

Written by Phuong Truong

Illustrated by Christine Wei

Everyone is Welcome



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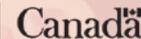
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Edited by Gillian Sze

Second Story Press gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund.



Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada



Published by
Second Story Press
20 Maud Street, Suite 401
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5V 2M5
www.secondstorypress.ca

Phuong Truong grew up in Ottawa and dreamed of being a rock star, a lawyer, or an author. She is pleasantly surprised to have achieved one of these goals. She works in book publishing and lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario.

For Cameron, Hailey, Lucy, and Jeff. –P.T.

Christine Wei is a Taiwanese artist living on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations in Vancouver, BC. She graduated from Emily Carr University of Art and Design with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and major in illustration. Christine's work often draws inspiration from sentiment, life stories, and nature-inspired mark-makings. She loves creating art with a variety of mediums to convey relatable narratives in dynamic perspectives.

To the day we can all rewrite our fears of differences and celebrate them. –C.W.

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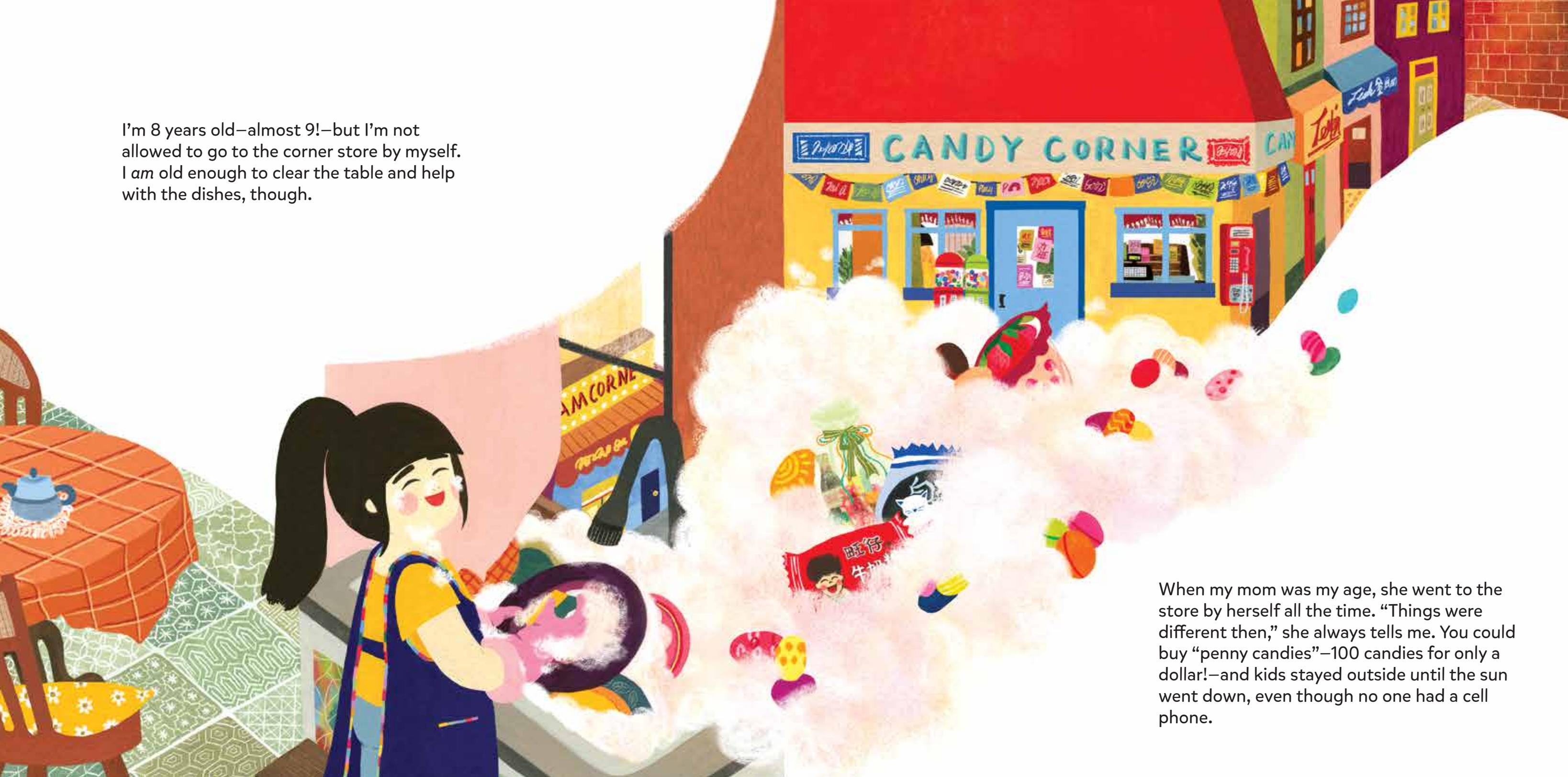
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I'm 8 years old—almost 9!—but I'm not allowed to go to the corner store by myself. I *am* old enough to clear the table and help with the dishes, though.



