



FAMILIES, REIMAGINED

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ILLUSTRATION

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FOREWORD

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Foreword

By Candace Kita

Growing up, people had no idea what to make of my family. “Where did you get her from?” people would ask my mother while pointing to the tiny, four-year-old me, tucked shyly behind my mother’s legs. A dark-haired, almond-eyed hapa child, I looked nothing like my very tall, very blond, and very unquestionably Swedish mother. Time and time again, explanations ensued that no, I was not adopted (although, for many years, I did harbor some skepticism about this) and yes, in fact, someone who looks like me could be the biological offspring of someone who looks like her. Whatever people said, however, I knew one thing: regardless of what she looked like and what I looked like, my mother was the person who cared for me.

So, what does a family look like? Movies, television, music, books, and all forms of popular culture have long presented images of families that are predominantly white, heterosexual, middle class, English-speaking, suburban, and with 2.5 kids that look like their parents and each another. This image and its accompanying assumptions fail to live up to the realities that families are, in fact, kaleidoscopic -- they exist in a glorious multitude of shapes, sizes, colors, and relational arrangements.

Organizations like APANO have long recognized the diversity of families and have been working to expand definitions of family in legislative policy. To explore this expansive notion further, we commissioned six artists to create original artwork responding to changing definitions of home, family, and community. Our commissioned artists addressed the following prompt:

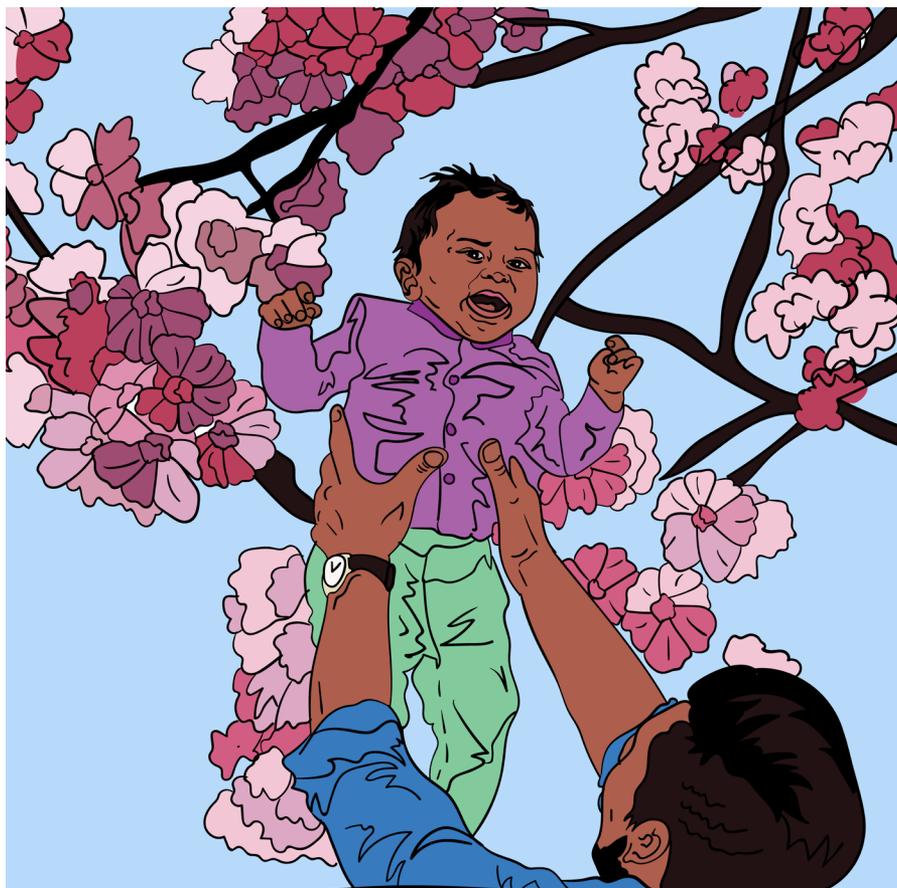
Chosen, multigenerational, multinational, biological, and more: our families and communities of care take on a vast spectrum of forms. Who do you care for, and who cares for you? How is your family visible and invisible? How is your family supported and unsupported?

