

Student to Student:
The Rose That Grew From Concrete

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아태법률센터와 UCLA 아시안 아메리칸 교육센터가 공동 출간하는 '언급되지 않은 시민 권리 이야기' 제작에 참여한 아이린 이(왼쪽)씨와 스튜어트 퀸 사무국장이 책에 대해 설명하고 있다. <박상혁 기자>

한인 등 소수계 영웅들 업적 학교에서 배운다

아태법률센터-UCLA 공동, 부교재로 출간
 4.29 폭동 취재 이경원 기자 기록등 생생히

한인을 포함한 소수계 이민자 커뮤니티의 진정한 리더들의 이야기를 담은 교재와 학생용 부교재가 출간된다.

아태법률센터(APALC)가 UCLA 아시안 아메리칸 교육센터(AASC)와 지난 5년간 공동 진행했던 '언급되지 않은 시민 권리 이야기' (Untold Civil Rights Stories)가 3월 장석 발간된 뒤 오는 4월부터 각 학교 내 부교재로 사용될 전망이다.

APALC의 스튜어트 퀸 사무국

장은 "아시안 커뮤니티의 1.5세 및 2세대들은 마틴 루터 킹, 시지 차베스, 넬슨 만델라가 누구인지, 커뮤니티를 위해 어떤 희생과 봉사했는지는 잘 알고 있지만 정작 자신이 속한 아시안 커뮤니티의 리더가 누구인지는 모른다"라며 "이러한 학생들에게 올바른 이민 역사와 우리의 리더는 누구 인지를 알리기 위해 교재를 만들게 됐다"고 설명했다.

이 책에는 4.29 폭동 등을 취재하며 한인 커뮤니티 목소리를 주류에 알리는 등 언론인으로 활약

한 이경원 기자의 업적을 담은 '인종간 다리 건설' (Building Bridges between Races), 학생의 눈으로 바라본 아시안 아메리칸 커뮤니티의 진정한 리더 등 아시안 커뮤니티의 이만생활 속에 나타난 주요 사건과 리더들을 자세히 소개하고 있다.

샌프란시스코 지역에서 성장, UCLA에 진학한 뒤 우연히 아시안 커뮤니티에 대해 관심을 갖게 됐다는 아이린 이(22)씨는 "고교 졸업 때까지 아시안 아메리칸에 대해 한 번도 배워본 적이 없었다"라며 "이번에 교재 준비 작업에 동참하면서 많은 사실을 알게 됐고 나와 같은 학생들이 더는 없기를 바라는 마음을 표출하게 됐다"고 말했다. <김진호 기자>

Student to Student: *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*

IRENE LEE

“Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Proving nature’s law is wrong, it learned to walk without having feet. Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air. Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else ever cared.”

–Tupac Shakur (1971-1996), *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*

What is a “hero”? If you asked me this question several years ago, my answer probably would have been something along the lines of “Superman” or “Wonder Woman” — someone powerful, important and fearless. Back then, heroes were the characters you saw in comic books or TV shows. They were different from everyone else, and the only way you could be one was if you had lived inside the TV screen or within the pages of a pulp-fiction book.

“When I turned on the television to watch my favorite show, flipped open a magazine or studied for my next U.S. history test, Asian American faces and names just weren’t there. I felt like the Asian American community was invisible in mainstream society.”

I was born and raised in a small city called Hercules, located in the eastern part of Northern California’s Bay Area. My parents, who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s, settled in California after they were married to raise my sister and me.

Like most first-generation immigrants, my parents were hard working, working-class, small business owners who went through a dozen different “mom and pop” stores by the time I entered high school. When I was younger, if I wasn’t helping out at their stores, I rarely saw them during the week. For as far back as I can remember (and until this day), they worked seven days a week, fourteen hours a day to pay for the bills, put food on the table, and sent my sister and me to school.

