

Credo 1

I can feel it. I'm alone in my house again. My mom has left to buy groceries without me because I'm a hassle to her. She promised she wouldn't do this to me again. I get up and rush to turn on all the lights. It makes me feel secure. I stumble into the living room where the fish and silk worms are and feed them both. One fish is floating; I guess he's tired of swimming. I don't like this feeling. I'm alone at home with nobody to watch me play with my dinosaurs and nobody to tell me to go take a bath.

We're going to America. Where is daddy? Where are my cousins? Where is Nai Nai? I miss grandma's musky smell for once. The seat is too big for me. Being on the plane makes me nervous.

"Mommy, why are we leaving Taiwan?" I whimper.

"Mommy ... wants to start fresh and go to college in America." She answers hesitantly while looking out the window. I know she's lying, but I'm too young to understand her true intentions. We're leaving our family in Taiwan because daddy yells at me for not cleaning up my dinosaurs. Mommy doesn't like it when he does that. She cries sometimes and I crawl into bed with her to comfort her although my two tiny arms can barely wrap around one of hers. We're going to be alone in America.

I'm in a pink wall painted classroom with 8 year olds coloring around me. My teacher Mr. Kevin is comforting me.

"It's okay Li-Tang, you lose your pens sometimes in life" he says mispronouncing my name. I know I didn't lose it though, Nicholas took it and Julian knows. He wouldn't dare tattle though, Nicholas is a bully. I feel out of place here; I don't belong. I've felt this feeling before. They call it solitude and it hurts.

I am alone in this world no matter how many friends or family members I meet. They all came and left sometime in my life. Many don't exist or acknowledge me anymore. Solitude is by far the worst feeling to have to bear. It hurts the most of any sorrow.

“What does your father do?”

Shoshana's mom asked the dreaded question as she drove me home to my two-bedroom apartment where five of us lived. All day long, while I was playing in Shoshana's spacious, three-story house, I was aware of how different her environment was from mine. Every room in her house had a towering bookshelf and each member of the family had her own room. My apartment had no bookshelves; instead, books were stacked on tables, like craggy plateaus threatening to topple over. With a lack of space, I had to share a room, a closet, and drawers with my younger sister.

“A taxi driver,” I said, cringing expectantly for the pitiful “Oh.” Until I saw how Shoshana lived, I hadn't been aware of the importance of economic status in our lives. Sitting behind her mother, a lawyer, I felt ashamed that my father was a taxi driver, the *rickshawala* of America. I was ashamed that we didn't have a large house; instead, we were getting help from the government to get by.

In a Global Studies class, we were discussing the welfare responsibilities of the government. A classmate complained that welfare recipients got paid for doing nothing, that they were lazy. It hit me, like cold water splashed on a slumbering face, that my classmate could have been talking about my family, my father. I wanted to protest that my father didn't sit in front of the TV all day getting checks from the government. He worked more than twelve hours at a time to earn enough money to make ends meet. On Fridays and Saturdays, he'd come home as late as 6:00 in the morning, having spent all night in the car, searching for passengers. My father worked very hard to provide for us the best way he could. I wanted to tell my classmate that he was wrong, but I couldn't. I was too ashamed.

A couple of years later, my US History teacher explained that immigrants in New York City are often seen driving in taxi cabs because that is the kind of job available now. Unknowingly, he lifted a heavy smog of shame from my mind because I realized that my father's station in life is based on the opportunities he had growing up, which are very different from the opportunities that Shoshana's mom had and very different from the opportunities that I have. A farm boy from one of the poorest countries in the world, my father couldn't even get a proper education. But his lack of education isn't an indication of his intelligence or hard work. And the stigma that poor people are to blame for their misfortunes—that they *deserve* it—is absolutely wrong. I know now that there is nothing I have to be ashamed of. That there is no shame in being poor.

I believe that you cannot judge a person based on their socioeconomic status.

Willie and Tony sit on a cracked stoop, sunlight pooling in their laps. Trees twirl their branches in the air.

“Nice day, I said a nice day, huh Tony?”

“Sure is, Willie.” A cool breeze carries the scent of soap and hot water.

“Morning, Mapp,” they call together.

Mr. Mapp strides by with his bucket. A large yellow sponge sticks out of his jean jacket pocket. He whistles softly and taps out a beat on his leg. *Ra-ta-ta-ta-ra-ta-ta-ta*

“Morning, Willie. Morning, Tony.” He nods at the men and moves on. The scent of bay rum aftershave lingers in the air.

“Good day to go and wash a car, huh Tony?”

“I’d say so, Willie.”

The sun moves higher into the sky. Down the block, plastic wheels rumble against the sidewalk.