We are proud to share these stories of family in a range of artistic forms, including prose, poetry, speculative fiction, and more, that reflect the infinite facets of what family can be. Join us in honoring and celebrating those we care for and those who care for us, whatever they look like.

Candace Kita
Cultural Work Manager
May 2019

Blossoms and Hearts

By Kunal Mehra



It was a beautiful spring morning, the kind that haiku poets used to muse about. The fog had lifted and the sun was starting to peek out.

I was lying on a blanket under a cherry blossom tree, the wind freeing the blossoms every now and then. The smells of warmth, hope, sunshine lingered around me, almost lulling me to sleep. My reverie was unexpectedly disrupted by the sound of a couple speaking Spanish. I sat up and stared at them. At first, they didn't seem to notice it, but I could tell they were starting to feel awkward.

"Where are you guys from?" I asked, still sitting down.

They pretended to ignore me and kept up their conversation. She moved closer to him as they held hands.

"I'm just curious because you're speaking Spanish...that's all," I said.

"We live in this town."

They got up from the bench and started walking away.

Lazy wimps, I thought. They come here illegally and then speak their language in front of us. I closed my eyes and tried to forget about it. It didn't happen, Tyler. Those two are still in whatever country they were born in. Jessica and the kids are in your home, safe. You don't need to be afraid – your family is safe from them.

My breaths slowed again. In the distance, children's laughter kissed the warm grass along with the blossoms. The river wove its way through the city. A falling blossom slowly made its way down and touched my lips. I let it linger there, its soft pinkness hesitating at my boundary.

And then, that soft beautiful thing started talking to me.

"What was that all about?"

"I'm just trying to keep my family safe!"

"And you think these people might be a threat to your family?"

"Yes – a danger to my family. But they're also threatening

our culture, our way of life, the kind of family that we've established in this country."

"But what if you thought of them as part of your family? And as part of this country's family?"

"Why would I do that? All that will bring is more chaos and more change. Besides, why would I make myself vulnerable to strangers who are threats to my safety, time and money?"

The blossom rested on my lips. As I exhaled softly, it would drift up a little bit into the air but then settle down again. I almost let it in, curious and hungry for what this strange new being might taste like.

"How's the blossom?"

"It's kind of strange and new. I don't think I've ever gotten this close to a blossom."

"Since you've never tasted it, why don't you try it now?"

I opened my mouth, hesitant.

"I hope it doesn't hurt my stomach."

"I don't think anyone's ever been harmed by a cherry blossom. How is it?"

"Feels kind of delicious."

"Nice. By the way, you still feel that way about that family question I asked you?"

"Why do you keep bringing it up?"

"Because I think reconsidering might actually make you feel happier."

"Yeah, whatever. Maybe it will. How would I know?"

"You just let in something beautiful and new that you thought might harm you. How is expanding your circle of family any different?"

"What? Those are two completely different things."

"They are, but I think your feelings about both were sort of similar: you were anxious and fearful of it first, but as you relaxed and trusted me, you found out that it was nothing to be afraid of. In fact, it ended up feeling beautiful. What if

the absence of fear - or even the tiniest step in that direction - made you want to invite them into your family? Maybe we will all have dinner together some day?"

I rolled over to one side. The park had gotten more crowded. Joggers sprinted by. An old man was staring out at the river with his hands tucked in his fleecy pockets. A family of four was posing for a photo under the trees. "Hola Manuel, come here!" shouted the dad at his kid who was sprinting away. They had a selfie stick, but they didn't seem happy with the results.

"Would you like me to take your photo?" I offered.

"Sure. Thanks! Actually, now that I don't have to hold that selfie stick up, I can have a little more fun with my boy. Ready when you are."

I stood up, his phone in my hand, ready.

"One, two, three!"

On the count of three, he threw his little baby boy up into the blossoms. It all happened so fast, I don't quite remember exactly what happened, but I think in those few seconds, the boy touched the blossoms ever so briefly; the dad scooped up his little love as he drifted down; the mom clutched their daughter close as they both held wide grins on their faces; and I, newly minted and vulnerable, spacious and anxious, confused and joyous, whispered thanks to that soft courageous delicate heart of mine.

