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About IMPRINT

IMPRINT: Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience is a compilation of creative writing and scholarly work from Seattle University’s (SU) first-generation college community. SU students, staff, faculty, and alumni who identify as first-gen are welcome to contribute. IMPRINT is published annually and released in the Spring Quarter. A committee of first-gen staff, faculty, and students mentor our selected contributors through the creative process.

IMPRINT is rooted in 3 values:

- **Visibility:** Increase visibility of SU’s First-Generation College community.
- **Scholarship:** Helping SU’s first-generation college community to own their identity as scholars by providing an opportunity for someone to experience a supportive writing process and publish a piece of work.
- **Mentorship:** Provide contributors with the opportunity to cultivate mentoring relationships through the writing process.

To learn more or submit for the next edition, please visit tinyurl.com/imprintSU.

IMPRINT is sponsored by The Outreach Center at SU.
About The Outreach Center

The Outreach Center is a community and resource space for members of the Seattle University community who identify with the first-generation college student experience and the student veteran experience.

We acknowledge and affirm our community’s multiple intersecting identities, including low-income, international, undocumented and DACA, and graduate students.

At Seattle University, we define first-generation college students as students whose parents or guardians have not completed a U.S. bachelor’s degree. Some first-generation college students may have siblings who have completed a bachelor’s degree.

Stay Connected

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Editor’s Note

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you.”
– Maya Angelou

Imprint is a journey of vulnerability.

It is a journey that asks us to share when it feels uncomfortable or scary.

It is staring at the words you’ve strung together hesitating to delve deeper and paint a moment. The thought of writing and reliving your reality feels like too much. You wonder where to start when writing a piece full of gratitude for the people that got you here.

It is meeting with your Imprint mentor feeling nervous about what they might think or say that you need to be in another room while they read your writing for the first time. Your palms sweaty as you wonder if it’s good enough.

It is vulnerability met with vulnerability. As an Imprint mentor, it’s an “I’ve felt that too” and a “that speaks to me on so many levels.” It is a smile, a tear, and a hug. By sharing our experiences, we cultivate a space
of affirmation. It is an “I see you” and “I hear you” type of space.

It is seeing your writing for the first time in print.

A sigh – it wasn’t as scary as you thought it was going to be.

A freeing feeling – letting go of something you were holding onto so tightly.

A stillness – it is here. It is real.

Vulnerability is trust and courage. Thank you to this year’s contributors for breaking your heart open. Thank you for letting us into your world.

Imprint is storytelling and truth-telling. It is an honor that this publication holds the truths of so many. This edition, like the others before it, overflows with honest and raw experiences of our first-gen community. Hold it and listen carefully. You are bearing witness to greatness.

Gretchenrae Campera, M.Ed.
Division of Student Development
To The First-Gen Burden
Carlos Moreno Vega

The burden--
Carrying your family’s future
Your back breaking from
The pains of poverty
Pressure to succeed and
Wanting to just break
Those chains of fear
That hold you back

From the friends whose
Parents have Doctorates
And their grandparents who
Paid for college with
Dimes and pennies
Earning it back ten-fold
Keeping their bloodline
Free from crippling debt
You feel their pity
And the shame from
Offering our identity
Dancing with our
Words for some coins
It’s the fifth party
We skipped to study
For an upcoming exam
We know failure is
Not an option
And the damage done
To our bank accounts
With no allowance
The paychecks and
Our hours at the
Shitty restaurant or
Overpriced grocery store
Vanish in an instant
When we have fun

Or to the queer
Kids whose families
Throw stones of hate
At the parades
For they don’t
Understand us when
We search for love

But love is here
In our friends
That are family

For all these burdens
Can take a toll on
Our mental, physical, and spiritual health
And leave us
Broken, ashamed, scared, unwanted
I say to you
The time will come
When you will rise
From these flames
And from your chains
You'll break free

Your prism will
Shine brightly
In everyone’s hearts
Like a beacon of hope
For those who come After you

And to the children
Of impoverished immigrants
Asking themselves,
How their parents
Found strength to
Survive their new unwelcoming
World and raised such
Strong, intelligent, creative, brave
Children who will succeed
Understand your ancestors
Dreamed of someone
Just like you
To carry their name
You make them proud
With your achievements and
Imperfect imperfections
So here’s to
All of you
First-gen kids
Blazing new trails
Achieving things
Breaking barriers
For others like you
To follow
“Why am I here?”

During my first quarter of graduate school, I can distinctly remember sitting in class asking myself this question. As this ran on an endless loop in my head, I questioned my identity as an introverted woman of color. My classmates verbally voiced their opinions in, what seemed to me to be, such an effortless way. I remained silent and decided that my thoughts were not worthy to share. Every time I had a thought that I considered voicing, anxiety took over. I could feel the overwhelming nerves throughout my body.

Then, I would hear a classmate elaborate on a similar thought I had. I would ask myself, “Why can’t I speak up like they did? Why am I even here?”

I did not say a single word in group discussions. I consistently worried about whether my professors and classmates would know that I was paying attention and learning. Towards the end of the quarter, I was told a few phrases that I will never forget.

My professor said, “I don’t call on you on class, because I can see the fear in your eyes. However, I know you are learning. Your papers definitely reflect that.”
For the first time in my graduate program, I felt seen.

My professor took the time to notice my learning style, and she did not force me to speak up. I felt appreciated for the student and person I am. She continuously wrote notes of encouragement on my papers. Her support allowed me to feel a sense of confidence and reassurance in where I am at. For that, I will forever be grateful.

This experience was the first of a journey of changing the way I view myself as an introverted professional and person. For the first time, I saw the positives and found ways to embrace this as a part of my identity.

To this day, the question, “Why am I here?” still runs through my head. However, I have used my strength of positivity to view this question with a different perspective. I came to recognize that where I come from is a huge part of who I am.

I am here, because of the people and place who raised me.

Growing up on the island of O'ahu, Hawai‘i, the values and culture embody how I view and live in this world. Being able to step outside to see the ocean waves brushing against the shore, the palm trees waving in the distance, and the sun gently hitting the horizon allowed me to recognize the beauty in the little things in life.

Whenever I would tell people that I am from
Hawai’i, their eyes would light up. They would say, “Wow, you are so lucky!” I agree with this statement but not for the reasons that people immediately think of. I am extremely blessed, because of the beautiful culture that has provided me with my core values of aloha and family.

The aloha spirit is more than just a phrase.
It is a way of life.
It is an embodiment of kindness, compassion, and respect to all people.

The aloha spirit is a warm hug when you need it most, a listening ear when you feel unheard, and a helping hand when you least expect it. Aloha never runs out and is an unconditional type of love that shows up in many different ways. With this, aloha spirit is extended to all people as each person is considered part of one’s family.

‘Ohana or family is a large part of the culture of Hawai’i. It extends greater than those who are blood-related to you. It is the importance of finding community where you are. I learned from a young age that calling someone “aunty” or “uncle” is a sign of respect, as being part of one’s family is a true honor and blessing. This has supported my belief that each person in my life is a member of my family. This includes my blood-related family, my childhood friends, my high school friends, mentors, colleagues, and the people who have supported me throughout the years.