“Hello, Mrs. Miles.” They tilt their hats at the dark skinned woman gently pushing a stroller. Inside rests a little boy. Blond curls spring from his head. Mrs. Miles caresses his face for a moment and wipes away streaks of cherry icy.

“Good day, gentlemen.” Her voice sounds like sea spray and the smooth taste of coconut water under the Caribbean sun. “He jus’ fell asleep,” she whispers. Tony covers his mouth and nods. She smiles tiredly, showing her bright white teeth, and pushes on.

“Seems like a good time for a nap, huh Tony?”

Tony nods. Then he points to the stroller and holds up a finger. *Shhhh...*

Shadows lengthen on the stoop. Down the block, a couple walks in the dim light. His firm hands encircle her hips as they roll from side to side.

“Evening, Ms. Sanchez,” they chorus, raising their hats to reveal receding hairlines.

“Hey Willie, hey Tony.” She waves a manicured hand tipped with long painted nails.

“Evening, guys,” Ruben calls back. A small smile flips up the ends of his mustache. Once they pass the stoop, Ruben pulls her a little closer and she leans in for a kiss. Tony whistles and the two men laugh into the night. Willie tilts back his cap.

“I think, I mean I do believe, that people are darn beautiful, huh Tony?”

“They sure are Willie, they sure are.”

Cindy Li
Writer's Workshop
Period 3

Credo #1: this is a revolution

It is the summer of 1789 and you are heading towards the Bastille. You don't know what's going to happen in two days, in two hours, in two minutes. You don't know, but as you surge forward, something in your chest breaks free, choking frenzied words in your throat. The sun is in your eyes, but you think that it's the most beautiful day you've ever seen.

It is the summer of 1814 and the dinner table in the White House has forty empty seats. Between the numbers of times your fingers brush over the ink and number of times you smooth over the folds, the slip of parchment from your husband telling you to evacuate is soft and pliant. You memorize the curve of the letters and slip them into your heart. Your shadow falls across the painting of George Washington and you pause. The sky will be filled with red flickering flames and fading gray smoke, but you believe in the freedom depicted in George's fiery blue eyes.

It is the summer of 1966 and you are part of the Red Guards, cheering wildly as you catch glimpses of Chairman Mao between the wave of shaking hands and flags. You're with them, just as they are with you. On top of the Tian An Men, two ants of men scuttle around. Praise of socialism, of democracy. What you hear is praise of the whole, how you are changing the fate of your nation, how you are part of this movement. You're going to change the world.

It is the fall of 2011 and you are in Liberty Plaza with other Occupy Wall Street protestors. Someone is dropping a heavy beat and there is the smell of weed in the air. Signs litter the ground and tourists pass with their cameras and wide eyes. You have a Starbucks coffee in your left hand and a laptop in your right. A policeman watches you with bright, searching eyes, fingers flitting over his holster. Maybe he's part of the 99% too.

You believe in revolution. So do I.

Swara Saraiya

Isabelle

I believe in onions.

I remember spring evenings in a white tiled kitchen, awash in the glow of the overhead lamp. I would sit at the dining table with a green cutting board, knife in hand, chopping vegetables for a salad to accompany dinner. There was lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, chickpeas, and glorious onions. I remember the sharp odor as I cut through the onion, always followed by a tingling in the bridge of my nose. And then my eyes would get glassy, and my vision would blur, turning the onions into deformed purple blotches. I remember wet cheeks, runny noses, and sloppily cut onions.

I don't think I've ever cried as much as I did last March. I lost my best friend to a Wellbutren and Ibuprofen medley. Her parents found her having seizures on the persian rug in their living room. They called 911, and she was rushed to the emergency room, and then rushed into a medically induced coma. She woke up with the files of her memories missing, so she went to a rehab center in Boston to try and recover them. I cried when her mother called me and told me that she might not remember me. And I cried in April when my friend called me, and remembered everything. My eyes get glassy, and my nose gets runny when I think about how I came so close to completely losing my best friend.

But during that month, my parents kept telling me not to cry. They kept saying I'd get over it, that at least I had memories of our friendship. I cut so much salad during March, pretending to cry over the sharpness of onions. And after each sob session, I felt relieved. I knew that somehow I would get through all the pain, but I needed time to grieve, and heal. I needed time to cry.

I believe that crying heals wounds.

Credo No. 3
James Dennin

When I was seven my mom and I had a conversation about changing the color of my room. The walls were white, and we were re-painting the entire apartment, so this was the chance to make my room reflect myself. I wanted blue.

“You don’t want blue” she said, “blue is a cold color, you want a warm color.” “But our kitchen is blue.” “But you don’t sleep in the kitchen; your room should be a warm color so that you feel warm and cozy when you’re going to sleep. How about red?”

