



Because She Loved McDonald's feature by |linh dao

People often asked me why I went to America. I said I wanted to fall in love. People then asked me, so did you fall in love with anybody yet? I said I did fall in love with McDonald's. People told me that I was really special. No, I was not. My grandmother was the one who is special.

Back when I was in Vietnam, I ate a lot of vegetables with rice every single day. People in America would tell me that I ate healthy back then. But the fact was I ate that way just to fill up my stomach, not because of any other reason. Not only me but my entire family ate the same kind of diet everyday. My grandmother cooked. We were just poor.

When I was 16, my grandmother was found to have blood cancer at the last stage. The doctor required her to live in the hospital so she moved there to live with a lot of strange people. She could not cook for me anymore. As the new cook, I came back to her house after school and saw my old grandfather sobbing in a dark corner of the house, trying to wash some rice with his quivering hands. I hurried to him, getting him up just to see that the sixteen-year-old me was not much stronger than the ninety-years-old man holding on to me to breathe through the pain.

I could cook, but I was never a great cook. All the schoolwork, and then homework, squeezed all of my energy as if they were squeezing a spoiled lemon. I could cook nothing but vegetables. I could not even cook meat for my grandmother.

Sometimes we bough her McDonald's. It tasted great, and it also had a great deal of energy in it. We were grateful. The only problem was we did not have that much money. Eventually, we could not afford that much McDonald's, especially when it is so expensive in my country.

The more time passed, the weaker my grandmother got. Then it came to the point that she could only lay in bed all day long. One day, I got a piece of newspaper that talks about the price of McDonald's in some other countries. Suddenly, something brightened the darkness of my mind. I felt as if I could feel the world outside with my bare feet. I needed to walk out of the hospital, the city, the country that I have been living in my entire little life. I felt as if I was ready to run, to get to Overwhelmed in the tangible happiness that I myself could not even describe at that moment, I whispered in my grandmother's ear, when she was sleeping quietly, that I would go abroad and bring her there with me to go get some fast food. I loved her peaceful face when I said that because I assumed that she was listening to me and that she was smiling in her dream. But most of all it was because of the moment that both of us shared- the moment of reaching out to something so simple yet so precious in our common lives.

Learning English was one of the most exciting experiences once I figured out the reasons why I needed to learn it. The boundless ocean of information that I could jump into opened in

front of my eyes as soon as I started my very first course of English as the first language, not as a second language. My mind was in a prison at first, since I could not understand anything the instructor was saying, and could not contribute anything back to the class. But the little things that I got, about truth, and life, about the world outside, as well as the future that I myself could build up by my own hands with knowledge, were precious.

The more information I got out of the course, the more I craved for it. I even brought papers with me to read while I was with my grandmother in the hospital. Whenever I had time, such as when she was sleeping, or when she was laying quietly, I would sit by her side, reading one of the English newspapers without understanding half of them. She often looked at me proudly but sometimes she also stared at me in curiosity. Sometimes I forced myself not to look back at her eyes, because she would get tired, and would close her eyes painfully. I would not be able to hold the smile on my face after that, knowing that the intangible deadline was coming up for my study partner to leave while I had not learned anything much.

Being close to her and being further away from her everyday, I began feeling the rush of learning day by day. I started learning every new words that I found in the newspaper as I was craving for words, for the language, and the future that both of us could hold on to. I loved to use my pen and my pretty pink notebook, carefully writing down all of them as well

as their meanings and when to use them. I did it all the time, around 2 or 3 in the morning after I finished my homework, in the kitchen every afternoon while I cooked soup for my grandmother, or during the break at school.. There is only one place, the universe that all the words I learned created, that made me dazzled. I was amazed by that place where I was not poor, not tired of cooking, not scare of losing my grandmother but bravely breaking the boundaries that I was born into every single day. That place was almost like an escape, and at the same time as a settlement. Surprisingly, it was just all about learning words and phrases, nothing more than that. But that fact did not discourage me at all. By the end of the course, I was able to read Oprah's Magazine to my grandmother. Then we heard about an exchange program in America and I did all the paper work in a week. By the beginning of August that year, I went abroad, with the promise to my grandmother that I would be as proficient as the native English speaker and then get a scholarship to complete my education in the States.

Pursuing a degree in America right now, I realized how literate I am in the English language, and bitterly how a part of our dream never came true. That promise I made was in my dream only since my grandmother passed away a month before I left. She could never go to America and eat McDonald's with me. But the simple dream that she gave me, the dream about something bigger to me than it is supposed to be for other people, is still alive in my heart.

The Quest to Nirvana

drama by |matt ziegler

Disclaimer- Warning: A close reading of this play may cause enlightenment. READ WITH CAUTION.

[Classroom Setting- Sometime in the future]

Teacher: Now Class, Since today is your last day at the Ratiug Center for self-Annihilation, we will be taking a comprehensive exam to test whether you are ready for enlightenment.