Although I am grateful for every single person who has become my family, there are two specific
individuals who are the main reason that I am here today. These two best friends of mine have been there for me from the very beginning.

As an only child, a common question that I receive is, “Do you wish that you had siblings?” My answer has always been, “Not really, this is all I know.” I honestly never wished I had siblings growing up, because I had two best friends.

One of my best friends provided a safe space for me to talk about anything, helped turn my dreams into realities, and always made sure I was taken care of. Whenever I told my mom that I wanted to try something new, she did all the research she could and paved the way for me to create my own adventures. Sending me to private school required hours of driving far away from our home, which created times in the car that were designated to talking about life. We had a saying - “What is said in the car, stays in the car.” I will never forget these special talks where I learned so much from one of my greatest heroes, my mom.

My other best friend made my hobbies into his own, never forgot to bring laughter into my life, and reminded me to always trust in God. Whenever I tried something new, my dad took the time to learn it alongside me where we could share in this time together. Whether that was anything from learning volleyball to watching my favorite tv shows with me, he made sure that I did not have to explore my interests alone.

I will never forget these special times where I learned what it means to share passions with people
you care about most.

My mom and dad’s constant encouragement led me to pursue a master’s degree and to seek a career path that brings me joy and purpose. They worked long days and nights to make sure that I had opportunities that they did not have. They opened the way for me to be the first in our family to achieve a degree.

Although they currently live halfway across the world in Okinawa, Japan, I never feel like I am alone on this journey. I know I have the two biggest fans supporting me endlessly. I hope to support others the way they unconditionally support me.

When I think about the love I have received, I am reminded of another friend of mine who has been there for me in my lowest points. This friend is not visible. Even if I do not take the time to notice, I know He is always there watching over me.

This friend is God.

During my graduate school experience, there have been times where I wouldn’t take much time to work on my relationship with God. I would convince myself that I was too busy with school, work, or other responsibilities. This allowed me to question my priorities and ask myself why I wasn’t taking the time to strengthen my relationship with Him.

Even then, I never questioned God’s presence as I always knew He was there.
In these past two years, God has shown up in new ways for me. When the reoccurring question, “Why am I here?” popped in my head, deep inside of me I knew one of the reasons why. Through the darkest of moments filled with tears and anxiety, I knew that I was never alone. I knew that I was here because God has a plan for me. I believe that He put me where I am to be challenged and to grow in ways that I didn’t know I needed.

In the most unexpected times, I have felt God’s presence in powerful ways. About a year ago, I got a concussion due to an unforeseen situation that provided me with both physical and emotional pain. Throughout this process of healing, I felt God’s hand and presence watching over me and guiding me.

I felt Him through my community.

Coworkers, friends, and family showed me an abundance of love, compassion, and grace. They validated my feelings and reminded me that it is okay to not be okay. Classmates that I did not know very well opened their arms in supporting me in little ways that meant so much to me. This included surprising me with my favorite snack, keeping me company on my walks, and just taking the time to get to know me. Even in a busy season, coworkers made me feel cared for and helped with various tasks I was not able to complete on my own.

Even though this experience brought me tears, anxiety, and fear, I learned valuable lessons and found out that I am stronger than I thought I was. I know that I could not have made it through this
without God as He reminded me that even in difficult times, He is right there next to me.

When I questioned why I was in this program pursuing a master’s degree, I would be reminded of the people that came into my life. God brought individuals in my life who I now can’t imagine not knowing. Through these people, I feel His love ever so present.

From being challenged in new ways and questioning my own identities, I came to realize that making time to work on my relationship with God allows me to re-center my own values and purpose in life. It provides me with a sense of calmness and joy to acknowledge that I am a child of God living out my purpose to serve and love people.

On my bedroom wall, I have the following Bible scripture posted:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Whenever I look at this passage, I am reminded of the bigger picture in life. God has a plan for me.

I am here to provide unconditional compassion and service to others as God provides for me. These past two years have taught me that in the most challenging of times, God is always there. He gives me hope to continue even in the midst of uncertainty.
Through it all, my grad school journey has taught me to embrace the question, “Why am I here?” It is okay to question. It is okay to reflect. It is okay to take time to remember who you are. So, I ask myself, “Why am I here?”

I am here to embody the aloha spirit.  
I am here to spread the unconditional support my parents provide me.  
I am here to love others and be loved by others.  
I am here to serve and live out the purpose God has planned for me.  
I am here for a reason.  
And I am here to be uniquely me.
Para Mi Familia
Mariah Fernandez

I am from platos desechables,
from gansitos y vaporub.
I am from el árbol de navidad en la sala, verde,
grande y con muchos luces.
I am from nopales y las hortensias afuera de la case
de mi hermosa grandma Espi.
I am from Guesstures y lotería
from Daniel Fernández y Patricia Ruiz.
I’m from “hola mija” y “pásame la escoba”
from ¡No toques nada! y ¡Si se puede!
I’m from “dios le bendiga” y un vestido blanco
de mi bautismo.
I’m from Seattle con raíces en México,
tamales, enchiladas, y arroz con leche.
From el nacimiento de mi hermanito Zayden en 2017.
El viaje a México con mi papa que duro una semana.
Soy de una familia que me apoyan y los amo mucho.
Para Mi Familia

Throughout elementary, middle school, high school and college I see the same people on the sideline cheering me on and pushing me to succeed.

Siempre veía la misma gente en cada partido de fútbol y presentación escolar, a veces con flores y globos.

As a senior in high school I found myself googling how to fill out the FAFSA and the meaning of a letter of recommendation.

Aunque tuve que aplicar sin mucho conocimiento, siempre tenía a mi familia para apoyarme y decirme que ¡Sí se puede!

The constant push and kind words helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel when I thought I wouldn’t finish my applications in time.

At first these people didn’t understand what it meant to be a first-generation college student.

Esta palabra es un pedazo de mi identidad. Significa que yo puedo hacer lo que otras personas dijeron que no podía hacer.
I'm proud to describe myself as first-gen and show that going to college is possible and achievable even though my parents couldn't.

These people have seen me at my lowest of lows, when my parents got divorced and losing my beloved Grandma Espí. También me vieron en mis mejores momentos cuando decidí a ir a Seattle University y cuando conseguí mi primer trabajo.

La gente de la que estoy hablando es mi familia. La familia Ruiz y la familia Fernández. Each and every single one of these people mean the world to me, without them I wouldn’t be where I am today as a first-gen college student. ¡Gracias por todo! Ustedes son la razón por la que nunca me rindo.
Be Calm and Be Strong, My Younger Self
Khuong “Teddy” Vo

Dear 10-year-old Teddy,

I do not know how to start this, but I am telling that I am you in the future. A 22-year-old man, who has experienced so many things in life and met so many wonderful people, is talking to you right now. How future looks like? I am telling you that we will become a journalist, and we will be a reporter for the best college newspaper named The Spectator. It is a cool name, isn’t it? That thing will come to us, but I am not here to talk about that. I am here to talk about our passionate heart.

Believe on it or not, we do have a passionate heart. A heart that never says give up to any challenge. And a heart that is strong to overcome some bad things that we will have to face.