When my mom was my age, she went to the store by herself all the time. “Things were different then,” she always tells me. You could buy “penny candies”—100 candies for only a dollar!—and kids stayed outside until the sun went down, even though no one had a cell phone.

She also told me that once, as she walked to the store by herself, some kids called out, “Ching chong!” They pulled at the corners of their eyes and stuck out their tongues. Mom just ignored them. I think that’s so silly because my mom was born here, and we mostly speak English at home.





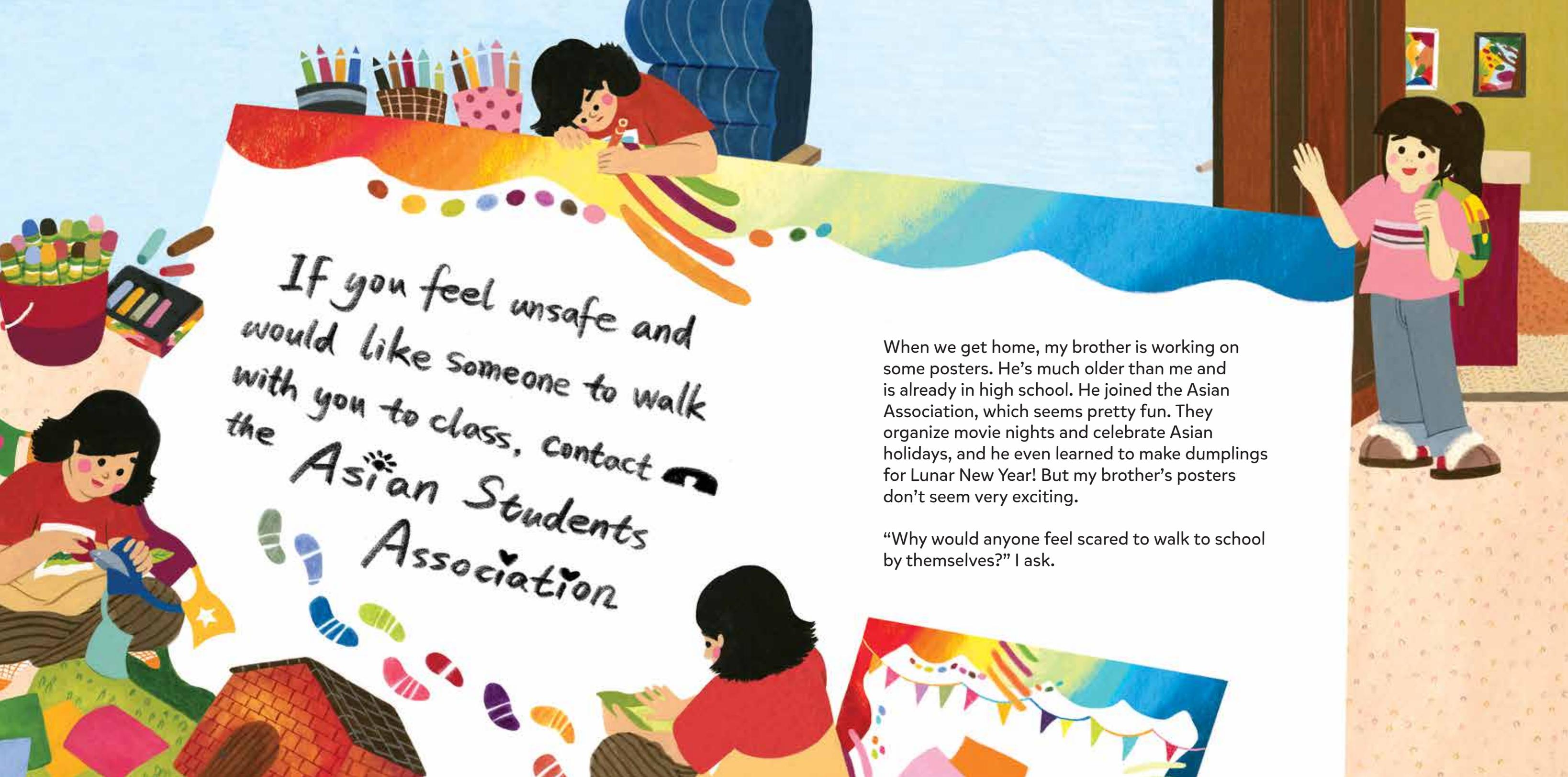
I don't mind about the corner store so much because I get to go to the Asian market with my family. There are lots of treats that I can't find anywhere else. Lychee jellies and creamy milk candies. And sweet buns filled with custard or red bean.



