

Have You Eaten

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The moment I leave the school premises, my mom asks, “Have you eaten?” I have always shrugged the question off, but my mother is persistent, hunting me down at family celebrations and holidays to ask me if I ate food. Historically, I’ve barely acknowledged the importance of that question, yet I have noticed how much my answer means to her. The moment I answer no she becomes frantic, looking for the closest thing she can feed or cook. There is a clear difference between my mother and I, for we have experienced two different worlds: one where food is an inevitability and another where food is a sacrifice.

Both of my parents grew up in the Philippines to families that could barely afford a regular grocery trip. Rather than strolling through the market, my parents would stroll through their small backyards where they would raise chickens and work in their gardens until their hands would blister to ensure they had enough food for the next week. Even through scorching summers and ravaging floods, they could only rely on what their garden could produce since vendors would render their bank accounts irrecoverable, meaning their nourishment splurge had to be reserved for holidays. My mother’s family would celebrate every birthday with a plate of spaghetti, a commodity that my grandmother could rarely afford. Yet, food is still an important cornerstone of our family’s Filipino culture, serving as a beacon of connection and celebration. This unity, while less grand or abundant than most families, connected our family during times of hardship, change, and struggle.

Despite their clear hardships, my parents’ experience with food scarcity can only provide us a window of what food instability looked like within those years as food insecurity is a complex and evolving issue. As the earth has aged, worldwide hunger has only been spurred by the rising momentum of climate change, which has impacted agricultural patterns by “changing precipitation patterns and [increasing the] frequency of extreme events, such as heatwaves, floods and droughts” (United Nations). Climate change raises a new hurdle that prohibits families from the sense of connection that food has provided my family with for generations.

Yet that unity does not have to bear such exclusive boundaries. A basic necessity should not come at the price of a family’s livelihood, scarring children to the point that they still fear food insecurity in adulthood and not only worry for themselves, but their family. Food pantries have been established across the world to provide easy food access to well-known food deserts and foundations such as the Hunger Project are implementing programs to assist financially challenged populations’ goals in achieving regular food stability. Acknowledging these obstacles and breaking them down is key to helping families like my parents’ lead lives free of food-related anxiety. My mom still feels the need to check if I have eaten every day and, while endearing, the real question we need to address is why there are people who cannot.