

LAVENDER Godzilla

Celebrating the Voices of LGBTQ+ Asians & Pacific Islanders

Spring 2023



10 Questions

Michelle & Tookta

QTAPI relationships are many, diverse and varied, each special and unique in their own way. In our ongoing interview series, Michelle Meow and Tookta share some brief and loving insights into their lives together.

1) Can you share a little bit about yourselves?

Michelle: I was born in the United States to refugee parents from Laos and I moved to San Francisco from the Central Valley of California for school and to focus on Broadcast and Media. I am currently the host and producer of "[The Michelle Meow Show](#)," Your A-Z, covering the LGBT, LMNOP, and everyone in between at the Commonwealth Club of CA and Sunday nights 10:30 p.m. on KBCW.

Tookta: I'm from the Northeast region of Thailand — Udon Thani. While I initially retired from my singing career, I moved to the SF Bay Area from Thailand to be with Michelle. The SF Bay Area was a culture shock for me, but it has been our home as a married couple since March of 2017.

2) How did you meet each other?

Michelle: We met in late 2016 during Tookta's first trip to the United States. Tookta is a morlam (Thai country folk) singer whose host at the time was a former relative of mine. My family's annual Halloween party was held at the host's house, where I showed up as Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Presidential candidate in 2016.

Tookta: I asked to take a selfie with Michelle because I thought she was dressed up as a White grandmother. I was so confused about her costume because I thought Halloween was supposed to be a celebration of ghosts and monsters for fun. Why would you be dressed as a grandmother? I didn't know who Hillary Clinton was. Michelle refused my request to take a picture. I don't take "No" for an answer so I sternly said, "take the picture with me now." We still have the picture. It's really funny.

3) When did you know this person was the one for you?

Michelle: I knew immediately. The first time I saw Tookta, I couldn't breathe, taken aback by Tookta's beauty: authentic, regal, cultural, unapologetic, Thai woman. There was something about connecting with someone who represented my culture and the pride she carried that was magnetic. I listened to her songs and all of a sudden, I understood Thai 100% versus being able to understand bits and pieces. The day after our first encounter, she told me about her starting her career at a young age, dealing with poverty, being a farmer, and

— continued on page 2

10 Questions

continued from front page —

volunteering free shows at the local women's prison. She made duck larb and stew that night and I had gone in for thirds - everything about her was so amazing. I knew immediately that she would be in my life forever or at least someone I wanted in my life forever in any capacity, whether friends or more.

Tookta: Before I left to go back to Thailand, I gave Michelle a promise ring and let her know that I'm too old to date forever like Americans do. Three weeks later, I flew back to the United States to surprise her for New Year's. Donald Trump had won the election and, a few weeks later, would announce anti-immigration policies as his first executive order. I remember laying in bed a week or so before heading back to Thailand when Michelle said "maybe marriage equality is next... I don't know." I remember feeling scared I would not be able to freely see her. That's when I knew I would have to do whatever it takes to be with her.

4) Have your past relationships influenced how you interact with one another?

Michelle: I'm a fairly indecisive person and the fact that I come from a refugee family has a lot of its own set of specific experiences that affect relationships. Tookta has really helped me prioritize and make decisions that are healthy for myself - this was something I couldn't do, resulting in break ups from previous relationships.

Tookta: She's really taught me patience. I can be impulsive and reactive. She helps me take time to process and listen. This balance is important I'm learning – especially in this relationship that is the most healthiest I have ever had.

5) How have interactions with family members been like?

Michelle: Our union was not met with the most open arms. We were estranged from our families for a little bit until people really saw how genuine we felt for another. Xenophobia, homophobia, queer phobia, sexist views all played a part.

Tookta: It's still pretty painful to talk about this, especially for Michelle. However, seven years later, our families are the most loving and that love has been really empowering and encouraging for us. Sometimes it does take time.

6) How else do you think being LGBTQIA has impacted your relationship?

Michelle: I think the fact that it's a constant struggle is the most rewarding aspect of being an LGBTQIA couple. We're always fighting for ourselves, our love, and others.

Tookta: Recently, I came out of retirement because I was inspired by the young Queer activists fighting for marriage equality in Thailand. My three new songs all focus on equality for all and also my own coming out to old fans and my record label. The first single just launched on Valentine's Day called "Love is Love" and the music video has photos of LGBTQIA couples from around the world, including couples in Thailand who staged a wedding ceremony to advocate for marriage equality in Thailand. You can find the video on YouTube at [Topline Digital Network](#).



7) How about your ethnic backgrounds?

Michelle: Having similar backgrounds has helped in a lot of ways, but with me being more Americanized, it has also had its challenges. Sometimes we have language barriers or different viewpoints of how life works. On the other hand, we both love that family and culture are important to us. We're very proud to display that.

Tookta: I would add that having someone who eats fish sauce and spice makes any misunderstanding or challenges easy to handle.

8) There's a saying that opposites attract. Do you two fit that description, or are you more alike?