Let’s start this letter with bad news. You are 10 years old. You are about to go to the English Language Center for the very first time in your life. And you soon realize that you might not belong to the place. In the class that you have registered, nobody wants to learn English as much as you do. Quickly, you recognize that you are doubtful about your English. You think it is bad to be doubtful. Actually, my man, I want you to know that being doubtful will give you the motivation to pursue fluency in English.
Your friends don’t think that English is amusing and attractive, but you are brave to prove the opposite. Backstreet boys will give you the inspiration to learn more English, and you should say thanks to them. When you are getting older, Ed Sheeran will be a singer whom you listen to the most, and if you wonder who he is, he is a wonderful British singer. English music is part of our life, my man.

I am about to give you another bad news, my man. I am sorry that I continue to send bad message to you. Here is the second bad news. You are 12-year-old, and you are about to have a promising academic year with your 7th grade, but your great grandma will pass away. Suddenly, you realize that your promising year is going to be ruined. At her funeral, you will cry a lot, my man. You are going to have three terrible weeks. In that period, your academic performance will drop dramatically.

Nobody has even seen you like that before, including yourself, but you will also get back on your feet as you realize that you can’t live the rest of your life like that.

There will be moment when you will think that you could not keep up with English anymore. Actually, you thought that I made such a horrible decision. However, when you struggle the most, I want to tell you that you have to stand up and fight. English is hard because you will have to remember several words that you don’t think you will ever apply it in the future. Nonetheless, you need to learn all of them by heart.

Is there any favorite words that we love using? I think that we always use the words “wonderful.” I can’t count how many times we say that word, but we love it and I think, it symbolizes something about us.
We love being a wonderful character, spreading love to people and showing them the positivity.

I think that we are done with the bad news, and I am about to tell you a good news. You are 16-year-old, and you are about to participate in the most important contest of your life-study abroad contest. That is the only opportunity in your life to prove to your parents that your English is good enough, so you have to prepare well for it.

We will face several competitive opponents, but we are not going to be scared. I want to tell you that we are coming to that contest without any concern. The only thing on your mind is to stomp that competition and go to the U.S. The goal is there, and you have to stay confident. I remember that we are not going to do that well in the reading part, but we accelerate in right moments.

Finally, we will claim the study abroad scholarship, and now we are here, living in Seattle, Washington.

We will come to the U.S. in 2015, and you should not be surprised when I am telling you that we will be living in the U.S. for 5 years. Isn’t it wonderful, my man? We will be here, in the U.S., and we are thriving for our dream-becoming a journalist. I bet that when I am talking to you, you still don’t know how much you love to be a journalist. You love writing, mate. And you have to be a writer.

A numerous amount of people will be doubtful about your decision, but you should not be doubtful because your parents will be there for you. Most importantly, your girlfriend will be there for you. Right, you will meet a beautiful, wonderful, and amazing girl when you are 19-year-old, and I am begging you to love her more than I. I am begging you to tell her daily
that you need her and tell her that she is your motivation. Also, tell her that I miss her a lot.

When you are going to meet her, you should know that you are about to make an important decision. In front of her success, you will have to make a decision of your life: becoming an author. You know that you are not ready, but you still want to try. And you will have done it. We get our first book when we are turning 20-year-old. We are still young and know nothing about life, but we know that we are standing in a stage and presenting about our book.

Journalists will be there to record you and ask you several questions that will make you frustrate. I just want to tell you, in that situation, please be calm and brave. I know that your voice will be shaking, and you could not talk well about your book, but I want you to feel proud of you, my man. At the end of the day, we are not born and raised to live in a standard setting. We are born and raised to establish our own trademarks.

When you are growing up older, I want you to understand that you will struggle a lot, but you have the powers to bounce back and fight stronger. You will meet wonderful people, including your girlfriend, my man.

By the way, can you tell Darien, Arouna, Eric, Michael, J. Anthony, Chhavi, and Ken that I am thankful for having met them in my life? Tell them that I miss them a lot! Tell them that I want to hug them! Tell them that if there is such a thing like next-life, I want to be their friends one more time.

Young Teddy Vo, I bet that there will be another good news for you. You will meet Alec Downing and Michelle Newbloom, editors at The Spectator, and I want to tell you that these people will give
you an opportunity to work in journalism field. That is your first shot, and please take it carefully. There will be a guy named Brian Vail who will blow up that opportunity with negativity and trash talk, so please approach him consciously. I know that at the end, we will not be able to work with that guy, but Michelle and Alec will support you unconditionally. Young Teddy, please help me hug them because no one in journalism will do such a thing like what they have done for us.

Finally, young Teddy, I am proud of you my man. You have a gut to challenge yourself, and you will prove that you deserve success. And I am proud of you my man, because you are the first-gen in your family to pursue higher education in the U.S. Is it going to an easy journey? Hell no!

You have to prepare for it as soon as possible, and I am begging you to think about it seriously. When you are at my age, you will know that chance to study abroad never comes twice. Preparing your knowledge and taking it when you are ready. I love you, my man. I love your innocence and positivity. And we will preserve that thing until we are 70-year-old.

Before departing, I want to tell you that you should love your parents and proud of them. Their charisma and their dignity will inspire you to be better, and you need to prioritize your time with them. Love them more.

I have to go, my man, and I hope that you know what to do for your future.

Sincerely,

21-year-old Teddy Vo
I am a first-generation college student. I am a transfer international student. I am a woman of color. These are few of the many intersectional identities that I carry with me everyday, some of which are acknowledged, and some of which are “silenced.”

What does it mean to not have a voice?

I grew up in India where men ran most of the conversations, and women were expected to do chores, like cooking the food and cleaning the house, and start a family. Like a traditional student back home, I went to a primary and secondary school. I then transferred schools and earned my high school diploma from an out-of-state boarding school with a major in science, and you’re probably wondering how. I’m not even in college yet. That’s because back home, you decide your major in high school. I remember in 11th grade my peers suggested that I study science because that would make me “intelligent.” Moreover, the top three well-respected professions in India are business, science, and law, because they offer financial stability.

I felt suffocated amidst the societal and the peer
pressure that hovered over me. I felt like I didn’t have a voice.

In high school, I participated in many debate and poetry competitions and emceed for school events. My interest in writing and public speaking grew, and that became my “side hustle.” I finished high school in 2014, and I vividly remember the rush of anxiety my parents and I had to see my final exam results. Besides English and Computer Science, I did not do well on any of my exams. I felt like I had let down my family. I recall a phone conversation with a friend who looked forward to starting her college, and as soon as we hung up, I started crying. My scores were too low, per “India-standard,” and by that I mean even a student who scores 98% can be denied admission to Delhi University. I felt alone and scared. But my stepdad lifted me up. He took me to an international study-abroad agency, and I got accepted into three U.S. community colleges and an East Coast university. I don’t know why or how.

That’s still a mystery to me, but I finally caught a breath!

