

Here Comes the Stroller:
Eight Lessons I Learned From My Mom

On the edge of tears, I shut the cover of Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H Mart*. Her retelling of childhood Asian dishes combined with her mother's lost battle against cancer left me somewhere between nostalgia and desolation. Enthralled by the turbulent journey, called life, I dove deeper into other memoirs. Emotional anecdotes left me flabbergasted by the intricate details enlaced in personal narratives. Yet, when I reflect upon my own life, nothing seems special. It seems silly, really. No Ivy League education. No world class award. No life-changing event. Nothing. *Why is my life not special?*

1. Don't let the Disney lady with a stroller walk roll over you.

"Your face looks like a banana!" the middle-aged brunette woman screams as she points her prickly finger in my mother's face. With no remorse, my mother hurls back the insult with a firmer tone, "NO!! *Your* face looks like a banana". I rest my bruised ankle against the pier ledge, unsure if I feel tears of pain or laughter budding at the corner of my eyes. While the stroller certainly impacted my ankle, the idea of banana insults is far too humorous. The real magic of Disney lies in my mother's protective nature, relentless spirit, and unparalleled dedication to my ankle.

2. Taste the cake.

My mother acquiesces to the puny hot pink brick that I have unconvincingly dubbed a "strawberry cloud cake". As I taste the revolting sponge, my pride slips away just as the eggshells slipped into the batter moments ago. Despite an abundance of unappetizing baked goods, from frothy frosting to rock-hard cookies, my mother's enthusiasm towards my newest creation never waned.

3. Grandma always scoops rice first.

My eyes roll a 360 as my grandma slowly teeters towards the dinner table. At 7:30 PM, with a growling stomach and a naturally incessant nature, my tolerance for slow walking is nearly gone. Noticing my mother's "wait, right there" look, I painfully glue my arms to my sides. Upon my grandma's momentous rice scoop, signaling the start of the meal, I recognize that waiting patiently for elders to start the meal serves as a small gesture of gratitude in comparison to years of dedication and love.

4. Caramel frappucinos are linked to national cuts.

While most parents fear for the infamous "sugar high", my mom seemed to embrace the sweet flurry. Desperate to calm my pre-race nerves, she directed my attention towards a specially dedicated caramel frappucino paired with a comforting hug. Looking back, a caffeinated slurpy seems like an unwise choice for a pre-race swim snack, yet my

mother's spontaneous nature and affectionate actions left me feeling on top of the world, ready to achieve any national cut.

5. Stuffed animals are a way of life.

If lice were to strike me, I would be more distressed about disposing years' worth of stuffed animals than the idea of blood sucking insects invading my head. On second thought, that may not be 100% true; however, my stuffed-animal collection marks the realm I have traveled. Beyond fluffy cuddles, stuffed animals remind me of my frugal mom's soft spot for stuffed animals in a pricey souvenir shop. Stuffed animals, not only symbolize family vacations, but also years of childhood innocence, imagination, and creativity.

6. If I had the confidence, I could win.

Time and time again, I drag my mother down to the basement, begging for a ping pong rematch, convinced *this* match would ensure victory. In the beginning, my premature stance and firm, white-knuckled grip stood no chance against her years of training, rocking foot to foot, swinging the paddle with the swiftness of an aerodynamic bird. She slaughtered me with her unreturnable serves and lightning-fast returns. Eventually, I began to anticipate her forehand topspin, returning her serves with equal ferocity. Despite immense improvement, victory seemed miles away. I endured the same nightmare each time I stepped up to play my familiar component – I climb ahead with a couple points, she butchers my excitement with a sudden round of impeccable spins, smashes, and strokes. Before I know it, the match ends, and the familiar feeling of disappointment slams me in the face. While serving as my biggest ping pong opponent, my mom embraces an equal pivotal rule, by biggest supporter. While guiding me with pointers, she notes my biggest loss is my lack of confidence.

7. Eight is great!

At an early age, my mother warned me against the notorious number four; instead, she insisted on praising eight and all its magnanimity. Therefore, I took every precaution to avoid four, meticulously selecting a phone number or birthday party date. I could not help but ponder *Why?* After years of questioning the superstitious nature of my family, I found closeness and cultural understanding through a seemingly long and odd list of Chinese superstitions. Often feeling culturally detached, with broken Mandarin and awkward expressions, I found comfort and belonging through these numeral superstitions. While I may never understand the implications behind lucky and unlucky numbers, the tradition serves as a reminder of my cultural bonds.

8. Be unconventional.

Read 1-7.

Upon further inspection, I deem my life special, marked by a special person – my mom. No Ivy League education, world class award, or life-changing event could equate to these loving memories. My life is just as riveting as Zauner and the other acclaimed memoirists. Perhaps, the only difference between us all is the power to examine the fine details and people in our lives.