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80A
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Awakening Guilt

I had a lot of trouble starting this essay. Not because I wasn't sure which act of oppression has affected me or shaped me more than others. Not because interviewing parts of my family were difficult. But because if I'm being completely honest, I found myself struggling to think of a time where I truly felt oppressed in my own country. Because I couldn't remember so much as witnessing an act of racism or sexism where I grew up. Because I was searching so fucking hard to find a focus point on my essay, a single incident where I could implement bullshit words and feelings on. And the harder I searched for something that could make me cry, the more I became guilty. The more I wanted to cry out of shame of being white and well-off and living in a gated community-out of being a living model of who this country is built for.

Every day at Oakes I am proven time and again of my necessary escape from my American normalized view of the world. The aftermath of Donald Trump's election was the first time me and my roommate Georgie have ever been shown the differences of our pasts, or felt a sensible conflicting energy between us. She grew up in South Africa, where her and her family "survived because [they] were white . . . but were exposed to more distinct racism . . . Black Africans are never given any opportunity to be successful or have social mobility." Once she moved to the states, she had to learn the code of hidden oppression, which in ways was even worse than her upbringings. She notices the ease in staying in a "white bubble," hiding away in safety, protected against the detriments the rest of the world faces. Once Donald Trump was elected, she didn't sleep for three days. Her eyes were puffy, her body was sore from running around in the riots from the night before, her world as she knew it was deeply changing and directly affecting her well being.

My parents always pushed me to express our democratic opinions in a very mellow manner. We are comparatively well-off, white, and historically derived from slave-owning Americans. Though worked up and discomforted, my family gets by without much harm when a Republican is put into power. Although this particular

election manifested a turmoil of hate, confusion, and anger within me, I was calm in the way I personally dealt with it. I meditated, practiced yoga, read, kept to myself and didn't really have any desire to riot with Georgie. I encouraged her to come with me on my quest for peace and acceptance and renewal for mind and body health. I became increasingly frustrated with her rebellion, and couldn't understand her outlashes when I told her to take a step back and relax.

After I heard her talk to my colleagues about her stories, I realized this election meant very different things for us. She recounted on the ways in which this one man in office will affect the fluidity of her life. She told us about her friends who have a very real chance at being deported, about her far travels for a fair government, about her survival of sexual assault, about her exclusion from her high school volleyball team because of her bisexuality, about how she might not get to marry the love of her life. And as I listened, a bubble of guilt began to form throughout my body-starting from my throat, and then drooping down to my stomach, to my fingers and toes and energy points I didn't even know I could feel emotions in. And I started to realize that when I was telling her to calm down, I was really telling her to suppress her voice. Her beautiful, powerful, justice-seeking voice, which has a certain spell on anyone who has the pleasure of hearing it. It's the kind of voice that holds your hand and guides you to the truth, to her soul, to her. And I can't thank her enough for that voice of hers, that woke me up to the horrific American ideals branded into my mind.

Her voice awoke me to the family structures I unknowingly accepted-of the acts of oppression I was never taught hover over places outside my small world. It put me into a state of paralysis as I grasped the contrast between her story, your stories, and mine. I am not content with the little bubble that surrounds me, and I am not proud of the American mindset that has been implemented in me. I am not proud of the way I get to move through the world. But I have to at least try to break these damn barriers passed down to us- I mean for fucksake, we are *all* guilty of living in parallel bubbles that dampen any desire to understand the people we get to share this precious time and space with. To accomplish this, I have to write from a point in my body that some consider a soul-where there's no filter, and no bullshit . . .just effortless honesty, and maybe a few curse words. I have to be fearless, otherwise we're gonna forever exist in this fucked up world where we really don't even know each other, where we are discouraged from learning about the person who shares a room with us, where we don't pay attention to what the extreme differences of our experiences truly mean . . .anyway, here's mine.