My educational adventure in the U.S. began in 2015 when I enrolled at South Seattle College (South). I discovered a newfound freedom. Those public speaking opportunities in high school crystallized my desperate desire to find my voice and be heard, and I decided to major in journalism. I experienced culture shock and faced many academic and language challenges. However, South helped me navigate them with the help of the strong community I had built. I made friends and interacted with them over a
a simple cup of coffee. I took diverse classes and met
diverse professors, some would mentor me, some
would write me a letter of recommendation, and oth-
ers would say “Hi!” to me at random places or encour-
age me to take a break. In 2017, I not only graduated
with an associate’s degree but also with a myriad of
experiences, connections, and some of the closest
friendships. I had found a sense of belonging. I felt
valued, and I was finally able to do what I was
passionate about, that is journalism.

The following year I worked three different jobs in three
different parts of Seattle might I add, to save up so I
can continue my education at Seattle University. It was
a place I envisioned myself going to from the day I
stepped onto the campus and took a university tour
that I led with a group of students from my community
college. Seattle University was an “all-in-one” package
for me: I liked the small class sizes, the ability to
connect with my professors on a personal level, the
campus’ vicinity to diverse restaurants, some of which
even offer student discounts (like Mr. Saigon!), my
program of study, and above all, the range of
scholarships.

In 2018, I transferred here. But the transition was
difficult. My first quarter at Seattle University was
especially challenging. I often found that I was one of
the few students of color in my classes, and at times
the only international student. I also struggled to
connect with my peers, in part because I felt like my
peers were much more acquainted with the university
lifestyle, class expectations, and the course rigor than I
was. And two, my peers already had those established relationships with their friends, and I was just now starting to do so. Moreover, I used to get frustrated at times because of late-night events that I couldn’t attend, because I was a commuter student. Unlike at South, I lacked a sense of community, familiarity, and shared experience.

Was being an Alfie my way of finding my voice?

However, I am grateful to be part of the Alfie Scholars Program, a cohort-style program that offers financial assistance, customized curriculum, and professional development opportunities to community college transfer students from underrepresented backgrounds. The Program has offered me a space to use my voice to empower unheard voices. I have great mentors who I can go to, whether to seek guidance on important life decisions, comfort in times of distress, or to just vent. I am happy to report that I have a growing family, and four generations of them! In fact, it is through the Alfie Scholars Program that I learned about my first-gen identity. I remember I had a meeting with Carol, the program director, and I saw a poster on her door that defined a first-generation college student. I was like, “Whaaaat?” I am a first-gen? And Carol said, “Yes, honey! You are first-gen.” I felt this warm feeling in my heart.

This warm feeling only became amplified when I “accidently” happened to stop by at The Outreach Center because a fellow Alfie asked me to meet her there. I saw students from all different backgrounds, some studying, some hanging out, some laughing, and some having a deep conversation. There were
couches for students to relax or nap on, board games for fun, a nice kitchen for students to heat their food, and every Monday the staff cooked fried rice for hungry students like me. I also noticed a beautiful patio. I quickly became friends with other first-gen students who also shared similar, yet unique experiences. The Outreach Center has since then become my second home, a home I feel comfortable going to share my concerns, a home where I feel supported and mentored, and a home where I am encouraged to write my story, the one you’re reading right now. Today, I actively try to invite more first-gens to this home, our home, so they can feel supported.

I am grateful.
I am grateful for my Alfie family.
I am grateful to the relationships that I have built in this space--The Outreach Center.
I am grateful to this growing community.

This quarter is my last quarter at Seattle University, and that hasn’t hit me yet. But I am happy that I’ve had a chance to go to college. I know it’s scary to be the first one to go to college. But it is equally rewarding to be the first one to graduate and set an example for your siblings, your friends, your kids, and who knows even your parents! Like many of you, I did not know how to apply for college or pay for it, let alone find my community. But I figured it out, and you will too with the help of your mentors, professors, and the Center. And like me, you’ll find your home and community too! I believe that each and every one of you has something valuable to offer to this world so make the most of your experience. Try things that you haven’t before. Who knew that I’d have my own podcast? It’s
called Project First-Gen, by the way! It’s a podcast that my team and I created to amplify the voices of first-gen college students like you so that you can find moments of inspiration, laugh and cry, learn about opportunities, and build community to ease your transition into college. It is through this podcast that I am able to be me and engage in deep conversations. Tune in to Spotify @Project First-Gen and join our growing community of listeners on our Instagram page @project.first.gen. We’d love to hear about your first-gen story and support you in whichever way we can. Happy listening!

Today, I am no longer silenced.
I walk tall, and I talk loud.
I am unapologetically the first.
Here They Come
Kal Green

Dream
noun
of uncertain origin
possibly Germanic
could be Scandinavian
usually something
that wants to remain
hidden

Definition
a state of mind in which a person is or seems to be
unaware of their immediate surroundings
a daze

A child
too young to understand the labor needed from a
mother who gave everything
even now
life on hold ¾ left to pick up the line
break the mold
A child wanting to emulate what they see on screen power rangers, nascar, firefighters, straightness, boy, black boy

A child too busy daydreaming, images of a life yet to come, a life made of misconceptions, preconceived notions of what could be

A child too afraid to live in the moment too afraid to live for now instead of when when I graduate when I am comfortable when I have enough money when will when happen Will it What could be enough for a child who never feels it never sees it, and barely believes it A child so blind, glasses couldn’t fix couldn’t redirect the wave lengths of worth into the correct rod missing all those lovely cones A child, who tries to observe find scarred silhouettes sinuous in their movements hiding what life could mean for a child with a life as precious as diamond
Definition
Something imagined or invented
a false idea or belief
an illusion, a delusion, a scam

Beginning of adolescence
fresh eyes flashing open for the sole purpose
of filling the folds forming
frantic feelings felt in the frontal lobe
Awareness of self-awareness
now
becoming aware
Language center
forming and reforming
the brain
reforming and forming
language center

the feeling of suffocation
great distress
experienced
during sleep
Bad dream producing
similar sensations
oppressive
frightening
unpleasant dream
Waking
waking in your own childhood bed in the house you spent most of your formative years
waking to relieve yourself only to reveal, the machinations of your ruminations
waking at the sound of the bathroom being used, abused, to produce a self
waking while investigating the singing siren soothing your soul to sleep
walking to the bathroom, eyes on the mirror that presents your fears
witnessing your reflection twice
yourself
the other witnessing from the living room
waking in realization of the situation
of there being another you
one that wants to move closer

a person
thing
situation
very difficult
frustrating to deal with
catalogue of disasters
a female spirit
monster supposed to settle on
and produce feeling
of suffocation in a
sleeping person or
animal

Succubus-like
a woman on stage
permeates thoughts
Heels so high
she is standing on her toes
higher the heels
higher to her
almighty power
Hair so long
it calls out to mine
as if it were calling
for hair
to come
home
moving with intuition
moving with intention
causing tsunamis with her hips
reaching japan with each wave
earthquakes with her voice
breaking sea walls and liquefying
Seattle rains with her tears
lingering landslides with those long legs of hers
forcing feral felines to feel some type of way
satiating their hunger with
poisoned morsels
suffocating those who seek
to suffocate more than themself

Definition
A person seen in a dream or vision, an apparition
Fleeting dreams, always leaving
only coming in images
a heel there
some eyelashes on a desk
voices at the edge of the mind
clawing
with manicured hands
masculinity melting
miniscule
meant to scar
forgetting
new tissue is stronger
than what came before
flesh too soft to know
what true scars are
trees with roots
that grow from chains