Michelle: The one thing that could probably drive us to divorce is her inability to organize.

Tookta: It would be Michelle's need to take everything slow. Sometimes she's too slow.

Michelle: With that being said, we're intellectually and spiritually aligned despite how different we might be!

Tookta: I think we both just kinda get each other and bring out the healthy version of ourselves.

9) How has being together changed you as a person?

Michelle: Life is scary. It's less scary walking it with someone who genuinely loves you. This doesn't always have to be a romantic partner. It just so happens we're more than friends but I think the foundation of our relationship is friendship and we don't take that for granted.

Tookta: We've both changed to communicate our emotions in a healthier way and also, reframe expectations and boundaries that may have been unhealthy in the past.

10) What are your hopes for your future together?

Michelle: Happiness, peace, yummy food and to leave this world healthier and happier for the next generation.

Tookta: Ideally, it would be nice to leave together, holding hands in our sleep like in the "Notebook."





The Battle, Part II

by Howard Chan

The iPhone on the table started to vibrate. The screen lit up with an unknown number with a +886 country code. It must be important because I never get a “normal” phone call from Taiwan.

Who could it be? There could only be a few possibilities. On the benign side, it might be relatives calling to check in on me; many of whom I haven’t spoken to for a half year since I moved from California to the UK. On the more serious side, maybe someone died or had a serious health problem. The only person I knew it couldn’t be was my mother. We had stopped talking three years earlier, ever since she disapproved of my gay “lifestyle.”

“Hello?”

The caller in a mix of Mandarin and Shanghainese said, “*eh nue nue, non hao fa?*” It was my aunt.

“I’m good. Busy with work here in London. How are you?”

“Oh you know, getting old. I haven’t talked to you in a while and I miss you.”

“I know. I know. Work has been so busy. I never seem to be able to take enough time off to take a trip back to Taiwan. But you know you can always come to visit me. I can show you around London.”

“Oh I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, my English is not good enough.”

“Oh, your English is plenty good enough. I’ve seen you managed your way around California the last time you visited.”

“Oh no, it’s not good enough. I need a translator.”

There are a few things you should know about my aunt. She, like many other Chinese ladies, enjoyed a good game of mahjong. But I have always thought she should have played chess and would have become a grandmaster. She had this uncanny skill of carefully drawing in her opponents into the game. By the time the other player realized he was in a trap, the game was clearly already over.

“Oh? A translator?” I paused and rolled my eyes. I fell into her trap.

“Yes, a translator,” she said with what I would have imagined a big smirk on her face, “I think your mom needs to come with me.”

This call was clearly no accident. She managed to find the most face-saving way for my mother to see me.

“Ok, fine,” I knew I was already beaten. “Book your flights and let me know when you guys are coming.”



June is always a particularly beautiful month in London. Increasing sightings of pale white skin was always a sure sign that summer has come. It was no different at London Paddington Station. The weather was just getting warm enough for people to transition from collared shirts to short-sleeved polo shirts but not quite there for people to move from trousers to shorts.

According to the schedule my aunt and mother’s flight had already landed at Heathrow. I was waiting on the platform for the next Heathrow Express, an express train that connected the airport to central London.

As the door opened, I saw two short Asian ladies slowly bring luggage twice their size off the train. I quickly went over to help carry their suitcases off the train.

My aunt saw me first. “*Ey yo, nue nue.* You are so tall.” She proceeded to give a big hug and shed a few tears. “Oh I think you have actually gotten shorter.”

Behind her was my mother, a lady slightly taller than my aunt, dressed as if she just came from the office and ready for afternoon tea. We stood there awkwardly, not sure whether it was appropriate to embrace. The only thought that ran through my mind was the very last thing she said to me before we parted last time.

“I don’t approve of your lifestyle. You have to change your ways or I can’t speak to you again.” In her mind, it was a choice. She was going to force a change through ultimatums. I obviously knew that it wasn’t a choice. My mother had also obviously underestimated the two traits I inherited from her: independence and stubbornness.

What happens when an unstoppable force meets an unmovable object for the first time in three years? We hugged like two straight men, arms awkwardly wrapped around

each other, making sure not to make contact on the chest so as to not display any signals that could be misunderstood as an apology or that one of us was wrong.

“Well, I have a surprise for you two,” I said. “We are going to drop off your luggage at my flat. You are going to pack a week’s worth of clothes because we are going to Paris for the first week of your stay.”

My mother learned French when she was in college. When I was young, random French words would work its way into conversations. She was especially proud of her gutturals that were sprinkled all over the language. *Quatre*. *Printemps*. Neither my aunt nor my mother has been to France. I figured the sights and sounds of Paris ought to distract them from whatever schemes the two were plotting, and you knew there was a scheme cooking somewhere.

We took the Eurostar from St. Pancras to Gare du Nord in Paris. We diligently went to all the tourist sights. The Eiffel Tower. Champs-Élysées. The Louvre. Musée d’Orsay, my favorite. Notre Dame. But no Louis Vuitton store. Ok, maybe one Dior store.