My siblings and I never got to meet my grandma or grandpa on my dad's side-and there's still a part of me that's still mad at the world for letting them go. I allow that part to remain a little angry because my dad dives into beautiful recounts of my grandma's life and compares some elements of her charisma to me and my sister. Somehow, his memories of her touch a part in me that pushes me to explore independence in the truest sense. Lina May Gilley was born in Texas, a "rural part of Texas, in particular, a 'good old boy' country filled with antiquated attitudes like racism and sexism." Her family was poor, and her life in Texas was shitty in comparison to the life she dreamt of.

Eventually, she scrambled up enough money to move to Los Angeles, where she changed her name to Cheryl. From the little information my dad gives to me, his shared memories are what creates the most beautiful imaginations in my head. They lead me to think of her as a nineteen sixties Beverly Hills power woman, with a real life sparkle when she smiles. She's the kind of woman who can pull off a tight bun and a business suit, and has a whole separate closet for her high heels, satin dresses and fur coats. She has a loud obnoxious drunk laugh and falls without anything tripping her. She can wear a big sweater and red lipstick, holding a cigarette and telling someone next to her the little philosophical things that come to her. In my mind, there's something about her that attracts people instantaneously, as if suddenly nothing has ever mattered in their life before the sight of her.

My father glamorizes her in the best way-the way that screams "I love you" and "I fucking miss you," and "I really wish you got to meet your grandchildren." But sometimes, I think I know my dad a little better than he knows himself--I can see that his portrayal of her deviates from the truth. Other parts of my family report she had a lot of boyfriends, had a lot of sex, and went to more parties than her own son did--she "experienced multitudes of situations where men tried to take advantage of her." She wasn't comfortable with admitting she ever needed help, and ignored the elements that caused her pain: her romantic life, experience with sexism and assault, financial distress, and persisted in hiding them from my dad. Her independence, though glamorous and desirable, did not come without cost--nannies, babysitting, boarding school, and a man who was never around to take care of their son. A man who never there for his fucking birthday parties, never saw him go off to college, or watch him marry the love of his life. A man who led my dad to be there for me, at every damn soccer game, every meal, every early out day, every morning to wake me up to go surf, every time I needed someone to brush my hair or tuck me into bed. He was always there to hug me, to wipe my tears, to kiss my forehead and tell me I was beautiful when anyone broke my heart.

And because he is this father to his children, he rightfully declines to portray his mom as anything less than wonderful. He refuses to blame her for the way she chose to move through her life, or for hiding the oppression she underwent-- and I think that has made the most impact on the way he raises us. He adopts her hesitation to teach his kids about the hardships of others, and continuously strives to build the most comfortable life for us in Carlsbad, a town among the north part of San Diego. Although he very much kept us from struggle, me and my siblings truly grew up in a bubble. And as I write now, from a place of shock to the stories I hear in Oakes core, disturbed at the ways this presidential election has enough power to form a lump in your throats and a swelling of unavoidable tears, I realize the place I come from, the family that raised me, the oppression I was sheltered from, has been detrimental to my growth. The safety that was provided for me has failed me deeply in understanding and questioning my world.

My parent's pasts are tools for understanding the choices they have made for me. Although they grew up in drastically different ways, they function succinctly in agreement about keeping their children far away from a hard life and oppression. My mom grew up in a big family in SanTee, in east San Diego-her parents were white, and working class, with no religious or political input. Her brothers helped their father with fixing cars, finding work, and other traditional American male jobs, while the girls helped their mother with cleaning and kitchen work. Once her parents divorced and her step dad replaced the dominant role, her "whole life just sort of blew up."