[Starts passing out tests]

As you know, failure to complete this exam perfectly and in its entirety will result in 10,000 more lifetimes in the cycle of suffering. You have all worked a very long time to get to this point in existence, so I wish you all the best of luck.

Snyder: Holy Guardian Morrison?

Teacher: Yes Riccardo?

Snyder: As you know, in my last 36 lives I was confined to the dung heaps of Southern Notlem and lost the ability to comprehend written language.

Teacher: Shit, I almost forgot. Yes, I'll administer your exam orally. Number 1: How did Saint Toby finally relinquish the final form of Hitler, also known as Giga-Hitler?

Snyder: Saint Toby first located the capstone in the second realm of the Caspian Sea, and then used it to summon Sylvester Stalone's undead manifestation. Saint Toby knew that Stalone's zombie form was the only creature capable of defeating Giga-Hitler due to his proficiency in boxing, rock-climbing, and talking incoherently. Saint Toby then went to Giga-Hitler's lair and summoned Zombie Stalone in a surprise attack on Giga-Hitler. After this battle, Giga-Hitler and the sixth reich

were defeated once and for all.

Teacher: Correct, you really know your Korean History. Number 2---

[someone in the class giggles]

Damnit Montee, I've completely had it with your immature sense of humor. That'll be 93 lives as a microbe feeding on cat piss, followed by 8,423 lives as an anima cactus infected with the infamous Sedicius Parasite.
Charles: What? No, c'mon. I didn't mean anything by it. It was your inflection, I swear. Please don't send me back to the cat piss.

Teacher: Too late for begging.

[The teacher snaps his finger and Charles immediately drops dead for the remainder of the scene]

Sorry about his shenanigans Nick. Where were we? Ah yes, Number 2-

[looks quickly around the room]
Why did the High Antarctic Court deem Europe the loser of the third and final transatlantic Armageddon showdown?

Snyder: Um...Well after Chancellor Barthusser of the South American Confederation created the super-virus which accidently wiped out the world's communication infrastructure, General Washington was able to bribe the Court with a wax statue of Helen of Troy II. The American Requiem Agency promptly found out and sent a counter-bribe of the restored body of the original Helen, and since the court was comprised of uncontrollable necrophiliacs, America won the showdown.

Teacher: Excellent answer. So far so good. Now for the final question which will determine either your eternal enlightenment, or whether you have to wait another 10,000 lifetimes to get back to this point. Are you ready?
Snyder: Saint Obama I hope so...

Teacher: Who won the final race in the 20th century 2-D classic, Chariots of Fire?
Snyder: Oh fuck, um...fuck, I know this....um, shit, um, the character....played by...fuck.... what's his name....um, ben cross was the actor....um, who the fuck was that....um...Harold Abrahams??

[There's a long dramatic pause. The teacher stares at him, then at the ground, building tension and suspense. After way too much awkward silence, the teacher jumps up and lights start flashing vigorously. Music begins playing, confetti falls from the ceiling, and everyone on stage begins dancing as if on the Ellen Degeneres Show. The teacher then takes Snyder by the shoulder.]

Teacher: Congratulations, Michael, You have finally reached enlightenment!!!

[Crowd cheers a bunch]

As you know, Enlightenment is the ultimate reward for countless lifetimes of suffering and stress. How that you've achieved this eternal state of being, what will you do next, Jimmy?

Snyder: Well, first I'd like to thank my 96,847th set of parents. They believed in me when everyone else just told me to go exhume some more sulfur. Now, since I've always wanted to author a new reality, I think I'll go hit the shop to start molding stars and alternate life-forms. I now however realize that despite my greatest

efforts to build a new universe, that it will only last for about 10 generations due to my insidious fascination for super-lightning.

Teacher: Wow, your omniscience is already kicking in. That's amazing, Simon had to wait---

Snyder: [Interrupting quite furiously] You mother fucker. I should have known that you were the one who created the Bubonic plague which devastated medieval Europe.

Teacher: [Defensively] Shit man, that was in the past. This is obviously a big misunderstanding. I knew you loved Sir Ballentine, but it was his time to go. And I mean, he was kind of asking for it by keeping so many rats as pets.
Snyder: No, Fuck You. That was my only incarnation as a human female. SIR BALLENTINE KNEW WHERE MY G-SPOT WAS!!!!
FUCK YOU.

[Snyder advances and towers over the teacher. He begins to raise his tightly clenched fist]
Teacher: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. B. B. King commanded me to unleash the plague. Europe was far too crowded with charlatans and brothels. There was so much sin. I was only following orders....

Snyder: I don't give a fuck what you have to say. I will fuck yo ass up!!!

[Snyder is about to pummel the teacher into total oblivion when there is an enormous crash and a blinding light fill the entire theatre]

Very Loud Deep Voice: Enough with this petty skirmish. Your axioms are completely out of line...

Snyder and Teacher [in unison and utter amazement]: Oh fuck.....It's Kant!!!!
[END]