Paris is one of the food capitals of the world. Hot chocolate from *Carette*. Baguettes from any corner *pâtisserie*. Chicken from *Le Petit Flottes*. Macarons from *Pierre Herme*. I wished I could say I partook all of these delicious foods on this trip, but we did not. After our first meal in Paris, my aunt complained about how dry Western food was. Bread this and bread that. We spent the rest of the trip trying out all of the Asian restaurants in Paris, all six of them. With the exception of a good bowl of pho, in my opinion, the French have no idea what good Asian food is.

After a few days, I took my mother and aunt by train right outside of Paris to the Palace of Versailles. I was feeling cautious this day. I don’t know about you. In my family, during a seven day vacation, the first three days are usually fairly pleasant. Everyone is cordial. On the fourth day, like clockwork, some sort of disagreement would break out; that disagreement would grow into a giant argument that leaves everyone agrieved and silent for the rest of the trip. Today was the fourth day of our trip.

When we arrived, we took a guided tour of the palace. My mother rather enjoyed the experience, impressed by the numerous rooms we walked through and the paintings and statues that adorned them. The palace also had a special sheen as the conservators had just applied new layers of gold leaf to various parts of the exterior. My aunt? Well not so much. All she commented was, “this palace would be the size of a concubine’s house back in the days of Chinese emperors.”

After the palace, we strolled toward the gardens in the back. As we reached the garden gates, my aunt exclaimed, “oh, my feet are so tired. I need to sit down.”

“Oh ok, well we can all rest a bit”

“Oh, oh, no, I want to rest by myself. Why don’t you two go ahead and walk through the gardens? I will be here when you two come back?”

All I could mutter under my breath was “well played, Auntie. Well played.”



When my mother found out I was gay, I was caught completely underprepared. This time, knowing that a scheme is coming to a boil and having three years in between to prepare, I was ready for this brawl of a conversation. My mother and I walked through the garden for the first three minutes in complete silence. Both of us pretending to be bewildered by the sights, the sounds, and the people around us.

Then my mother delivered the opening punch, “so have you changed your ways?”

“No, because it’s not a choice,” I counterpunched, “How did you know you were straight?”

There was silence.

“Have you had sex with a man?” she asked. She must have thought I am still straight if I haven’t had sex with a man.

“Not really your business,” I answered.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“No, I work too much.”

She sighed with relief, then asked, “Do you remember Katherine? This girl you liked in kindergarten in Taiwan? I’m still in contact with her parents. I think she’s still single. You should fly back to Taiwan and I can arrange a date.”

This conversation was quickly turning south. I started to turn around to walk back to the gate. I was ready this time to address all of her concerns and preconceived notions.

“Look, mother, this isn’t a choice. I know you think being gay will ruin my career like that Taiwanese singer. But the world isn’t like that anymore. We moved to the U.S. so I can get an education, and not just any education, so that I can go to M.I.T. and I did that. You wanted me to get a good job. And I did that. I have always made good decisions. Why do you think I would all of sudden start making bad ones?”

She remained silent.

“Is this because you don’t think you will have grandchildren? I will have children and this is better. All those Chinese soap operas that you watch, the ones with 200 episodes. It’s always about one kingdom fighting another or the mother-in-law not approving their daughter-in-law and in some cases trying to kill them. This way you can skip over all of that grief. Isn’t that better?”

She remained silent. With a few yards left to the gate, she said, “it doesn’t matter. This is bad for you. You need to change your ways.”

When we returned to the gate, we helped my aunt stand up and took the next train back to Paris. There was nothing more to say. We remained silent for the rest of the trip back to London.

I thought I was prepared this time. Trying to reason and to use logic to convince my mother that I am who I have always been. That me being gay wasn’t her fault or anyone else and that it wasn’t and shouldn’t be a scarlet letter that followed me wherever I went. But I was wrong. My mother saw the world in black and white with no shades of gray and was not a creature to be reasoned with. She knew what was right and what was wrong. To her, being gay was just a self-inflicted wound that she so desperately wants me to rectify.

All I can do is go on to the next battle and hopefully win the war.



A moment in time
And yet a year of my life
What am I doing
Who am I when we're apart
An end is a beginning

It's Simple

by Ben Yuen

Hey babe? I don't know how to do this.
Can you help me?

Sure, it's simple!
One: Get a license.
Two: Find a job.
Three: Find a place to live.
Then you're all set to join me in Ohio!

Great! But wait...

A license?
I don't know why, but I've never wanted to drive.

It's the only way to live in Ohio!

A job? How do I find a job in Ohio?

Maybe a nonprofit like me?

A place? We're not going to live together?

It's better to start apart!

I guess so...

But how? Please help me?

How? It's simple!
License: Get a permit, practice driving,
take the test, get a license.
Job: Research companies, rework resume,
send applications, get hired.
Place: Pick a location, research apartments,
strategize: close to boyfriend, close to work,
close to shops.