Escape from self
from world
from life
Sleep as escape
it becomes
something more
sinister than life
way to hit fast forward
multiplied by eight
sometimes sixteen
at times, you can hear
the person taking order
of those dreams
want tears with that
maybe you want to see
those
Three hundred pounds again
or maybe the other
two hundred that
left

Sometimes
I can see her
in me
when I smile at the corner of my eye
when I find myself humming
without even knowing it
finding new melodies from old ones
changing and improving them
folding them into letters
and sending them on their way
breathing life into the now
from a yesterday
that always seems to be on my calendar
never complete
a notification that can’t get rid of me
me that doesn’t exist
me that lies in ash
me

Definition
A vision
hope for the future
vain hope
idle fantasy
an ideal, goal, ambition
aspiration
Succubus-like
I am on stage
permeating thoughts
Heels so high
I am standing on my toes
higher the heels
higher to my
almighty power
Hair so long
it calls out to you
as if it were calling
for you
to come
home
moving with intuition
moving with intention
causing tsunamis with my hips
reaching japan with each wave
earthquakes with my voice
breaking sea walls and liquefying
Seattle rains with my tears
lingering landslides with those long legs of mine
forcing feral felines to feel some type of way
satiating their hunger with
poisoned morsels
suffocating those who seek
to suffocate more than myself
a self now found

Now rooted
like hair that curls
whispers
secret promises
decipherable
only to those
with a little
melanin
like trees
that line the skin
raised ever so slightly
reminders
that life exists outside
of pain
of life feigned
outside of chains
of a life regained

Waking
waking in my bed
one filled with pink
my pink
waking to relieve myself
only to reveal
the machinations
of my ruminations
waking at the sound of
my bathroom being used
abused, to produce a self
waking while investigating
the singing siren
who soothed
my soul to sleep
walking to the bathroom,
eyes on my mirror
presenting my fears
witnessing my reflection
twice
the other
witnessing
myself
in front of self
waking in realization
of the situation
of there being another me
one that wants to move
forward
to define
definitions
that have been told
as necessary training
so I use and abuse
my bathroom
to see
myself

Definition
A series of images
thoughts and emotions
often with a story-like
quality
generated by mental activity
during sleep
the state in which
this
occurs
prophetic
supernatural vision
experienced
awake or asleep,
Have you woken up today?
Shapes That Ghosts Take
Dalena Le

Tháng Sáu¹

"Do you know how to perform CPR?"

"No," I said without thinking.

That was a lie.

Sorry about that, grandpa. I know you don’t like liars. I was a liar, that morning.

I did know how to perform CPR; how could I forget? Second semester of freshman year, high school, Health, basement classroom.

Step one, see if the person responds. Step two, call 911. Step three, check if they’re breathing. Step four, combine your hands and push against the center of their chest. After 30 compressions is step five, breath into them. Repeat until the help you called for in step two arrives—

¹ Tháng sâu: June, literal. “the sixth month”
I knew all the steps, I was certified. But I couldn’t remember a thing when the operator asked if I could do it for you. I wasted a lot of time. At least I thought so. You were already dead by the time the operator was done relaying the procedure that I already knew.

I’m not sure what else I can tell you, really.

Barely getting the landline back into its slot, I pushed myself off the mattress and yanked my bedroom’s orchard door open.

In my mind, I kept repeating those five steps—those five steps that I’d never forgotten.

So calm in my panic, I looked straight ahead. My feet fell in long strides, silent on the carpet as I followed the length of the hall into your room where grandma’s cries had woken me up 5 minutes before. It was 2:10 AM. You died 20 minutes before that.

Grandma was hunched over your body, calling for you. At the time, she didn’t know you were already dead either. She called you by every term of endearment she could. Dear, darling, love, it was one of the few times I’d seen her care about anyone other than herself—I hope that makes you happy to know.

"Bà ngoại," Granny, I managed in the little Vietnamese I knew. "I called the ambulance, go wait for them outside."

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2 Bà ngoại: Grandma
Maybe you'll also be happy to know, grandpa, that she didn't immediately move away from your body. She looked to me through her glasses, lenses wide as windows, then towards you and her hand lingered a second on the side of your face.

When she left you to me, I thought: a real dead body.

A corpse, and it was yours.

I'd read so many novels describing what it'd be like to encounter one. In that moment, I was like those characters found on those pages. You were grey, de-saturated, barely yourself anymore. Hollowed and flattened. An imitation of who you were when you were alive.

Your hands were spread out on either side of you. Like you'd braced yourself for death, like you knew.

I focused on the blood near your mouth and repeated the steps: checked for your breathing, combined my hands and pushed against your chest (I hear grandma open the front door), 30 compressions and I try to revive you, I go through the steps again and you're still dead.

You were even greyer, by the time the paramedics arrived. You very nearly matched the clothes you slept in. A pale smear of a man against the red sheets of your bed.

I stood back and pressed myself against the wall
as four paramedics, men in dark uniform, squeezed into the room. They too, looked like smears in my line of sight. Wavering, speaking to me (I didn't understand a thing, I kept looking at the blood near your lip), curling around your body and lifting you from the bright, red sheets. They took you down the stairs where they repeated the same steps:

Check for breathing, combine hands and push against the chest. After 30 compressions, try to breath life back in. Repeat.

Spirits

I saw you one last time after you were buried.

I think that was necessary. I didn’t attend your funeral or look at you when the paramedics took you downstairs and tried to bring you back to us. Us, as in grandma, mom and uncle, everyone in the tiny world of our family. . .

I won’t list myself, because I only know what your death meant for them.

For grandma, losing a resource. For uncle, a father who never loved him. For mom, her only friend.

I don’t know what your death meant for me, I still don’t, yet I think of you every day and I don’t know why that is. You weren’t particularly better than mom, uncle and grandma at treating me decently but you also weren’t particularly worse than them. You didn’t negate how I felt, bully me, lie or take your anger out on me.
You were certainly better than my father, you weren’t violent. You, like everyone else in our little clan, never made me feel loved but at least you weren’t monstrous. And as a child, that was good enough. It was good enough to have one less abusive adult.

So yes, it was good I saw you one last time.

After your funeral (no one really came, I doubt you care, you told me you don’t need friends, remember?), I saw you.

I saw you. Outside of your coffin.

You weren’t wearing the black suit the mortician had carefully dressed you up in.

I wasn’t exactly sure what was happening, but I knew I was awake. Mom said it’s a good thing to see a loved one’s ghost. In our culture, it means the spirit’s successfully cut their ties with the living world and are on their way to the afterlife.

Yet, you were there at the foot of my bed. Were you, as mom told me, on your way out? Was I the last stop?

My desk light was still on. You stood partially obscured by the darkness, your image sharpened the moment I sat up. You were whole—not quite the transparent thing spirits are believed to be. You looked more alive than you did when you were on top of your red bedsheets; you were wearing the clothes you died in. Your favorite Reebok pajamas.
Although you didn’t look like a ghost, I wondered if I had reached out instead of staring at you, would my hand have gone through your arm?

You smiled at me.