I watched as the men came and took all of my books off of the shelves, and moved my beds into the hallway. They covered my floors with plastic and scraped at my walls for a week. Gradually the room came together again, with brightly painted red walls.

Years later my room is essentially the same. Twin beds even though I don’t have a sibling. I’ve started putting up paintings, but the walls are still the same color, chosen by mother. Everything I put in my room is all dictated by that ridiculous color, red—like the outside of a fire engine. Like the color of the power rangers I used to play with when I was little.

I lay on one of the twin beds with my girlfriend. She leans her head on my chest and runs her hands over the creases in my shirt. “I never want to leave this room,” she says “the walls, the posters, it’s all so you... the whole place just seems so warm.” She starts to kiss my neck.

Mothers are always right.

"You look like a boy," a guy friend said to me one day, "You have the hairstyle, the face –"

"And, like, no boobs!" another guy chimed in.

"– So if you just covered up your hips, you could probably pass for one too."

I wasn't sure how to respond to that. I *guess* I was angry, since I rolled my eyes and thanked them in the most sarcastic tone I could manage, but to be honest, I was more confused than anything. I mean, why wasn't I *angrier* at them? Don't girls usually get pissed as hell if someone bashes how they look? And, based off of that, why was I actually feeling a bit *proud* of what they said? Maybe I *wanted* to look like a guy, or maybe... maybe I even wanted to *be* a guy?

It'd make sense, actually. I mean, you always see guys teasing girls, girls hitting guys, and they're both smiling and all, but you never see *me* hitting people and smiling about it. Yeah, it's true that I don't like hitting people in the first place, but what's more is that I tease my own female friends and they hit me and we're all smiling about it too. Then there are those girls wearing skirts so short you can see up them when you're lower than them on the stairs, the Asian mob girls who giggle over their crushes and stalk them all over the school, and then you have me in my baggy clothing, trouncing the guys in Mario Party during 10th and occasionally yelling profanities so loud that people down the hall tell me to shut up.

Anyway, I was so worried about it that when I got back home, I turned on my laptop, went to Wikipedia, and started reading about gender identity and all that. It didn't actually help and just confused me even more, but I was pretty sure that somewhere in the midst of all that text, there had to be *something* that explained who I was and why I was feeling this way. I even told Mom everything and asked her to help me look, but she just said to me, "Stop being so ridiculous and worrying so much about what those guys said. You're just a tomboy. Now go do your homework."

Obviously, I was miffed at her for not helping me identify myself and figure out the important question of who I was, but looking back on that incident, maybe her advice wasn't too bad after all. I remember spending the next couple of hours confusing myself by trying to cram all that information into my head until I finally said to myself, "Screw it, I'm just gonna go play some Brawl now."

Because, like my mom said, the entire thing really was ridiculous. Worrying about my friends' opinions, worrying about how I act, worrying about who I was and hoping that some other person could identify me with some handy little label... it was all just one big waste of time.

Because, really, you can't be labeled, not by yourself or anyone else. You're you, and that's that.

Horses

Rushing down the street, I find myself counting my steps. One. Project due tomorrow. Two. Relationship issues. Three. Parents argued last night. Four. College applications are in a week. Five. Got a bad grade in Systems. In class, I tap my pen anxiously on my binder. Tap. Forgot to do the math homework. Tap. My friend's mad at me. Tap. Don't have money for lunch. Tap. Didn't sleep last night.

Running past the freshmen in the stairway, I curse the slow speed. Step. Test today in Human Diseases. Step. The teacher can't find out I don't do the homework. Step. I'm in three classes way too hard for me. Step. My friends yell at me because my schedule is too full. Step. My mom yells at me because it's not full enough. Five minutes before the end of my always-too-short lunch and I sit on the floor curled up, calming myself down. Breathe. In. Quiz in a few minutes. Out. Same quiz every day. In. It's turning into a nightmare. Out. My best friend's boy hit on me. In. I'm a cynic about love. Out. My future feels like a black hole of anxiety.

I walk my horse to his stall; his hoof beats sharp on the cement. One. Should work on my schoolwork. Two. Don't deserve to ride. Three. There's a test on Monday. Brushing him off with quick, tight, circles. One. I need new friends. Two. College applications are too soon. Three. Will I get in? I get on my horse. Shoulders back, hips open, heels down. Focus. Trot. Remember to breathe. Rhythm. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. There are no thoughts outside of this. No connections outside of ours. On the edge of my vision, I can see his perfectly carved ears twitch. And the world looks so good with a horse in it. I believe that horses are the only reason I'm still alive.