Oh, and prepare for snow.
That's all you have to do.

(Straightforward)
That's all I have to do.

(Nonchalant)
That's all I have to do.

Why can't I do it?

In hindsight? Depression. Anxiety.

At the time? I'm just lazy. I'm a bad boyfriend.
If I loved him, I'd just do it! I don't deserve love.
It's so simple! What's wrong with me?

Babe, can you help me?
No, you already did. Never mind.

I've been practicing driving... a little.
No, I didn't get the job. I haven't found a place.

You got the fellowship and found a nice apartment?
That's great, babe! I'm so happy for you!

I love y- what?

You have to go? Oh ok, I'll talk to you later.

Bye! I love you!

<No response>



by Jun Yang

Jun Yang, born and raised in Seoul, South Korea, has made San Francisco his home for the past 13 years. A self-taught artist, he uses a broad range of techniques and materials in his work, creating art pieces in a variety of sizes and locations, from intimate canvases to full-scale murals. The City inspires Jun and his art through its cultural diversity, celebrated urban landscape, and natural beauty, as well as the socially inclusive culture which provides support and protection.

www.junyangart.com
IG: @junyarts

My first memory that comes up about growing up in Seoul is that I was bullied a lot and physically punished by teachers. I was hiding myself because I was so ashamed of who I was, and scared of rejection and abandonment. I was not allowed to be affectionate to my buddies. In school, my teachers told me "Don't be gay." Don't be like this and that. It wasn't cool to express affection. I tried to fit in but I never felt like I belong.

As a gay teenager, I faced many physical attacks, intolerance, bullying and cruelty. I attempted suicide several times, causing serious bone fractures, muscle and tissue damage in my body. I had to leave my home country to survive. I moved to Europe and now I live in San Francisco. I came to San Francisco in 2010 and have felt comfortable being accepted. I truly feel that I belong to this city.

I worried about being judged by people. But I wanted to change my life and challenge myself. Being vulnerable was a painful challenge for me. I never thought that I could be able to be open and honest to others, but the more I became vulnerable and honest about myself, I felt stronger. The love and support from my chosen family and LGBTQIA communities really helped me to find my own voice. It was reflected in "Hold You Tightly," my solo show in June 2022 at Scholmer Haus, a queer gallery in the Castro. I wanted to portray my struggles and life journey through queer portraits and queer bodies.

In Korea I was living and experiencing life in a body that was always trying to fit heteronormative expectations. Through my art-making process, I feel empowered and proud of being who I am. I stopped trying to fit in and I feel welcome here. I'm able to express myself 100% without having any fear of being judged or criticized. This is what the City has provided for me.

Now I want to give it back with my art, my visual love letter to the world from San Francisco. I want to create a series of queer portraits to show my gratitude and the feelings of being protected and inspired by LGBTQ+ communities in the Bay, while also sharing my life story and the things that represent who I am in here.

Self expression is my power. I feel energized and motivated when I paint these queer figures. I use my life journey as a muse for my art, but queer and trans people really inspire me. I see so many confident and beautiful queer and trans people on social media. However we only see their beautiful photos. We don't see their pain, traumas and transitions. They have to go through so much shit in their lives.

I still hear tragic stories about LGBTQ teens ending their lives after being bullied and discriminated. Even in the US, LGBTQ teens are four times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual teenagers. I saw a news story that a majority of trans people killed in the US are black and Latinx women. I want my art to be a tool for healing and to bring hope to people, as well as to inspire their parents.

I want my paintings to resonate and represent the language of queer voices. Being a queer and Asian immigrant artist I have been questioning my place in this art world and how people think about me. My art challenges the inflexible rules set by heteronormative art world. Our bodies are like containers — they contains good and bad emotions, but it's always hard to unlearn and get rid of negative emotions. Representation matters, queer bodies matter.

Growing up in Korea I never felt self-worth nor practiced self-love. San Francisco provided a home for me and now I feel safe and protected to share my love with the world. Through making my art, I feel empowered to fully embrace who I am. My unique story of trauma, isolation and healing myself through my art is building bridges between queer and immigrant communities. My art is a love letter to the LGBTQIA+ and immigrant community. Beyond all physical and psychological borders, San Francisco sends you love.



This work explores the fluid nature of queerness. I wanted to experiment with the piece to see how the bold lines capture the energy and movement of these figures with a sense of unbridled freedom and self-expression. These figures are fearless and celebrating their identities. Through them, I want to celebrate the diversity and beauty of the queer community.



This self-portrait represents my life journey as a Korean immigrant. Also exploring and celebrating my intersecting identities by wrapping my face with the 보자기 Bojagi (Korean traditional wrapping cloth). Using myself as a reference, it really

allows me to express myself freely. Living in this social media and cell phone obsession era, our selfies lead to a homogenization of images and make it harder for individuals to stand out. I want to create more unique self portraits and share my stories through my art. I think self portraits are a powerful form of self-expression and I want to inspire other immigrants and queer communities.



