they have to. They also take the social distancing guidelines seriously by always staying at least six feet away from people.

My parents like to watch those Hmong News YouTube channels to stay informed about COVID-19. Those news sources keep my parents up-to-date (more than me sometimes), but I don’t know how accurate those news sources are and definitely question their credibility at times. For example, my parents heard that if you drink human urine or smoke weed, that will cure COVID. My siblings and I have had to fact-check our parents a few times and we do our best in keeping our parents updated about accurate information. I personally only update my parents when I’ve heard the news from credible sources or legislators.
Like many other older Hmong parents, my mom definitely felt the need to stock up on rice. She didn’t do it because she thought we were going to run out. More so, because we were planning on doing two separate events in the coming months and didn’t know if we had enough rice to put on the celebrations. We ended up doing neither of the events, but it was definitely stressful for my mom to find rice while also trying to not catch COVID. Once we figured out how to get some rice, buying it wasn’t too bad since we simply went to one of the stores and put in an order. I’d say the toilet paper situation was more stressful since we could live without rice, but not so much without toilet paper.

For the toilet paper situation, I had to really utilize my network to find a store that stocked up nightly. I was informed to go really early in the morning since they ran out of toilet paper so quickly. On the mornings where I went to buy toilet paper, all the customers would line up outside the doors, then run to the area where the toilet papers were stocked once the store was open. It was the most hectic shopping experience I’d ever had and definitely one I’ll never forget. I really hope COVID-19 calms down soon so that we don’t have to worry so much about basic needs.
I have felt uncomfortable wearing a mask in public. It wasn’t necessarily physical discomfort, the discomfort stemmed from others looking at me and treating me differently because of my mask. In a country where wearing a mask has become a political stance, those who choose to not believe science and choose ignorance over empathy have made it increasingly difficult for others to stay safe and feel safe. In the beginning of Governor Walz’s stay home order, I received so many dirty looks and xenophobic comments while trying to grocery shop, go to the bank, etc. It’s important to note that these comments, actions, and xenophobic behaviors are not new and happen on a regular basis, but has intensified dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Geographical and cultural context absolutely plays a role in how one experiences public discrimination. I have heard of countless accounts of these xenophobic comments and actions targeting the Asian community around the world, but the United States by far has had the most violent, raging, and vulgar hate crimes compared to other countries. I mean Asian restaurants, specifically targeting Chinese restaurants, across the country.
being destroyed and vandalized with graffiti that says, "Coronavirus" and "COVID-19." Sales for Asian restaurants plummeted to the point of no return because people are afraid that these establishments will give them COVID-19. Even the President of this country in multiple press conferences called COVID-19 the “Kung flu” and have continued to fuel these xenophobic sentiments. Blaming an entire racial group for the pandemic to try to avoid his own shortcomings as a President. While members of the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community have faced discrimination in all forms across the world, the level of hate, rage, and pure disgust coming from some Americans is profound and leaves me speechless for what the future holds for my community.

Thankfully my parents’ work spaces is most AAPI and other Black and Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) folks, so they have not faced any discrimination in the work place and live in an AAPI community. My sister and I have experienced discrimination due to COVID-19. I have received so many glares while out in the public. I have had mothers pull their children away quickly when they see me and can audibly hear them say, “Don’t get too close to that Asian girl, you’re going to get the coronavirus if you do.” I have had people shout xenophobic comments and death threats towards me when I’m minding my own business walking down the street. I have seen my own community stricken with pain and lost hope from their businesses crumbling due to the economic impact of COVID-19 and xenophobia/anti-Chinese discrimination. It’s incredibly infuriating hearing people say that they have suffered the most from this pandemic when they can’t even begin to imagine what it’s been like to be an AAPI person throughout this tragedy.
I believe these stereotypes can be challenged and changed, but it will not be an easy journey in the slightest. The first step is non-AAPI folks to be addressing this xenophobia and holding their friends, family, and loved ones accountable. Being held accountable and addressing internalized xenophobia can be very difficult, but when it comes from a person who you love and care about, it’s a little bit easier to swallow than from someone who doesn't have any personal connections with. The next step is for non-AAPI folks to put an extra effort in supporting and caring for the AAPI community. This support can manifest in various forms. It can be visiting your local Asian stores and restaurants more often than usual to make sure you are supporting their businesses. It can be promoting these businesses to your network and social media so that others are reminded to support Asian businesses. Support does not always have to be in the form of financial support. Check in on your AAPI friends/loved ones. You never know what we might be feeling or...
experiencing throughout this pandemic. It could be discrimination in the form of comments and actions like I stated earlier, it can be the pain of seeing their community members hurting, and it can be seeing AAPI business owners struggling to make ends meet. Support can be in any form, but make sure that you are doing the most you can to uplift AAPI folks and other BIPOC communities during this difficult time.