Her incoming stepfather was a policeman-and a racist, misogynistic, narcissistic asshole. He beat my uncles physically, verbally abused the girls, and punched my grandma on occasion. According to my mom, "it could have been anything that would set him off and make him get his belt . . . he would just lash out, stand over me and tell me exactly the way he wanted something done. I remember one time he stood over me while I was cleaning the windows, uncomfortably close and screaming in my face that I wasn't doing it right. Eventually he just took everything that was in my hand and threw it on the ground, leaving me in tears and a sense of helplessness." He was everything my mom hated about the nature of men, about the nature of dominance, about the destruction of divorce. With every job, every attitude, every thought, she moved further away from the man who greatly disturbed her childhood. My mother's exposure to oppression drove her towards raising us in a sheltered way. She chose my father to spend her life with and raise her family, a man with a clear intention to hide pain from his children. A man who never lashed out at us or expressed his anger in any sense. A man who helped her keep us from crime, rape, racism, sexism, anything that could have hurt us, instead of teaching is about it's continuance. Due to their

unmentioned agreement, I am shocked to learn about existing social problems in the country I live in, and feel a swell of guilt arise at the notion of my misguidance.

Together they unconsciously decided to raise us in a place with no outlet to any problems in the world. Carlsbad is comparable to the TV show *Weeds*, and it's depiction of the suburbs as "little boxes." Mostly everyone is white, with substantial amounts of money and lifelong careers in business, law, or the medical field. A lot of the moms partake in PTA, and stay at home to take care of the kids while the dads work at their nine to fives. Every neighborhood looks the same, every house a blueprint for the normalized American family. There's barely any crime; the cops only get paid to pull over baked teenagers, bust parties, and make up for the size of their dicks by embracing unnecessary authority. They have nothing to protect us from, because where I grew up feels like utopia now that I'm out of it.

Because I'm in Santa Cruz, I can take a step back and clearly see the way of life I was brought up in, which haunts me and my movement to break out of it. The high school I attended built a separate school named CVA (different teachers, different buildings, different learning material) for "delinquent students" who were kicked out of Carlsbad High School, or guided there after middle school. These kids, who got into fights, received poor grades, were expelled, etc., were predominantly Mexican, black, Latino, and Hispanic. Most of the Carlsbad high school attendees just ignored the CVA kids, and failed to see this rising injustice. They didn't matter to us, their race, persona, choices, seemed to fall short of the image and legacy my high school wanted to continue. They were separate. . . out of sight, out of mind. There was no need to ask questions, just get back from lunch in your BMW, get to our AP literature class, and don't let your \$500 Michael Kors watch make you late.

It makes me angry that some of my friends still live there, caught in comfort, unconscious and uninspired for change. It makes me angry that the schools I attended never taught us of the continuing of racism in our country. Topics like that seemed too touchy to dive into, and were only remnants of the past. We didn't learn about other countries or their governments, about crime, sexism, oppression, internalizations, because those things didn't touch us in our little paradise. If I never moved out of Carlsbad, I would have never noticed my school as a racial filter. If I never moved out, I would have never met any of you, or be shook from my disabling comfort. I would have never even tried to put myself in someone else's shoes, or rise to a level of understanding and pure empathy. I would have blindly lived a life of complete ignorance, with a fucking gated-community-esque view of the planet.

This assignment awoke the guilt that was trapped inside of me, and pushed me to look at the tension between me and my roommate as something more than just disagreement. It made me see how wrong I was when I told her to adopt my calm approach, and inspired a much needed apology to her. With added enlightenment from Audre Lorde, I now understand that it wasn't Georgie just being stubborn and angry, it wasn't just me taking on a conflicting style of moving on by being calm and cool and accepting. I now understand that it wasn't a misalignment of attitudes, but rather a misalignment of cultures, of words. And as participants of any country or any society, "it is our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries and separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own . . .there are endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other " (332). Lorde looks at me and Georgie as a part of the world, as part of a tree, with endless meaningful roots and chance for deep connection. Discovering the differences between what is below the surface, what is buried under that tree, is what sparks the growth of a forest. We all must become conscious of our dying forest, or the rhythm of our world's heartbeat will eventually fade into nothingness.

Works Cited

Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." (n.d.): 329-31. Web.