

Liyah A. Cha (Teen) 3rd Place, Untitled

I never needed that miniature slot machine. I never needed that erasable pen collection, or those fingerless gloves either, but I still dumped them all into a pile - dominating the left wing of my closet - dubbed the 'keep side'.

Receiving has always been easy; it's the departing that's hard. To leave sentimental possessions, intimate places, or familiar environments, was to bid a part of me farewell and plunge into an unknown climate. I'd bask in the borders of my easy life until the things I labeled as granted were swept under my feet. And the virus was the bullet that shattered the glass. No longer could I walk around freely or talk with friends at liberty. Things that had once been free of consequence, now held a considerable cost.

As I carried my possessions into open boxes, parts of my happiness fled, leading me to wonder: which was actually important: the objects themselves or the memories I made with them? A sudden realization dawned on me: it was never the things I could buy, the places I could go, or even the circumstances I was in; what mattered was the people I shared those memories with and the relationships I had built along the way.

I had too long been fixated on the core of a pampered society, lounging in my own materialism. I had too long been spoiled with my simple life, failing to appreciate the small beauties - the little things - until they, too, departed. And so I had failed to comprehend the simple maxim: the valuable things are free. My happiness didn't lie in that new pair of jeans folded neatly in my drawer nor did it lie in those beat up converses sitting in the garage. No, it lay in the sacred touch of human flesh, the tender sentiment of unveiled smiles, and the tangible intimacy of relationships, that not even money can buy, that is tied so meticulously into our everyday lives that we fail to cherish it. And that is family.

I took one last look at my possessions and sealed the box shut.