My grandmother used to walk to the Asian market almost every day. She'd push her shopping buggy and wear a big hat to protect her skin from the sun.

But one of Grandma's friends had an accident last week. Just like Grandma, Mrs. Lee was walking to the market when someone pushed her right into the road! Then he just kept going. Luckily, other people were there to help, but now Grandma will only go to the Asian market when my parents can take her. So now I get to go every weekend!





If you feel unsafe and
would like someone to walk
with you to class, contact
the
Asian Students
Association

When we get home, my brother is working on some posters. He's much older than me and is already in high school. He joined the Asian Association, which seems pretty fun. They organize movie nights and celebrate Asian holidays, and he even learned to make dumplings for Lunar New Year! But my brother's posters don't seem very exciting.

"Why would anyone feel scared to walk to school by themselves?" I ask.



“Some students have had buckets of gross stuff thrown at them—and all of the students have been Asian,” he says.

That seems so unfair!
“Hey, maybe the Asian Students Association should offer to walk older people to the market too. People like Grandma and Mrs. Lee!” I say.

“That’s a great idea.”
He smiles and ruffles my hair.
I let him get away with it...
this time.

At school the next day, I have a hard time focusing on my lessons. I can't stop thinking about what happened to my mom when she was little, how my grandma is too afraid to go shopping by herself, and that some Asian students don't feel safe, even at school. I am very happy when the teacher announces it's time for recess.



We head into the big field in our schoolyard to play tag, like we do most days. But today, one of my friends tells me he can't play with me anymore.

His dad told him that everything bad that's happened in the world is my fault. Mine and everyone who looks like me. He seems sad but he walks away, and I don't have the words to stop him. I'm relieved that no one else goes with him.



After school, I don't even get myself a snack. I just go straight to my room to lie down. Mom knocks on my door. "What's the matter, kiddo?"

"One of my friends wouldn't play with me today. His dad told him to stay away from Asian people."

"Oh, sweetie," my mom says sadly. "I'm sorry that happened to you. I hope you know you didn't do anything wrong."

She takes a deep breath and sits down beside me.



“Sometimes, people need to find a reason for their troubles, and it’s often easier to place that blame on people that look different than they do. Some children are taught that how a person looks or where they come from is more important than how they act. The hard part is that there may not be much you can do to change their minds. You just continue to be the awesome person you are and keep being a good friend. To everyone.”

Mom said I may not be able to change anyone’s mind, but that doesn’t mean I shouldn’t try.



An illustration showing a group of diverse children sitting on a grassy field. They are gathered around a large white sheet of paper, which is a 'Get Well Soon' card. One child is holding a bunch of colorful pencils, another is holding a pair of red scissors, and another is holding a yellow glue stick. The children are looking at the card with various expressions of interest and concern. The background features a large, soft, circular light in the sky, transitioning from light blue to light orange.

The next day before class, I tell everyone what happened to Mrs. Lee, and many of my classmates gasp at the thought of hurting a grandma. Someone calls out, “Is she okay?” and another person asks, “Why did he push her?”

“I can’t say for sure why it happened, but a lot of bad things have happened to a lot of Asian people, and we are scared. Mrs. Lee hurt her wrist, but I think she is mostly sad and upset.

“I’ve made a Get Well Soon card for Mrs. Lee and I think it would really cheer her up if you’d all sign it or draw a picture. Anything you like. Everyone is welcome.”

When everyone feels safe, everyone feels welcome

A little girl hears that her grandma's friend, Mrs. Lee, was pushed on her way to the Asian market. Then she learns that Asian students at her brother's school are afraid to walk to class, and she realizes something very wrong is happening to her community.

How can life be so unfair? With her mom's support and the help of her friends, she sets out to do something kind for Mrs. Lee.

September 2023 For ages 6-8

Publicity contact: emma@secondstorypress.ca

For Canadian orders: UTP 1-800-565-9523

For US orders: Orca Book Publishers

1-800-210-5277

ISBN: 978-1-77260-343-9

\$21.95



9 781772 603439

Second Story Press