If there's an eraser in my head, I would want to erase all my scars and pains. If I erase it over and over again and if I keep erasing it, my head will become a blank canvas. Then I can paint beautiful

memories. I want to erase my old self who lived life with lies. In San Francisco, I no longer lie to myself. I became an artist. An artist has to express pain through art, so let's draw our pain. Let's help each other and heal our traumas through art. San Francisco protects and cares for artists and refugees. Let's work together and work harder to heal 💖



David

by Tho Vong

It was early September 2007, and SUMMER had *finally* come to San Francisco. Below me, blocks from the Castro, “Gay Mecca of the World,” the “J-Church” and “N-Judah” trains dive in and out of the underground station. Schools of gay men swim out on their way to the surrounding gyms or flirting with each other as they walk their dogs.

Laughter and playful banter drift up to the window as I sit in a room at Maitri Hospice by David’s hospital bed. The room was painted a soft butter yellow and made as homelike as possible. A few vases filled with flowers past their prime crowded the end of a tray table.

A bouquet of Gerbera daisies is on my lap with bright yellow, white, pink, and red faces. I chose them for their upright cheeriness. Later, I found out they represented Innocence, Purity, Friendship, and Classic Beauty.

David was all of that, or at least at his best, he was. He came to me five years prior for counseling. I was completing my training in Hakomi mindful somatic psychotherapy and in preparation for ordination with the Association for the Integration of the Whole Person, I was taking practice clients at low or no fee. Recently diagnosed with HIV, David was looking for a counselor who was gay, a person of color, and ideally HIV positive for support. *I fit the bill.*

David came from a Mexican-American Southern Baptist family. His father was the town pastor – “the fire-and-brimstone type,” he said. Being a soft-spoken boy, his father would berate him for being a “pansy,” terrorizing him with whippings and sermons about homosexuals being “SICK ABOMINATIONS,” *Cursed to Burn in Hell For Eternity.*

Worst was his *threat* that anyone in the family who was founded to be a *HOMOSEXUAL* would be turned out. In the Mexican-American culture, family is everything; to have your family disown you... you might as well be dead.

When David was old enough, he fled and excommunicated his family without telling them why. Better to leave than to be banished, he shared. But no matter how far he ran, his father’s curses haunted him.

He was possessed by the belief that he was intrinsically evil for being gay. And that HIV was God’s punishment for that Sin. Twin demons of Shame and Low Self-Esteem drove him down a spiral of increasing drug use, stealing, lying, and riskier and riskier sex, making him vulnerable to contracting HIV.

As if fulfilling a prophecy, David sacrificed himself upon the altar of hatred through self-abasement, like a twisted offering to his father, to appease him, for his approval... For his LOVE.

I could not help David. From the way the tracks were laid, it was easy to predict where his train would end.

I could not help him switch tracks.

I could not exorcise the hateful homophobic beliefs that his father had beaten into him.

None of the tools that I learned from my training could unravel the intricate Gordian knot of David’s emotional pain, addictive behaviors, and psychological and spiritual malaise.

Our work was at a stall, and though I gave him referrals, he disappeared and didn’t contact any of them. My mentors assured me that David would be a difficult case for even a highly seasoned counselor. That did not assuage my guilt in letting him down.

Years slid by, and I am back in David’s room at Maitri Hospice. The train had come to the end of the line. His boyish handsome face had hollowed. His once smooth complexion is finely wrinkled like dried onion skin. His breath rattles like dried hominy in the empty gourd of his gaunt body. Having burned his bridges, David was penniless, houseless, and with few friends.

The nurse reported that even up to his sharp decline two days ago, David was frantically occupied with finding a job to pay back all the money he owed. From our time together, I knew that David was terrified of dying because of his fear of burning in Hell for being gay. Though I still didn’t know much about fundamentalist Christian theology, I had gained a more intimate knowledge of pain and suffering in the last year and a half.

In March 2006, I was taken to the emergency room and put into a medically-induced coma to calm down a life-threatening arrhythmia from a congenital heart condition that I didn't know I had. While in the coma, I had a near-death experience.

After my consciousness winked into darkness, like an old TV screen being turned off, I found myself floating in a glowing white space, surrounded by this All-Knowing-Presence. My life flashed before me, as stark as a skeleton on an x-ray. I could not hide from myself or this Presence.

Every thought, every triumph, every failure, every secret, every regret, every joy, every anxiety, every shame, every Sin was exposed. The Presence took all of me in. I was savored like fine wine, as overflowing Love washed through me and cleansed my Soul.

I felt Peace at last. I can finally rest. I am Home.

Though I had the "choice" to stay, I was firmly nudged to return because I had some tasks to complete. When I woke up, my real training to become a minister began.

First lesson: Having to let go of my attachment to ideals about my body when I had a cardiac defibrillator implanted into my chest – a challenge for a former professional dancer.