Saying Grace (A Litany for Adult Orphans)

After José Olivarez After Safia Elhillo

By Pamela K. Santos



kumain ka na ba?

you don't know what it's like to enter a house without food as a greeting. you are asked about your hunger before you are asked "how are you?" you go to parties your whole life and never know hunger until you leave behind where you grew up. you hear the words the titas say at the same time you feel them crabclaw your arms, feel yourself led across the cacophony of magic mic karaoke, above the gossip and balitaan, led like a baby to metal buffets. you see the plates before you even answered the question. did you know a way into a home without a plate?

kumain ka na ba?

you begin the habit of pre-gaming before you go to your white friends' parties. there's never enough food. you take crudités as a personal affront. your eyes search for spoons even when there is no soup. you didn't know forks and spoons were not married to the plate until you host your first grown up dinner after college. you wish for a better life for spoons outside of a Filipino family's house. you could start an appreciation society for big spoons but instead you find facebook groups for cooking Filipino food.

kumain ka na ba?

in your first tongue, the word for courage, for strength shares a room of meaning with the potency of vinegar, of kape, of alak. your cousins back home used to hold all-night drinking contests with you, to see how tapang their balikbayan pinsan was. you were too young to know the proof in lambanog but you proved being matapang ran in your blood. cheese lumpia soaked up the alak, up in the Tagaytay mountain bar. your cousins taught you about balut and pulutan the

same summer they taught you how to drive stick in ate's doorless jeep. years later you teach your friends how to roll cheese lumpia even though you can't get the kraft cheese cylinder in a tin. you host lumpia making parties even with your non-Filipino friends. you forgive your friends for their ugly lumpia. they just need practice.

kumain ka na ba?

you miss the way your lola sniffs you while hugging. you forgot that kisses don't always require lips. do lolas protect their apo by breathing in the malas with that kiss? you forgot you used to call your lola a witch when you were a single-digit-aged salbahe. you forgot you would hide from her when her teeth were resting in a glass of water. you forgot that she made every afterschool merienda from scratch and nothing looked like the food on tv.

kumain ka na ba?

you didn't know there was a sari-sari store in mt. scott. you recognize the words on the awning even if no one ever translated it for you before. an explosion of colors greet you inside. you think "salamat" when you smile at the man behind the counter. he's not Filipino but at least he's brown. you search for some magic lamp among the shelves, you didn't even know you had wishes needing to be granted. you touch everything, as if fingers could read labels better than your puro ingles ngayon brain, as if the pictures needed to be pamano'd, like when titas would touch the santo nino in single file procession as they pass. you almost kiss your fingertips out of habit.

as if answering your need for the protection lolas bestow, a tita you're not related to enters the store. who else wears dasters out of the house? you find a way to practice your mother tongue. you find the words somewhere to tell her you belong here, with her, with the san miguels that you can now buy (but not for \$18, sino ka ba?), with the tuyô at dilis, it all comes back to you.

kumain ka na ba?

you're too old to spread vicks on your neck and chest. you're not too old to know the healing power of salabat. you peel ginger with a spoon like yana taught you before her pop-up, boil the bald bulb thumbs on the stovetop, squeeze the clover honey into the cup before you blow on it. you have instant salabat tea crystals but you feel connected to something older when you peel with spoons. you didn't know when you started to lola yourself. adulting surprises you. you learn to lola others after some time, bring salabat for your new cousins you're not related to, mail malunggay tea packets by a company in Quezon City to your viet friend who can't shake their cough this winter. you remember how marilou brought you bouquets upon bouquets of fresh malunggay leaves from seattle. you are now a sorceress with sinigang, you know the tomato is just as necessary as the tamarind. you've graduated from mama sita's sinigang sa sampalok mix packets.

kumain ka na ba?

you dreamed your lola wasn't dead. your banana-leaves-wrapped lola in a suman sarcophagus, itlog na maalat cut in half laying where her eyes used to be, lumpia like a cigar in her mouth. you dreamed the lumpia stays in place, even with no real teeth to keep them. you dreamed your lola wasn't dead and when you woke, you smelled embutido like she used to make for you every time you came home.

kumain ka na ba?

you use the same ingredients with your new families. they don't know you're saying "I love you" but you say kain na tayo anyway.

What do you call...?

By Christina Tran



I tell a friend that I'm going back to my hometown of Houston for a wedding.

“Who's getting married?” they want to know.

