

The girl with no Hometown

Growing up, I would always visit my cousins in Sacramento. I grew up in Hong Kong, the daughter of an American father and a Chinese mother, so going to the US to visit my father's family was always like going on a safari. At first, I did not care for California too much, as to me, with my Chinese eyes, it seemed almost like a Netflix comedy... Huge houses, big, loud and overly friendly people, thick American accents, hotdogs and baseball games. Still, there was something about Sacramento that seemed intriguing and I always wondered if I was missing something important about it.

Over the years, our family went back to Sacramento every few years to visit and amazingly, it always seemed basically the same. Life in Hong Kong, by contrast, always seemed to be in a constant state of change.

I came to understand that part of this difference was the nature of the community. Socially, as an expat city, Hong Kong is in a constant state of rotation. Expat families usually come to Hong Kong on a two or three year work assignment. My family was the exception, we moved to Hong Kong when I was in the 1st grade and have now lived in Hong Kong for over 10 years. One result of this is that I have seen many of my friends come and go, usually coming to school, staying for a few years and then leaving to go back to their home countries. As a result, my group of friends seemed to be in a state of constant change, with one or two of my close friends leaving every year, and new friends taking their place.

My cousins in Sacramento lived a very different experience. All of their friends, like them, grew up there. Nobody ever seems to leave. My cousins Michael and Chris have basically the same group of close friends in High School that they had in primary school. My uncle and aunt know all of their sons' friends and have known their parents for years.

This difference got me thinking about what makes a place a "home town." Is it being familiar with the city itself, the landmarks, the stores and the buildings? Or is it having a stable network of friends, a community of people that you can come back to and immediately feel at home?

I love Hong Kong. Its vibrant, cross culture energy, its constant state of change, its incredible efficiency. But although I have lived here for almost all of my life, is Hong Kong really my home town? After I go off to university and my parents move back to the US, when I come back to Hong Kong in 5 years, it will undoubtedly still have the same buildings, some of the same restaurants and the same cross cultural energy and dynamism... but most of the people that I knew and cared when I lived here will be long gone. My community in Hong Kong is transient and like expats everywhere, most have real roots somewhere else. But I have no real roots anywhere else. My cousins in Sacramento will always have their hometown, but in fact, I am a girl with no home town