

# Lifting Up Asian American and Pacific Islander Staff Voices



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## "My Quiet"

Growing up, I was all at once sheltered and exposed. The daughter of immigrants, who left behind their lives in the Philippines to follow the "American Dream."

The tension between honoring my home culture and assimilating to the whiteness around me created a duality I would live in for all of my life—

Keep quiet/speak up. Be a polite girl/be like your outgoing brothers. Learn Tagalog/only speak English. Be Filipino/be American.

I hid inside myself, unsure of who I was and what I wanted to be. Stuck in, yet leaning into my quiet.

My first day of kindergarten I waded through the sea that was school, head down, feet heavy. Raising my gaze I saw around me other children, some that looked like me, many who didn't, teachers who meant well but did not understand, and a system that rewarded extroverts and compliance.

I was seen as different, difficult, defiant just for being quiet.

I was voiceless. My throat closed up the day I entered school. My voice was buried further and further inside. Uncomfortable, yet safe in my quiet.

Until one day I met a teacher, a group of students, a friend, who loved me as I was. My teacher learned about me, thought about what I needed, my classmates rallied around me, embraced me, a girl, upon seeing me alone at recess each day, asked me to play, over and over and over again, reaching her hand out to me to let me know that my voice wasn't that she needed to hear, but my hand she wanted to hold.

Ms. Kasabian, my 5th grade class, and my best friend Rhodessa, gave me the safety I needed to open up, gave me the courage to find my voice.

I was no longer voiceless. Anxious and invited out of my quiet.

Inspired by their empathy and humanity, I was determined to be this person to all my students. To tune into to their needs and wants, their fears and joys, their hopes and dreams—To truly hear their stories and learn who they are.

In choosing to listen, I learned to lift up and welcome my students with my quiet.

# AAPI Heritage Month

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