Feeling the slight bulge under the skin of my chest was a constant reminder of the fragility of life. Random attacks of arrhythmias followed by painful shocks and multiple

hospitalizations reminded me of the thin edge between life and death.

I was learning that *Grace* and *Compassion* are grown from a CRUCIBLE of Suffering. I also learned the Distinction between Fearing the Dying Process, and DYING itself. Having been on the other side, I knew that death was not a problem; it was the physical process of dying that was frightening.

Sitting by David's side, I realized what was missing in my previous work with him. It wasn't a lack of tools or skill or a lack of will and commitment from David to heal and grow.

He did not need to be fixed, he *needed* to be fully seen and accepted. To be taken in and LOVED. Only from that base was there any possibility of Redemption.

With that understanding, I placed my hand on David's thin chest and whispered about my near-death experience in his ear. I spoke of my self-exposure and the response of immense love and peace that I felt on the other side and the importance of forgiveness for oneself.

I told him I loved him, and it was okay to let go. I kissed his forehead as I smoothed down his thin but still glossy hair as I said goodbye and left.

Early the next morning, I received a voice message from the on-call hospice nurse letting me know that David died a few hours after I left.

I hoped what I shared eased his fears as he left this world.



G A P A THEATRE

For workshops and performances:

 GAPAtheatre

Daddy Issues

by Kenji Oshima

On my bed, on all fours, was a blind-folded, butt-naked, muscle-bound, Canadian-Born-Chinese “boy” UCB senior getting the spanking he deserved.

Well, actually, the one he asked for.

This daddy was in heaven.

No kissing, no spit, no penetration; just a good old-fashioned hand spanking. The act clearly an orgasmic release for *him*... without all the mess of fluids.

Afterwards, still naked, laying back in my bed with his hot arms crossed behind his head and *fully* at ease in his stunning beauty he confessed, “Everyone thinks I’m an asshole...”

I replied, “You’re hot and privileged... people talk shit about the beautiful... they’re *intimidated*.”

Far from an asshole, he was intelligent, polite, a little shy, and said that returning to his home country, sans a job, would be a shit show... somewhere in there was a *real* patriarchal Asian dad.

I’ve noticed that as the supplier of hot fun to an occasional “boy,” and the wise man who listens to my clients, tricks, friends, godson’s, and mentee’s needs, complaints, and concerns – offering support, care, and kindness, I have become, in short... *daddy*.

The genesis for this topic surfaced during a GAPA Theatre show, two of the younger guys started calling us older guys... “Daddy.”

“Flirting” one of them said.

It was a way to let off some steam by safely teasing us (they knew we’d be appropriate) and I found myself being the wise older guy, with good advice, on more than one occasion.

When I was young and pretty? I was *hideous*. Screwing whoever I wanted, (nothin’ but white people as that’s all there was in 1985 gay Boston). I didn’t see *my* brown almond eyes in anyone but *me*. Thank you, racism, for zero self-esteem.

To my younger gay boy self... oh *hell*, I’d *fuck* you.

Vanishing from so many lustful eyes, has been the hard part (pun intended) of becoming grizzled – the looks I didn’t think I had are *fading* and the mirror can be jarring.

Now, I’m the troll I loathed. The men I thought were hot when I was 25... weren’t ... younger... men. I’m stuck in the puzzle of wanting love, yet lusting for younger guys.

When I was a boy? I *fucked* like a boy – not a lot of finesse but a whole lotta cum. Now that I’m a man I lead with my brain... and not with my dick.

Growing into the wisdom of aging is what it means to be a “daddy” in all of my life. Being a daddy isn’t just about fucking... it can be... but it’s about wisdom, kindness, and mentoring.

Being a daddy is about being gentle and helpful, kind and compassionate. It’s about figurative and real spanking – setting limits, guiding, sometimes swaddling, and being vulnerable.

Being a daddy is about attitude – it’s not about stoicism but more about maturity.

It’s about giving back.

I teach... I lead... I love.

I guess you’d call it... *paternal instinct*.

Accepting my “daddiness” is about welcoming all of me with my Dorian Gray internalized agism *decaying* in the closet (baby gays you’ll have to Google Dorian), while I “endeavor to grow into loving myself for *all of who I am*.”

Not some twisted version of my former youth self.

Embracing my mixed-race-middle-aged-queer-Asian-self with a salt and pepper beard, a dad bod and the creaks, pains, and lines of age means loving that I’ve made it this far... with the scars to prove it.



WHEN I WAS A BOY



NOW THAT I'M A MAN

Who doesn’t want a daddy ‘cause let’s face it, being human can really *suck*... first noble truth anyone?

What *about* Daddy Issues????

Why is age-play so *loaded*?

What makes us so *drawn* to being “*bad*”?

Even so, as my gay therapist puts it... “We *all* have daddy *issues*.”