There was more light in your eyes than there was in my room. You smiled, and then you were gone. Gone as quickly as you had come, I found myself smiling back at the space that was no longer filled with the shape of you.

It honestly feels like you haven’t really left. I’m trying to tell you all of these things.

Like I said, I think of you every day. Despite where we stood personally, when things got hard, I thought of you: captain of the South Vietnamese resistance, 18 when you were drafted and watched your friends die. Shrugged, when I asked if it hurt to never see them again. Ground your fingers into the curve of your forehead, when I asked if you regretted anything about the war and fleeing on the sponsorship of the Quakers.

I don’t know. I suffered as a child and a teenager, you watched but at least you were there. You weren’t a role model but you were a decent example and that was something I needed, too.

Maybe that’s why I could care so much about someone I don’t really love.

I didn’t attend your funeral because the date fell on the same day that I’d take an exam required
for high school graduation; I knew you’d rather me
take steps towards my future than throw flowers onto
your grave. I left that to mom, bà ngoại and cậu bà.\footnote{Cậu bà: Uncle (mother’s brother)}
You once said you’d be fine with having your ashes
thrown into the ocean, I was confident you would be
fine with having one less person watch as you were
lowered into the earth.

Senior year of high school, I sat in my academic
advisor’s office. Her name was Ms. Recupido, a little
Italian lady. We discussed my plans for university—with
my transcript in her hands she asked what I’d like her
to say about me in her letter of recommendation:

“You have a 3.9 gpa, I can start with that,” she
said with a grin, passing her petite fingers through her
short, light colored hair.

I guess she was trying to assure me I’d be a shoe
in for the schools I wanted to apply to—I was visibly
stiff. Anxious. Not about my plans. Plans, I had those for
sure. I wanted to go to Seattle University. Spread red,
black and white wings and light down onto St.
Loyola’s cross. Disappear into small class sizes, befriend
my professors; tucked away in the folds of Capitol Hill,
away from everyone and everything.

I wanted to spin up algorithms over a hot cup of
coffee, undisturbed, for my university career.

I thought of these things, fantasized about being
on my own as I sat in Ms. Recupido's office.

I was anxious.

I was anxious out of impatience; I couldn't wait to graduate high school, it meant I'd be one step closer to leaving the people who hurt me the most behind.

Sorry again, grandpa. I'd taken all those steps forward, straight into Ms. Recupido’s office for me.

“Well,” I started. “I’ve done over 80 hours of volunteering for the English and Physical Science department. I’m also working with ASU, composting, NHS now so I’ll be over 100 hours of service and other extracurriculars by graduation.” I spoke so quickly my mouth dried up, I had to lick my lips before continuing to list my other achievements:

I scored perfectly in Math, Science, Reading and Writing for all those stupid standardized exams. I led the muralling team, I took a Japanese student into my home and hosted them for months, my art made it into the Narramore Exhibit and was displayed downtown in the museum for months—

I gave Ms. Recupido as much fuel as I could and went over the same things again with the same excitement and desperation when I asked my AP European teacher for her recommendation.

I gave those gracious women everything I had, everything to make my wish come true.
So sorry, grandpa.

Except not really.

**Departure**

I suppose the rest is history. I don’t regret a thing.

Everything I’ve done I’ve done for myself, by myself.

I know, that if you were here, you wouldn’t like to hear any of this. Mom couldn’t stand it when she finally caught on.

“What,” she had said a year ago. “What have I done to deserve such a selfish daughter, tell me?”

I gave her a piece of my mind. Two decades worth of trauma and abuse released in an instant.

It’s a sad thing, when an adult is incapable of evaluating themselves. It’s a sad thing, when an adult is incapable of taking responsibility for themselves.

But, I understand.

University has given me more than just distance from a painful childhood, it’s given me perspective, too. And I can acknowledge that’s a privilege—the exact kind of privilege you fled Vietnam for. I understand, finally, why our family is the way it is. So small, so damaged by things none of you had control over. Communist terror, poverty and uncertainty.
I respect our family's sacrifice, but that’s not an excuse. I didn’t deserve anything that happened to me. University has armed me with understanding and perspective. Not love or forgiveness, and I don’t mind that at all.

You know, grandpa, I graduate in June.

The last time I ever saw you was in June. The June of my freshman year in high school. You had told me months before that point that you hoped you’d at least get to see me graduate high school.

I have great news for you. You’re going to come with me for my university graduation.

Whether I like it or not—you’re with me, everywhere. You, who was semi-decent, good enough, the closest thing to an adult I’ve had in my life.

It’s funny. The monks mom hired to bless you at your funeral scolded grandma for reaching into the casket and touching your face—that it’d only invite the spirit to stay when they needed to move on.

They didn’t realize that I’ve hung onto you.

You’re both in the dirt and in my thoughts. For a long while, I couldn’t understand why that was or how I felt about it.

Now I understand a little more. In Spring, I’m going to take your ghost with me, tied to my wrist like a balloon into graduation where you’ll witness
what I’ve managed to pull off for myself.

Word from the Author

Considering I’m talking to a dead man, I’m not exactly sure who this is going to help, much less touch—but if you’re someone who’s not afraid of some poltergeist, here it is. And I don’t necessarily mean an actual ghost. I mean the wounds we carry with us, burdens that are left unsaid.

That said, I had a rather hard time writing a “first gen” story, which is ludicrous. This is exactly that: a first gen story. There’s perseverance and hardship, the usual ingredients. I hope there’s more to my narrative than that. I refuse to believe there’s only one type of story someone from an immigrant family, growing up in the United States can have.

Not all first gen are the same. Strongly believing in that is how this piece happened.

Thank goodness.

Admittedly, I’m still not sure how I feel about it even after writing it. But I wouldn’t care to have written it any other way.
Ultimately, this is a story about lies and truths.

I cannot separate my first-gen identity from my Latinx identity (Truth).

I told my friends my parents took me on college tours, just like their parents did (Lies).

My parents always wanted the best for me but didn’t know how to help me get there (Truth).

This is a story about the lies I told myself as a first-generation kid growing up in Eastern Washington and the truths I didn’t realize until much later.

Growing up, I always knew I was Mexican, my heritage was a source of pride. My parents came to the United States, so that I could go to college. My parents would tell me stories of working on farms in a small village in Mexico or grinding their own corn to make tortillas a mano. They spoke of a work ethic instilled by their parents that followed them to the United States. They worked harder than anyone I knew to make sure their kids would never feel the gnawing,
crushing hunger they felt growing up. When my friends talked about both of their parents being home for dinner, my parents were pulling into the driveway with eyes red rimmed from their latest 12 hour shift. I would watch TV for a bit before my mom and dad shuffled into the house and collapsed onto the couch - too exhausted to even take off their shoes. Somehow, they still possessed the energy to write out practice multiplication tables and make sure I finished my homework. It didn’t matter if they couldn’t understand the language I was writing in and or that I was using math they had never seen.

I often found myself serving as the connection between my parents and the English speaking world they lived in. When I was ten, my dad decided to get an air conditioner to help us get through the brutal Eastern Washington summers. I had to go with him to translate between him and the employees at the hardware store. I remember the relentless, dry hundred degree heat that immediately sapped my energy. I remember feeling like I was suffocating as I climbed into my dad’s truck. When we arrived at the hardware store on the ‘other’ side of town, I didn’t think anything was wrong. I did what I had always done and translated through the entire transaction.

