

## MEGAN

My name is Megan. I'm a junior from Bedford, Ohio, majoring in cognitive neuroscience with a minor in public health, and this is my story:

Sometimes I don't feel American, at least not quote-on-quote American. Most of the time, actually. I'm Asian, and nobody ever lets me forget it, whether it's by thinking I'm a math whiz or acting like one of the kids in my elementary school and asking if I know Mulan.

I remember the moment I discovered I wasn't quote-on-quote American, which is to say I remember the moment I discovered I wasn't white. I think most people of color have this experience, the first instance of someone or something making them feel as if they don't belong. Growing up in small town America, I never really realized I was different until the first day of kindergarten at lunch. My mother packed my favorite meal of braised pork belly in my Snoopy lunch box, and everything seemed to be going fine until I unzipped my bag, opened the Tupperware, and prepared to take a bite of the succulent chunks of fatty meat. "Ewww," one of the kids at the table said, "that looks gross! What are you eating?"

"Pork belly," I said.

"That's nasty," he shouted for the whole cafeteria to hear. "Who eats stomach?" And then I heard a collective ewww.

No matter how much I tried, I couldn't get down even one piece of pork—not with what seemed like everyone staring at me with a mix between intrigue and disgust.

When I got home from school that day, I begged my mother to let me take something—anything—else for lunch. Wonderbread sandwiches with the crusts cut off, leftover pizza in the fridge—or if that was too much effort, Lunchables. "But you love hong shao ruo," she said.

"No, I don't. I hate it," I said. This is the first time I remember lying to my mother, but I couldn't—I wouldn't—I didn't want to be different. I told her I didn't like her cooking and then pretended not to see the look of heartbreak on her face when she drove me to the store. But the next day, I had a Capri-Sun and a make-your-own pizza and it was worth the cardboard bread and tasteless sauce because nobody seemed to care.

And everything went back to being normal—or whatever it was before—until a kid in my class decided to pull on the corners of his eyes to make them like mine.

Here in America, we Asian-Americans are never white enough. I hoped when I visited my family's hometown in China I would finally have found the place where I belonged. But when I went to see my family in Nanjing, people couldn't figure me out. I didn't wear the right clothes. My Mandarin had a funny accent. I opened my mouth, and what was supposed to be my people—people from what I hoped was my home—shot me funny looks.

I was visiting with my cousin when one of his friends came over. He walked over to introduce himself, speaking in rapid-fire Chinese and I drowned in the mess of phonemes. Could he please slow down, I asked, in what I thought was my most polite Mandarin.

"Oh, that's right," he said, suddenly in English. "You're American—I forgot."

In that moment I saw what I couldn't before: I was painfully Westernized in an Eastern world now and everyone around me seemed to know it.

It's kind of ironic, you know. We don't fit in here, but we don't exactly fit in there either. We're stuck in this purgatory of cultures; we're the people trapped in between.

I had never met anyone else like me—or at least anyone who had vocalized feeling like me—until I came to Wash. U. and joined, on a whim, the Lunar New Year Festival, or LNYF. I had done theatre throughout high school and decided the LNYF skit would be a good way to continue drama in college.

I remember the first time I read the script—it was about an Asian-American adoptee who felt like she didn't belong in either Asian or American communities—in both places people had made her feel awkward, made her feel different, like she didn't completely belong there. “Who am I?” she asks herself and the audience. “Am I Asian? Am I American? Am I Asian-hyphen-American?”

After that first rehearsal, I found the skit writer and asked him, only slightly joking, “How did you get in my head?”

And he responded without a second thought, “Because I feel that way, too.”

It may have taken me years from that kindergarten lunch, but in college, I finally, FINALLY found a group of people who encouraged me to share my story, a group of people whom can identify with and share in my experiences, a group of people who made me feel welcome being whatever it is I am, whether that's Asian, American, Asian-American, or none of the above. These are people I stay up late talking to, sprawled on couches, unaware of how much time has gone by because we're in the middle of deep talks—yeah, those kinds 3 a.m. nights. They're the people who aren't afraid to explore the question of “Who am I” with me and to discuss how being Asian and American and a woman and coming from a middle class background impacts how I see the world.

SHAWN: So who are you then?

MEGAN: Who am I? Who are you? Who is anyone?