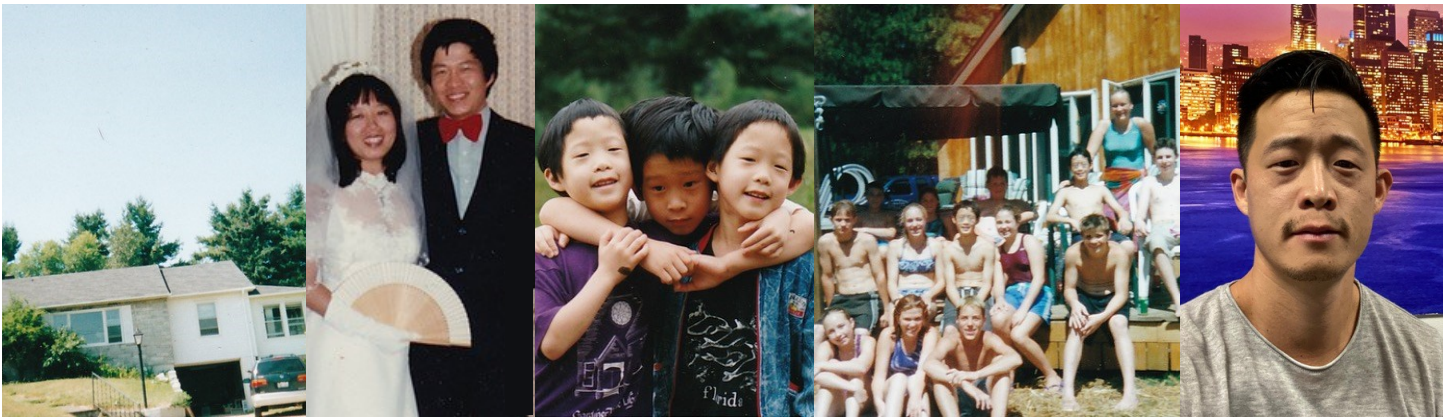
So...

... in closing

... I just gotta say

[wink]

... *Who’s your daddy?*



What Connection Means to Me

by Kevin Jeng

I was born in a small college town in Upstate New York called Potsdam. My parents both immigrated to Potsdam from Taiwan. My mom taught Chinese at university. My dad was a research chemist. They met in Potsdam and soon got married and started raising a family of three boys. We were one of the only Asian families that lived in the small college community.

I grew up in a two-story house with an acre of land and a huge forest behind our backyard. I have fond memories as a little kid exploring the outdoors with my brothers. We would climb the huge trees located in our back yard. We would explore the forests and stumble upon rivers of water where we would build our own waterslides and rapids. During the winter time, it snowed a lot. We would build snow forts that spanned the entire front yard. We would connect our individual forts with snow tunnels.

I also have fond memories playing with our friends. We would have sleepovers at our friends' places. We would play soccer, run outside, then come indoors and watch TV and play video games together. As teenagers, I remember we found a scrambled tv channel that showed adult content. As teenagers going through puberty, it was like having struck a gold mine.

One of our family rituals was to go to the local mall to shop and eat. I don't remember much about our experiences to the mall. I do remember when I was around ten or eleven, as we were walking through the mall, suddenly from across the aisle I saw two white teenage girls walking towards my twin brother and me. They began to giggle and point at our eyes because of how slanted they looked. I didn't realize at first what was happening, but once I realized they were mocking us, it was humiliating.

That was the first time in my life where I felt different and felt ashamed. As a kid being exposed to that for the first time, I didn't know how to process it. I shoved it away and didn't want to look at it because it was very painful. I think that experience began the process of evaluating how my Asian-ness didn't fit in with what I saw around me. The movies and television shows that I saw all featured very

attractive white men and women. The porn that I ended up seeing as a teenager all featured attractive white men and women. I quickly realized that I wanted to be white. I didn't want to feel the pain of being Asian. So I tried to fit in by pretending to be more white, whatever that means. If I purposely didn't acknowledge my Asian-ness, then maybe others wouldn't see it as well. It was naïve, but at the time it was an effective coping mechanism.

Under these circumstances, I began to develop a guard. As a teenager and into adulthood, I realized I don't like being the center of attention. When folks ask me questions about myself, I get an instinctual uncomfortable feeling in my stomach. Why are you looking at me? I don't want to be seen. I try to first ask questions and deflect attention away from me. It is hard for me to feel psychologically safe in environments where there are a lot of white folks. It has nothing to do with the specific people in the room. It has everything to do with me wanting to run away from my Asian-ness.

As an adult, I have started the process of recognizing and confronting the shame that I've carried with me into adulthood. Connecting with my Asian-ness has been uncomfortable. The process of coming in contact with my pain has also helped me to heal. When I acknowledge my Asian-ness and love myself for it, I feel a sense of groundedness and love that I've never felt before. For me, that pain I felt as a child slowly transforms into love.