We went home to discover that the air conditioner ended up not working. So, my dad and I went back to the hardware store to return it. A different employee helped us this time. He seemed nervous. He told my dad, “I’m sorry, but you were overcharged for this air conditioner.” Apparently, if we had not come back we never would have known. The original employee that helped us didn’t think it
mattered, because my dad was “just a stupid Mexican anyway.” I didn’t translate this part. My dad still understood. I watched as his shoulders hunched, his eyes lowered, and he seemed to shrink before me. I heard as he spoke in a defeated, broken English, “Damn, man.”

My dad and I have never talked about what happened in that store (Truth).

I told myself that it was just one guy and that it didn’t matter. (Lies).

In my head, pursuing an education became about proving the employee wrong. It was also about proving to my parents that their sacrifices and the violence they suffered in the United States wasn’t in vain. Working long hours, still making sure I did my homework, and enduring racist taunts all so that I could get an education made me realize that I wasn’t just going to school for myself. I was carrying the hopes of my parents with me. All of the choices I made about my education from that moment were informed by what I perceived would make my parents’ sacrifice meaningful.

I began college on the path to be a doctor. Not necessarily because I wanted to, but I felt like I had to (Truth). I felt like I had to major in something that would make my parents, especially my dad, proud. Plus, my parents didn’t know about majors or that you don’t necessarily study a ‘career’ in college like they thought. I forced myself to sit through classes I had no interest in, convincing myself that I could handle four years of misery. (Lie).
The pressure of ensuring my parents' sacrifice did not go to waste informed every choice I made. There were few majors and few career options available to me if I was supposed to live up to my parents expectations. I was still trying to prove to my parents, and maybe even to the hardware store employee, that my parents were not 'just stupid mexicans.' Being first-generation meant that everything I did, all of my successes and failures, were reflections of my parents. So, when I ultimately realized that I didn’t want to be a doctor, I felt like I had failed to live up to my parents' sacrifice.

It wasn’t until much later that I realized that I had been thinking about being a first-generation student all wrong. Yes, part of it was about getting an education for my parents’ sake. But the pressure that put on me was not the only piece of it. Most of the pressure came from what I was putting on myself. Being first-gen and pursuing an education wasn’t really about proving that hardware store employee wrong. (Truth). It wasn’t about making my parents proud. That was always there. Being first-gen doesn’t mean that I was responsible for righting the wrongs that my parents had to live with because they came to this country.

People talk about speaking your truth. It wasn’t until I started being honest with myself that I came to understand what being first-gen meant to me.

No one ever talked to me about the loneliness. No one said anything about what it would be like feeling as if I was the only one on campus who had all of this pressure to live up to while not really knowing what I was doing. Growing up, I was the one who had to
figure out how things worked in Eastern Washington so I could help my parents. Whether it was translating at the doctor’s office, helping them fill out various forms, or finding things on the internet, I was always the one who was expected to be able to figure it out. When I arrived at college, I felt like I had to do things alone, because I was ashamed of sharing how lost I felt (Truth). Part of me was back in that hardware store, unsure of what to do in a place where I was clearly not supposed to be. After having to know how the systems in Eastern Washington worked so that I could translate for my parents, I couldn’t admit that I had no idea how to live within the college system.

It came as somewhat of a shock when I finally found others on campus who had similar experiences to mine. By listening to other people’s stories that sounded a lot like mine, I was able to realize that I was not alone. There was nothing (or not a whole lot at least) unique about my experience. I was probably in the majority of students feeling like I had no idea what I was doing. Somewhere along the line, I had forgotten that I had grown up as part of a collective. Decisions in my family were made with the good of the whole family in mind. I was trying to get through college on my own rather than continuing to rely on a community that provided me with strength for so many years.

This is what made me realize that I had been thinking of being first-gen all wrong.

Being first-gen is about continuing to honor and live out the legacy of hard work. The same drive that pushed my parents to work day in and day out is the
drive that followed me when I went to college. Being first-gen is about using the resourcefulness learned from living in systems that are not made for you. It’s about realizing that even if I was responsible for figuring out how to navigate Eastern Washington for my parents, I always had people and a home I could go back to.

It is about defying those who say you can’t and the strength that comes showing yourself that you can.

At the start of my college career, I saw being a first-generation student as something to be overcome. It was yet another marker of something I lacked. But now I know that I was wrong. Being a first-generation student is about the strength to keep going even when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

And that’s the truth.
Give Me A Second
Guillermo Sandoval

Picture this. You’re sitting toward the front of a full class, dull pencil in hand, note-filled journal and textbook on the table. The instructor is lecturing and stops to pose a question. A response comes to mind. Now you’re thinking, “Should I further articulate this response or speak now and risk being perceived as dumb?” You weigh the pros and cons, and you finally decide you’ll chime in. As your hand reluctantly rises to reach the height of your chest, someone else blurts out your response. The instructor responds to them, “Yeah, great point!”

Damn... Can you give me a second?

I’m a first-generation person of color. If silence was held just a little longer, I’d have something to say.

Truthfully, I tend to be shyer than the average person. Not sure why. Imposter syndrome, maybe? In high school, I had classmates tell me they didn’t think I spoke English. I see why they thought that. I was a little brown boy with a thick mustache that rarely ever spoke. Though, I’m also not sure that I’d entirely contribute my inability to promptly participate in conversation to my shyness.
Some people fail to consider how much space their voices occupy. I can easily recall instances—primarily in the classroom as an undergrad and in some job meetings. The same people talk over each other for an hour straight.

The class/meeting ends.

My thoughts go unheard, dismissed, or told by other people. When the class or meeting topics are about advancing inclusion, racial equity, and social justice, I think, "If we really want to make progress, let’s start with waiting for or inviting less often heard voices to contribute."

I want more people to value silence, knowing there’s internal processing happening. I want people like me to really think about the significance of their voice being heard, regardless of how the words come out. I still struggle with sharing, here and there. But, I find comfort in knowing there’s immense worth in contributing knowledge from my historically excluded perspective.
The First to “Master It”
Samantha Penjaraenwatana

I remember asking myself, “Where is my letter?”

It was mid-January. Was it delayed? I kept checking both my email and mailbox.

Nothing.

It’s coming, don’t worry.

A few weeks passed by, and I knew the news was not going to be good. I received a physical letter in the mail. I couldn’t open it. I knew I wasn’t accepted into the program. And I was right.

“We are unable to offer you admission.”

But why?

I remember sitting in my room, holding this letter, and feeling unsure about what to do. I couldn’t tell my parents. My parents were so supportive and affirming. I called my partner and cried my heart out. I couldn’t process my feelings. I just wanted to know why not me. I wanted an answer. What did I do wrong?
This was the first time in my life where I felt like I really understood what failure was. I failed a test before, but this felt different this time. Receiving the letter, I thought “This is it. I am never going to grad school. What am I supposed to do next?” I felt lost, confused, and a little bit ashamed. I felt alone and scared. I didn’t want anyone else to know. But I knew I had to tell people eventually.