My hometown was really small, really diverse, and had a large immigrant community. All throughout elementary to high school, my friends, classmates, and teachers were of all different ethnic and racial backgrounds. In high school, our entire student body consisted of mostly Asian American, African American and Hispanic students with a smaller number of white and other ethnic groups.

But even as multicultural as my community was at the time, I often felt detached from my own ethnic and racial identity as a Korean American/Asian American student. Why? Well, being born a second-generation Korean American, I felt like my values, beliefs and interests were different than my parents, for example, who were raised in Korea. I spoke mostly English at school and at home. I didn’t like Korean food growing up (I know, insane, right?). And even though most of

my closest friends were Asian, I found myself trying to avoid things or situations — like the “rice rocket” Asian racer crews at school or watching the Korean video rentals my parents would bring home every week — that made me look or feel too stereotypically Asian.

I didn’t feel close to my Korean roots or Asian American identity — not because I was necessarily ashamed of it, but more because, back then, I didn’t feel like I had a history or community to look up to and be proud of. Growing up, I felt that Asian Americans and other ethnic minorities didn’t have much of a place in the media, in society or even in history textbooks. When I turned on the television to watch my favorite show, flipped open a magazine or studied for my next U.S. history test, Asian American faces and names just weren’t there. I felt like the Asian American community was invisible in mainstream society.

In elementary through high school, although I learned a lot about African American history through lessons on the Civil Rights Movements or the making of colonial America, none of my classes ever taught me about the histories of Chicanos/as, Latinos, American Indians or Asian Americans. In history class, I wrote plenty of study note cards and five-paragraph essays on influential leaders like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Franklin Roosevelt. But somehow, the names of figures like Fred Korematsu or Philip Vera Cruz never came up on an exam question or were even mentioned in assigned readings.

It wasn’t until I took classes during college in ethnic studies that I began learning a whole other part to U.S. history — a part that honors

the contributions of Asian Americans and other individuals of all different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

One of the first stories that I learned about in an Asian American Studies class was of the Vincent Chin case. I remember seeing a black and white photo of Lily Chin standing at the center of a stage, up at a podium, looking out into a crowd of people and images of her son's picture posted on picket signs behind her. This image immediately caught my attention because here was this first-generation Chinese woman who, at the time barely spoke English, but still found the courage to speak up against hate crimes and reach out to communities of all colors to come together and promote awareness. For me, this image spoke to the way people of color across the country share common experiences and can relate to one another, despite our different backgrounds or the misunderstandings we have about each other. Because when it boils down to sink or swim, do or die, all people of color in this country fight against the battle of being ignored and treated unequally.

After having learned about the experiences of more leaders like Fred Korematsu, Beulah Kwoh, or Philip Vera Cruz, the meaning of the word "hero" to me now has nothing to do with being different or more special than everyone else. Instead, it has everything to do with finding power in the most unlikely places and people.

In a society like ours, where everything from the color of your skin to the way you wear your hair could make you a subject of criticism, it isn't easy to find the courage to speak up for yourself and others. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that

faith is "taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." In that case, I would say then that a "hero" isn't someone who has super-human strength, a flapping cape or the ability to single-handedly rescue people from collapsing buildings. Heroes are not unlike you and me. They are ordinary people who make the extraordinary decision to stand up, against the odds, and fight for what they believe in and the people they love. The heroes of this book, like so many others throughout history, not only dared to dream up a better world, but also took action to find out what it would take to live in it.

So then, what makes an ordinary person a hero? It is the courage to jump in headfirst (while you don't always know where you'll end up), always remembering where you came from and never giving up on the hope for a better tomorrow.

Although each one of these heroes came from different walks of life, they share one simple but important thing in common. They were all just regular people who found the courage to fight for what they believed in. None of the heroes and civil rights leaders in this book came from a rich, famous, or even privileged background. Most of them were immigrants, part of the working class, and did not have the opportunity to pursue a higher education, like going to college. In a way, they were the underdogs of society, the anti-superhero. But still, these people were able to inspire national movements, overturn U.S. federal laws and make their issues, and the issues of others, known to the public.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF P.A. LAVA, 2008.