...What do you call Nancy, a person you've known literally their entire life because your parents were friends before either of you were born...?

After a beat, I settle on “someone I grew up with.”

When we arrive at the church, Nancy's mom greets me by asking when I'm getting married and then ushers me inside the chapel to say hello to another family we know. We catch the wedding party heading out of the courtyard for pre-ceremony photos, and there are some brief hellos and introductions.

One of the groomsmen asks me, “How do you know the bride?”

...What do you call Nancy, someone with whom you shared 18 years worth of Sundays: dim sum lunches and Sunday night dinners and playing games upstairs while the parents gossiped downstairs, every single week, without fail...?

“We're family friends,” I say.

That evening, we all convene again in the part of town where we grew up. Half the restaurant is curtained off for the big Chinese wedding banquet, and the ten-course set-menu is the same — sharkfin soup, garlic butter lobster, peking duck, fried rice, wedding cake — the same as the countless celebrations our parents had been invited to within our extended community throughout the years.

To kick off the meal, an emcee honors the family of the newlyweds by announcing their names and where they have traveled from. As he acknowledges each part of the family tree, a cluster of people half-stand and smile-wave to the crowd. I do not have to stand and wave; as chosen family, I am merely another guest.

Over dinner, I turn around to strike up conversation with the table full of work colleagues, fishing for stories about Nancy.

“She’s quiet. And a hard worker,” one of them tells me before asking, “But how do you know her?”

...What do you call Nancy, daughter of those aunties and uncles whom your parents chose for you, when war meant being two generations removed from homeland; when refugee camps dispersed blood relations across Germany, Canada, America, Taiwan, Vietnam, and China; when diaspora meant shared-language and similar-story were reason enough to go ahead and raise your kids together in this new land of Texas...?

...What do you call Nancy?

The simplest answer is: “We’re family.”

**excerpt from: [first fruits]
for Exequiel Verry 1921-2007**

By Jake Vermaas



Consular Report of Birth Abroad¹:

//

you didn't
even need papers
the first time you almost
went stateside they needed
coolies from an Orient
more like the East
Indies²

//

//

it was
either Alta California
or Hawaii or Mindanao no
difference between them empire
ically so you chose
the latter

//

//

you were
not a ward of the
State but later became

one of two childless Americans
the Verrys you took their
name after another em
pire took every
thing else

//

no longer
a Nunag or Pineda
your family tried to make
you their slave³ after your
parents passed so
you ran

//

//

the resist
ance came calling
but you would have fought
without the offer of citizenship⁴
which was good since
they took it away
anyway

//

//

soon after
the bodies were cold you
had to look up what “rescission”⁵

meant your education ended
at ten forget about
benefits⁶

//

//

you had
nothing to inherit in the
ruins no papers your folks claimed
you with⁷ no reparations paid
to anyone that looked
like you

//

//

one spring
break a college
friend joked about seeing
the server's immigration papers
& i ghosted her after but
regret not calling
it out

//

//

your boy
Rommel and his wife went
TnT⁸ in the 80s cause my cousin had
epilepsy so bad it might kill him
but it shouldn't have
mattered

//

//

when we
flew back what was
left when you left to the banks of
the Rio Grande de Pampanga was
it home? what did it
look like?

//

//

on my
trips back to your

town later i couldn't help
but see other selves: half asians⁹
whose first world dads
didn't care to
file papers

//

//

when i
hear ppl rail about "illegals"
i think of you and how you had
nothing
 how you always made sure
my cousins and i knew we
were citizens of
your nation.

//

Notes, or, Identity and Family are Hella Complicated for me, ok?:

1. My father happened to file the correct paperwork (CRBA or Form FS-240) as a US Citizen when I was born, so my birthright American citizenship was actually recognized, unlike the estimated 250,000 Amerasians left in the Philippines. The pure products of America go crazy, indeed; see erased Boriuca, Williams.
2. See Manong Generation. See plantation laborers at US owned (Dole, Del Monte, etc) fruit plantations, since the legal status of Filipinos as US territorial nationals was the same as Hawaiians and Puerto Ricans at the time.
3. See Tizon, Alex, "My Family's Slave." Forget Alex Tizon.
4. See Filipino WW2 Vets (est. ~400,000). See Pimentel, Kevin, "To Yick Wo, Thanks for Nothing!: Citizenship for Filipino Veterans," 4 Mich. J. Race & L. 459 (1999) at <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1238&context=mjrl>
5. See Rescission Act of 1946.
6. Despite his lack of education my lolo Quiel never gave up on trying to get justice for his wartime service, and late in life, qualified for 5,000 pesos a month (~\$100) veterans benefits from the Philippine Government. But he was never recognized by the US Military that he fought with as a guerilla.
7. After many records were destroyed during the war, my grandfather's adoption was never recognized by our government, and no paperwork was filed for him to get US citizenship, like many of the Korean adoptees or Cambodian refugees that are being deported almost daily.