I knew I had to tell my colleagues. As I started to tell my team, they asked, “How did you not get in? You’re doing the work already!” This was not helpful to my processing. I didn’t feel like I belonged in the program, and the faculty made that decision for me. I couldn’t do anything.

It was just back to normal business for me.

Two years later, I went back and forth about applying. I didn’t want to. I was scared of the rejection. Six months before the application was due, I started to open up about my feelings and began to process this fear of rejection with others. An alumnus from the program helped me gain the confidence to reapply. After every meeting, he told me, “Apply, you got this.” I found mentorship and encouragement from him.

I also found mentorship from the director of career services. Every two weeks, she would read my many, many versions of my resume and personal statements. She held me accountable. That is exactly what I needed. There was this new feeling that I didn’t have before. I didn’t feel alone. I didn’t feel scared. I had a team supporting my every step. This time it felt
very different.

It was time to click the submit button once again. This time, I felt more ready.

Not hesitant.
Not fearful.
Ready.

I clicked the button, and it felt rewarding. I worked so hard. I was prepared to see what was next.

I remember sitting in theory class feeling overwhelmed and stressed. As I heard my peers talk about their experiences, I asked myself, “Why am I here?” Why did this feel like failure again? I got accepted.

I thought, “I shouldn’t feel this way. I should be happy to be here. This is what I wanted.” So, why am I feeling this sense of failure again? I didn’t know the answer to this question.

Maybe I don’t belong here. Am I alone again?

I didn’t feel enough compared to them. I wasn’t sure why I was here, and why I was accepted into the program. I didn’t tell anyone about my secret. I was ashamed, and I didn’t want people to know that I didn’t get into the program my very first try.

Theory was difficult - not going to lie. But I found my person. Through our many FaceTime calls and honest sharing of our struggles and frustrations, we grew close. She was the very first person in the
program that I told my secret to. She was so understanding and supportive. "Do you need anything?" she asked. She was so reassuring.

I realized that I wasn’t the only one scared to fail. She felt it too. This mutual feeling made us both realize that we were not alone. We had each other, and this meant everything to me. I couldn’t have made it past fall quarter without her. Actually, I couldn’t have made it through these past two years without her.

We stayed resilient for each other.

I don’t think I could pinpoint an exact time when I realized it’s okay to fail. As time passed by, I started to open up about my failure. I remember going into my faculty member’s office and sharing my feelings about not getting accepted. She said, “This is your time, you’re meant to be here at this moment. You are here for a reason”.

These words stick with me today.

Her constant reminders and encouragement is what keeps me going. These words of affirmation taught me that failure is part of growing.

Failure is what sustains me to keep moving forward. I wouldn’t be who I am today without this failure. I learned that this experience of failure turned my story into success.

Failure was a huge part of my journey to receiving my master’s degree. I didn’t let failure define
me or my experiences.

It is with gratitude to all of those who have supported me that I can confidently say, I am the first to "master it."
About the Contributors

Allison Botelho, or Alli as most people know her, is a person who appears to be quiet and shy at first, but has a huge, goofy, and loving heart. She was born and raised on the island of O'ahu, Hawai‘i where she lived for 18 years. Then, she packed up her bags and started her educational journey to Seattle, Washington. She attended Seattle Pacific University and received her bachelor's degree in psychology. After graduating, she stayed to pursue a master’s degree. Alli is currently a graduate student in the Student Development Administration program where she hopes to be a support system and family for students. She loves spending time with loved ones, watching Netflix shows, and trying new food places.

Mariah Fernandez is a first-generation student who is proud to be Chicana. She is the first-born daughter of two loving and supportive parents who raised their three daughters to always follow their dreams no matter the circumstances. Since childhood, she has always worked hard to get to college and fulfil a life-long that her parents didn’t have the chance to accomplish. Mariah will be a senior next year receiving two degrees in Forensic Science and Chemistry with hopes of becoming a Medico-Legal Death Investigator.
Kal Green was born Christopher Mykal Green in Seattle on December 19, 1996. Mykal wishes to enter the education system to increase diversity surrounding students and their exposure to literature. Being a queer person of color, Mykal aims to create the images and stories he doesn’t see in the world, so the world can hear one more perspective on what it means to be both black and gay.

Yvette Gutierrez-Morfin was born and raised in the Tri-Cities area of Washington. Her parents are originally from Jalisco, Mexico. She grew up with two younger brothers who still drive her up the wall sometimes. She is currently pursuing a Masters degree at Seattle University. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her niece and nephew, reading, playing video games, and being really bad at Call of Duty.

Dalena Le is currently a Computer Science major and English minor at Seattle University. She is a native Washingtonian and will graduate in the Spring to be a software developer. When she’s not spinning up code or yelling at it, she’s minding her own business and probably quite elusive.

Chhavi Mehra is a Communication and Media Studies major with a specialization in Journalism. She is first-gen, an Alfie Scholar, and an international student from India who came to the U.S. at the age of 19 to pursue her dream of receiving a university education. As a woman coming from India, she experienced first-hand how she was once among the “voiceless” and wants to use her voice to help amplify the voices
of marginalized communities in India and America. She dedicates her story to other first-gens, her campus community, and fellow international students. Through her story, she also hopes to bring pride to her ethnicity and her family and thanks her family and the Alfie Scholars for believing in her and supporting her in her educational and career endeavors.

Carlos Moreno Vega is a first-year student at Seattle University pursuing a double major in Political Science and Spanish. Being a first-gen student with a Mexican background, he cares deeply about issues surrounding the Latinx communities. His passions and interests in these issues reflect in his involvement in Seattle U’s MEChA club and Connections Leadership Program. Particularly, he tries to raise awareness about queer issues in Latinx spaces to spread awareness about identities and people not often discussed in Latinx cultures. In his free time, Carlos plays video games, reads, and watches various political podcasts and videos. After college, he hopes to use his degrees to make his way to law school and work with immigrants.

Samantha Penjaraenwatana is a first-gen, Asian American, educator born in California and raised in Bellevue, Washington. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Community Psychology from the University of Washington Bothell. For the past two years, she has supported first-gen students in her role as the Graduate Coordinator for First-Generation Initiatives. She will be receiving her Master of Education in Student Development Administration from Seattle
University in June. Her interests include playing tourist around WA state, crafting ideas from Pinterest, and spending time with her dog, family, partner, and friends. She will be forever grateful for the opportunity to support first-gen students at Seattle University.

**Guillermo Sandoval** is a first-generation, Mexican-American, education professional born in East Los Angeles, California, but raised in Tacoma, Washington. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Communications with a Minor in Global Engagement from UW Tacoma and a Master of Education in Student Development Administration from Seattle University. His hobbies include playing soccer and tennis, and hanging with friends and family.

**Khuong "Teddy" Vo** is an international student from Vietnam who finds out that his passionate heart belongs to the world of journalism. He wants to use the power of writing to uplift his community - the Vietnamese community. He is the son of two lawyers, who have wished that he would follow the legal career, but Teddy decided that journalism and storytelling are what make him happy entirely. In Teddy’s piece, he delivers a letter to his younger self. In that letter, he wants to share what he has been through as an international student, and what brought him to Seattle U.
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