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Photo: Irene marching with fellow strikers at a Fall 2008 demonstration held in Long Beach, California, in protest of Proposition 8.

In spite of all the barriers they faced, these individuals refused to sit in silence while their voices, hardships and the people they loved were being ignored. And in their struggles, they not only fought for their own rights, but also crossed racial boundaries and reached out to different communities. For me, it is that kind of deep compassion for others and fiery determination that defines what a true hero is.

Remembering what the late rap artist and social activist Tupac Shakur said about the rose that grew from concrete, the failures and triumphs of these heroes remind me never to underestimate the power of my own voice. Like the rose, that defied nature’s laws by blooming from a crack in the concrete, we have the power to defy our own odds and achieve what we want most. No matter how small or unimportant you or I might feel in this world at times, each one of us has what it takes to do something and be someone important in society.

The chapters in this book have more to do with than just letting you, the reader, learn about what these people were able to accomplish in their

lifetimes. The story of each individual is a way for us to know of and be inspired by the heroes of our past, pass the torch, and find ways for you and I to understand what it means to inherit this legacy. In other words, the pages of this book should not be about memorizing bullet-pointed history facts, tucking that knowledge away in the back of our minds, and pulling it back out when an exam rolls around. Instead, it should be about taking in what we now know about the past, looking to the future, and discovering that we have the power to shape what that might look like in the years to come. You and I are a part of today’s generation, society, and world. It is up to us to continue the legacy that leaders in history like Rosa Parks, K.W. Lee, Cesar Chavez and so many others have helped build.

You and I have the ability to do something important — right now, today — to make a difference in your life, others’ lives, and our society. *The question is not whether or not we have the power to make change, but it is how we plan on doing it.*

What We Can Do

Take a step back and think about what is most important to you. What issues interest you and what can you do to get involved? Here are some ways you and I can make a positive difference in our own communities and society:

- **Get active on campus.** Find a club on campus that does activities that really interests you and join it. Be an active member and tell your friends about it! Joining a club that you're really into is a great way to meet other students that share the same interests and goals as you. Not only can you use your involvement in a school club to voice your opinions and become a part of an organized group, but you can also learn what it takes to set a goal, work with others, and find ways to help each other to achieve your individual and group goals.
- **Reach out into your local community.** Start by getting involved in your local organizations. For example, your local church, sports teams or community service groups are great places to start becoming an active member of the community and contributing to a great cause. By becoming active in local neighborhood groups, you can practice how to communicate with a group of people, voice your opinion, and become a better leader in your own community.
- **Volunteer for service learning projects.** Think about something you're really interested in and then find a place to volunteer for it. For example, if you really like working with younger kids, find a daycare or an after-school program that needs volunteers to work with kids in areas like math or English tutoring. That way, you can do something that you find fun and feel good about, while making a positive impact in someone else's life!
- **Get out the vote.** Voting and being involved in the political process is one of the most important ways that you can get your opinions heard. If you're of voting age and haven't registered to vote, go to your local DMV, Post Office, or other government office where you can fill out a registration form and get more information about voting. The mayor of your city, the laws that get passed, and the president of the United States of America is chosen based on your votes and mine!
- **Want to find other ways to make a difference?** While voting is an important way to make a difference in government policy, it is only one of the many ways you can get involved. Go research online, volunteer for a political campaign or write letters to your local government officials. Learn about what types of issues are affecting your community and find out what your mayor, governor or other local officials are doing about it. It is just as much our responsibility to make sure the officials we vote for and elect are properly addressing our communities' needs as it is to vote. The future of our cities and the types of laws that will affect us today and in the future is in our hands. So, stand up for what you believe in and make your voice heard. Your opinions and beliefs are important and can and do make a difference!