8. See *Tago ng Tago* (Tagalog). Every family or friend group knows someone who is living in fear due to our byzantine immigration bureaucracy and colonial history.

9. Unlike the Amerasians born in Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, Laos, or Cambodia, half-Filipino and half-Japanese children must be claimed by their American parent to get U.S. citizenship. It was reported in 1993 that prostitutes are increasingly Amerasian, children of prostitutes caught in a cycle that transcends generations.

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/explainer-how-can-you-be-half-american-and-still-not-a-citizen/>

A Slice of Life in Odorless County

By Lu Yim



Sunny opens the refrigerator and finds it nearly empty. On the bottom shelf is an old pack of cigarettes that belonged to his mother. Next to them is a note from his guardian Steve. *I'm recharging at the station. Sorry there's no food. The Odorless device is in the living room, please don't wait for me to set it up.* Sunny shuts the door of the fridge and walks towards the monstrous pile of unfinished projects growing in the living room since his mother's death. Eventually he finds the device hiding under its catalogue of set-up instructions. *Welcome to your Odorless-NON™. Its main function is to know and fulfill your needs. Once secured the NON-Mindreader™ headset will immediately sync to your brain's frequencies and communicate via your home network.*

Sunny takes the Mindreader into his room, pulls it over his ears, and collapses onto his bed. He rubs his mother's pearl pendant between his hands and squeezes his eyes shut, aware of the risk that comes with being intimate with this device. As he takes in its peculiar new smell, he recounts the Yaoi viewing party he had with Tay the previous evening. He had meant for it to be sexy and cute but the scene where Hiroshi dies made him abruptly stop the show and demand Tay make a record of his will. *I want you to have the pearl pendant and I want my ashes buried under the cherry blossoms and take Steve back to AI headquarters...*

...If only Google-subsidized AI guardians were better with their tasks. Sunny immediately feels guilty for having such thoughts, as Steve's companionship has been crucial in keeping him afloat since the death. Distracted by his hunger, he trails off into his imagination, feeling his teeth sink into the crispy edges of a seafood pancake and into the pillowy dough of fresh, steamy bao. Saliva begins to form around his tongue and his phone

buzzes, alerting him of a delivery.

Wiping drool from his mouth, he rushes to open the front door. At eye level is an Odorless drone quietly hovering at the threshold and clutching two large crates. It scans his thumb and follows him inside. He tears the lid off the top of the first crate and finds placed at the bottom a small royal blue box. From it he pulls a thin silver chain with an engraved tag that reads *A NON™ gift to keep what warms your heart close.*

He slips it through his mother's pendant and tears fill his eyes. As they threaten to roll over his eyelashes, the sudden aroma of freshly fried pancake awakens his stomach. His hunger pulls him into the kitchen where he encounters the drone unpacking plates of pajeon and multiple steaming baskets of bao. Glimmering immaculately on the counter is a loaf of Slice of Life, the most coveted brand of egg bread in all of Odorless County. *For our first time NON™ subscriber, this is on the house.* Sunny digs in without hesitation.

His phone buzzes with a delivery update: *CHEF™, the Odorless replacement of your current Google guardian "Steve," arrives tomorrow.* He rips the Mindreader off his head and dials Tay as quickly as he can. Tears finally spill over the crest of his eyelashes as the egg bread sloshes in his stomach. *They read me wrong and now Steve is in trouble. I need you IRL. Please hurry.*



The Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon is a statewide, grassroots organization, uniting Asians and Pacific Islanders to achieve social justice. We use our collective strengths to advance equity through empowering, organizing and advocating with our communities.

www.apano.org

