

To my parents:

It was clear to me at a very young age that you had unspoken expectations for me. I knew you both grew up without a free and available education, or a loving home with food prepared on the tables. I knew you both struggled financially to make ends meet. Mom, coming from the country, grandma and grandpa did not have the money to buy you new clothes, let alone feminine products. Dad, raised without a father by your side, you had to learn how to fend for yourself while grandma tried to find jobs. When you both came to America in your early twenties with two toddlers, you faced a great deal of change and hurdles that would test your character and lives forever. Despite not knowing how to speak English, you both not only managed, but thrived in midst of culture shock and societal norms.

Even as a child, I knew the struggles you faced and the daily sacrifices you both had to make in order to provide for your four children. Dad, you kept telling me to find a job that will bring comfort and security. You didn't want me to be like you, constantly stressed out about money and working 60 hours a week. Mom, you consistently reminded me that if I wanted to have a bright and easy-going future, I had to work hard now and find a man who will provide for me. You didn't want me to struggle like you did growing up. Those were your hopes for me, hopes that are understandable and expected because of what you had to go through.

But I, as a young woman and the youngest of your four children, have my own dreams and hopes that sometimes do not coincide with yours. Comfort, security, and money are all desires people have in life, but unfortunately, due to circumstances you and I do not have control over, I seek more than those things. I am a dreamer who has big dreams, dreams you will never be able to comprehend.

Did you know that I want to become a writer? Despite wanting to devote and invest my time and future into writing, the unspoken expectation you had for me was clear; I am supposed to find a career that brings stability and an income. That is why I chose to become a teacher instead.

Did you know that I love to travel to new destinations, while seeking adventure? It was clear to me that as Vietnamese girl, I was not allowed to go to places on my own nor travel with friends because our culture says girls should remain at home where they learn how to clean, cook, and do household chores. Understanding the unspoken expectation that you had for girls of our culture, I remained still and quiet at home while my two older brothers roamed free with whoever, whenever.

Did you know that I want to have a personal relationship with you both? Yes, that is also a dream I have. You are always stressed out about work, money, the house, and the next mortgage. The unspoken expectation is that I am a child and you are the adult. I am not to give you advice on how to live or how to be. At the dinner table, seeing you both stressed, I want to relieve you of your worries by reassuring you that I am also working hard to provide for you in the future days. Yet, I am hushed because what I have to say is not important or I do not know anything because I am a child. So, I sit at the table wondering how to draw close to you both without feeling the hurt inside. The child in me desires the love and affection of her busy parents.

The biggest dream I have remains unspoken. I will never be able to tell you because of our generational gap and differences in cultural norms and expectations. As someone born and raised in America, I naturally assimilated into the American culture. Never did I abandon my Vietnamese roots. I knew the heritage you have for the family will be the biggest factor of my life. Yet, I have never lived in Vietnam. I don't know what life is back there, but you do. You

told me at a very young age that if I were to ever date or marry, it would have to be with a Vietnamese man, who had a secure job and spoke the language. But I, living in America where there is freedom of choice, remained open-minded. I did not believe in setting my mind on Vietnamese man or being dependent on a man to bring me a comfortable future. No, my dream, mom and dad, is to marry someone who I can love with all that I have and am. I want to have a family that is not afraid of sharing their dreams to one another. I want to have a family where we can sit at the table together, knowing that we can laugh and talk freely. I want a man who loves me for me and can accept that I have big dreams.

You will never be able to understand because you did not have the same circumstances or opportunities that I did. My eyes have been open to many things, things you will never comprehend. Unfortunately, that is the way it is. I can try to enlighten you, but that would be considered rude. I can try to explain, but that would only bring misunderstandings and complications. As your daughter, I do not disregard what you have done in order for our family to live comfortably here in America. Back in Vietnam, I understand that you had nothing, while believing that your circumstances would never change. Yet, here you are in America with four children, a house with a backyard, cars to drive, and secured jobs. You both are role models and individuals who have displayed the act of persistence, diligence, hard-work, and determination. I will never think lightly of the sacrifices you made.

But I still cling onto the hope that one day, we will be able to settle our differences while addressing each other's expectations. The desire still burns within me that one day you will be able to see from my perspective what life is like for a daughter whose parents are immigrants. Though I know we won't agree on everything and our views will potentially clash, I hope and

pray that one day you will be able to see your daughter accomplish all her dreams. Then maybe you will see that there is more to life than comfort, security, and money.

Your appreciative and youngest daughter,

Be Linh

*(Vietnamese nickname)*