These anti-Asian hate crimes from Black individuals have not increased anti-Blackness in my family and elders. However, I think it is important to acknowledge that there is anti-Blackness in the Asian community and in many Asian cultures that we need to address and reflect on. This internalized anti-Blackness has shown in a number of ways in our spaces and while these anti-Asian hate crimes from Black individuals have not increased anti-Blackness, we must admit that there has been a lot of anti-Blackness in our communities to begin with. I have heard anti-Black comments and discriminatory language used from relatives, stories of my AAPI friends not being able to date their love interest because they were Black, and so many other instances of anti-Black discrimination. And while these anti-Asian hate crimes cannot be condoned, we cannot use this as a chance to further our hate, but as a learning opportunity to better ourselves. If we keep fueling this hate and never addressing it in ourselves, our family, and our community, no progress will be made. When we start to unlearn and deconstruct white supremacy in our communities, we will reach liberation. The liberation of our community will happen when we reach Black liberation. AAPI communities cannot be liberated until the Black community is liberated. We cannot make progress without supporting each other through our differences and fight against these racist systems that have governed our lives for too long.
Many changes have been implemented and the hospital policies and procedures are still constantly changing related to the COVID pandemic. Every patient is required to have a COVID test now and certain surgeries aren’t allowed until the results are in. We are required to wear masks and a face shield whenever we come into contact with patients. For COVID patients, we wear the thicker 3M N95 masks, a face mask to cover the N95 mask, a face shield, gown, and gloves. I’m always cautious with every patient because not every COVID test is accurate and some people test negative who are actually positive. As for visiting policies, we just started allowing visitors again but with guidelines. Visitors have to be healthy and have no symptoms related to COVID, have to be over the age of 16, and the visiting hours are from 8am-8pm. Each patient is only allowed 2 visitors throughout their hospital stay, which is tricky for patients near end of life or newborn babies. For employees, our temperature is taken at the start of our shift and there is a COVID hotline that we can call if we have any questions or concerns.

I’ve worked hands on with a variety of patients who tested positive and required hospitalization to manage their symptoms. The cases range from healthy individuals who needed some oxygen to help with their breathing to patients who were intubated and required mechanical
ventilation in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). I also work with patients who show the similar symptoms to COVID with pending results. Working with COVID patients is pretty similar to working with any other sick or ill patient. Prior to COVID, I’ve worked with patients with other diseases, so it was normal to follow the hospital’s policies and procedures. Same with COVID, there are policies and procedures, such as wearing appropriate personal protective equipment to protect ourselves.

I’ve also worked with patients who were previously positive and recovered from COVID in the ICU, but they’ve become so weak from being sedated and bed ridden for so long. I’ve given some patients their first showers after weeks of being bed ridden and you can see how happy they are to finally shower. Some require physical rehabilitation to regain their strength and although it’s a challenging obstacle to overcome, they are the most inspiring and hardworking patient’s that I’ve worked with if they can overcome COVID.

As for teens, we did have a patient who was admitted for a motor vehicle crash and tested positive. He was sent home after a day because he was stable and was instructed to quarantine at home, as well as seek medical care if his condition gets worse.

Patients and their family members feel uneasy when they learn about COVID-19 diagnosis. Everyone is concerned because there are many unknown facts about COVID-19 and it affects everyone differently. Not much is known about how fast it spreads, how severe it can affect people, the long-term effects, a vaccine, and etc. I’ve seen many patients recover from COVID as well, so we do our best to help the patient recover. Many diagnosis are very uneasy (stroke, heart attack) and our role is to help the family
understand what is happening with the patient. As a healthcare professional, we are honest with our patients and their family members regardless if there is a good or bad prognosis (expected outcome for the patient). We are constantly communicating and updating families on the patient's condition and we hope for the patient to recover or show signs of improvement. Many patients are stable when hospitalized with COVID and many recover as well. If their condition is poor, the end of life conversation is initiated between the doctors and the families, ultimately respecting the patients and their families wishes.

As for educating the community about ways to prevent COVID, we follow and recommend the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines including handwashing, social distancing, wearing a mask, avoid touching the face, and frequently cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that we touch daily (doorknobs, phone, countertops, etc).
We cannot guarantee someone that they will be safe from COVID, but taking precautions can help lower the chances.

I do feel uneasy knowing that there is a chance that I can be bringing COVID home to my family members that I live with. As a healthcare worker, I am passionate about helping people and we took an oath to serve our community in challenging and hard times. As long as my facility is following the safety precautions and procedures and supply protective equipment, I don’t mind working with covid patients. I feel my facility is properly ensuring mine and my coworkers’ safety from COVID-19. The policies and protocols in place are not only meant to protect our patients but the employees as well.

Throughout our shift, we sanitize our hands before and after going into patient rooms. To prevent spreading germs from the hospital to the community, I change out of my dirty scrubs into a clean outfit before I leave the hospital, I leave my shoes and pens in the locker room, I disinfect my phone, badge and apple watch at the end of my shift, and I make sure to take a shower as soon as I get home. My advice is to always wash your hands, wear a face mask, and try to practice social distancing! Always monitor your symptoms and don’t go out if you are not feeling well.
As COVID-19 started to become more real in my family's life, we developed so many fears. My grandparents feared COVID-19 due to their old age and underlying health conditions. My parents feared for my grandparents lives. The fear became more real as a couple of our relatives had already passed away from it. Living with my grandparents, we had a new system to leave toiletries out for 24 hours. In addition, wash all fruits and vegetables with soap.

My grandparents also feared going to the store because they may be harmed. They were even more scared when they saw a Black person. They saw how Black individuals violently harmed other Asians because of COVID-19. Like many storytellers said, I blame the idea of "whiteness" and media bias for spreading anti-Asian and Blackness. This shouldn't be a race issue.

I'm disgusted, exhausted, and pained to keep seeing my family and AAPI community fear for their lives. I'm glad to have taken on AAOP's project and listen to the storytellers' experiences. My family and I don't feel alone anymore when we learn our AAPI community shares the same fear as us. Despite those fears, they continue to work so hard. And I hope you and your family also don't feel alone. I hope these stories and self care advices uplift you as it did for me.
Thank you for reading!

Want to explore more stories done by Asian American Organizing Project?

aaopmn.org/

@aaopmn

@aaopmn

Asian American Organizing Project