I also feel compassionate for my childhood self who had to endure the conditions growing up of feeling less than and less worthy. I can begin to craft a new narrative where I know and feel my Asian-ness as worthy. While the walls which I've put up to protect myself still exist, if I can connect with my inherent worthiness, those walls don't seem as necessary anymore. More recently, one of the most refreshing experiences I've noticed is having the desire to be seen. Not to be ogled or objectified, but to let folks see me without fear of judgement. It has been a slightly terrifying and gratifying experience.

As I write this piece, I wonder how many other folks have had similar experiences to me. Who else has been running away from aspects of themselves that they don't

love? Who else has endured situations where they feel like they don't fit? Rather than choosing to confront the pain, who else has chosen to numb the pain by ignoring it and casting it aside?

When I was asked me to write a piece about connection, I instinctively agreed because this topic resonates a lot with me. For me, I believe that connection is one of our primary sources of well-being. When we can learn to connect with ourselves, connect with others, and connect with the beauty in this world, we experience a harmony and resonance with life. We experience peace and joy.

In our society which focuses so much on hyper-individualism and measures of productivity or financial success, I wonder why does our society miss out on the value of connection and community? I have been taught to study hard and find a good paying job. The more money you make the better. What about the values of helping others and being kind? Of caring for those who are suffering? Of caring for yourself when you are suffering? My hope is that as a society, we can begin to cultivate a new value system of connection... with ourselves, with each other, and with the beauty in this world.

I'll end by sharing a quote from Brene Brown's *Atlas of the Heart* that really resonates with me. In it she writes, "Our connection with others can only be as deep as our connection with ourselves. If I don't know and understand who I am and what I need, want, and believe, I can't share myself with you."

My hope is that collectively we can learn how to continually reconnect with ourselves, to love the parts of ourselves that have been prior sources of pain, and then to take that love and connect deeply with others without fear of judgment or shame. How as an adult I would love to once again run around like a little kid playing with my friends... not a care in the world and in harmony with my friends, with nature, and with myself. That is the aspiration that I'll hold for myself and for our society.

Contributors

Howard Chan (he/him) is the current Chair of GAPA.

As a member of GAPA Theatre's Hearts & Minds cohort in 2022, his piece was his first experience writing and performing the written word on stage. Locally, he has sung with the Golden Gate Men's Chorus and the GAPA Men's Chorus. Prior to this, he has dabbled with playing the piano and violin, as well as conducting local orchestras. When he has free time, you can find him making sketches of inanimate objects.

Kevin Jeng feels like describing himself to an audience feels awkward and limiting. He wonders what makes up the essence of who we are after all? Kevin hopes the reader will gain more insight into what kind of person he is through the piece that he's written. He thanks GAPA for letting him write a piece about connection.

Kenji Oshima is an irreverent, creative, gimpy, spiritual geek who earns a living as a success coach, dharma teacher, and spiritual director; with a history as an activist, artist and member of GAPA Theatre thrilled to be back in Lavender Godzilla.

Thọ ('TAH') Vong had his first spiritual experience floating in a lagoon next to a refugee camp at age four after escaping Vietnam. His unfolding relationship with the Divine has led him through many identities: community organizer, dancer, Broadway chorus boy, massage therapist, minister, and future clinical psychologist. Writing helps him find the thread that runs through his life.

Ben Yuen has enjoyed acting for many years, telling other peoples' stories, but is still new to telling his own! He has one previous piece with GAPA Theatre about his and his boyfriend's experience during lockdown called *Distancing Together*. A member of GAPA Theatre's Hearts & Minds cohort in 2022, he's been inspired by all the fabulous writers and excited to hear all the wonderful stories.



GAPA envisions a powerful queer and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander (QTAPI) community that is seen, heard and celebrated. Our mission is to unite our families and allies to build a community through advocacy, inclusion and love.

GAPA
P.O Box 14315
San Francisco, CA 94114

For organizational information
and to sign up for updates, visit:
www.gapa.org

LAVENDER Godzilla

Lavender Godzilla is GAPA's voice and is printed for the benefit of its members and supporters. The appearance of the name, photograph or likeness of any person or organization is not intended in any way to indicate the sexual orientation of the person or organization.

Lavender Godzilla invites submissions of unsolicited manuscripts and materials. Text submissions should be typed and emailed to: news@gapa.org. Written article length can be up to 1000-1500 words.

Publication of submitted material is at the discretion of the Editorial Committee. The Editorial Committee also reserves the right to

edit works for length and sizing concerns. All other non-text submissions should be arranged separately with the Editors. Submission deadline is 30 days before publication. Note: Anonymous works without contact info (email, phone) will not be considered for publication.

Permission to reprint as a courtesy unless otherwise stated. Credit to sources is greatly appreciated. Opinions expressed are those of the contributors and are not presented as the views of Lavender Godzilla, its editors, or GAPA.

When writing letters to the Editor or any letters regarding a specific article/column, please cite the source(s). Your name, address and phone number(s) must accompany your letter. You may, however, ask the editor to withhold your name and address from being printed.

Editor: Dino Duazo