

Phuong Script Draft 1

My other happy moments were in school. I started my first year of elementary school at Tenth and Penn. A week before kindergarten started, my teacher sent me a bunch of heart stickers and a postcard:

*Hi, Phuong! My name is Miss Fink and I hope you are excited for school.
Bring along a big smile and don't forget teddy!
I can not wait to see you on September 7th, 1998!*

I couldn't read at the time so I told my dad to read it to me. He read it nice and slow. I was confused. Why did I need to bring a teddy? I begged my dad to take me to the store but he refused and told me to take another stuffed animal I had. And there it was. The old, raggedy koala bear I had since who knows when. It sufficed. On the first day of school, I went through big double doors. My classroom was to the right. A lady told me to go inside. I let go of my mom's hand as I held my koala bear with the other and didn't look back. Another lady in the classroom told me to come over. She had a big smile. It was Miss Fink.

*Hi, are you Phuong (fong)? Is that how you say it?
No, I say "Fuehng".
Fong?
Yeah.*

I gave up. From that day on, I was known as "Fong". I still don't know why I didn't continue to correct her or anyone else. I let myself believe that "Fong" was really my *American* name. Why didn't I fight for my Vietnamese name? It was my identity. But Miss Fink was a person of authority. I respected her and allowed her to decide my identity, or at least, my name. Her mispronunciation didn't phase me at the time. Who could blame me for being a naive kindergartener? Well, only I would 15 years later.

For as long as I could remember, my name gave me more trouble than I wanted it to. One day when I was in 4th grade, my teacher, Mrs. Steffy, was out sick. I always enjoyed having a substitute teacher once in a while because I liked to meet new people. On this day, an old man came into the classroom. He wore a dark beige sweater with black pants and loafers. He sat at Mrs. Steffy's desk, took out the attendance sheet, wore his reading glasses, and called out names. *David?... Elizabeth?... Bryan, now that's an interesting way to spell it... Ashley?... Now, this is such an odd name, I can't even say it, who's P..H..U....*

That's me.

He definitely won "The Biggest Douchebag Substitute" award in my book that day. It didn't even bother me anymore that my name was "Fong". Granted, I did tell everyone my name was "Fong", unless they were Vietnamese. That was when I had to awkwardly say, "My name is Phuong." "Phuong" is one of those words that I felt weird saying. Sometimes when someone actually says my name right, it doesn't even register to me that they're saying my name! Having a not so common name also gave you an appalling list of nicknames. There was Phu-Phu... Ping-Pong... Ling-Ling (which is derogatory now that I think of it)... P-Hung (pea-hung)... Foo-Ong... and many others that I've done a good job at suppressing.

Now, it doesn't suck *that* much to be a "Phuong". I remember the first time my mom told me "Phuong" actually meant something. I wanted to know so badly! I was

about ten at the time, and it felt like my mom was keeping a ten-year old secret from me.

She said, “Phuong nghĩa là *direction*.” She told me my name meant “direction”.

Interesting. But the next thing she said was amazing, “Mà Tuyet Phuong nghĩa là *direction of snow*. Mind blown. She told me the first time she saw snow was in 1988, the first year she came to the United States. She said it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen and she wanted her first daughter to be named Phuong Tuyet (“direction of snow”) because she had finally found snow. And I had finally found my new identity.