

## **hiphiphapa**

A monthly newsletter (of sorts) and corresponding supplements

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### **About hiphiphapa**

What is hiphiphapa? It is a monthly newsletter addressing topics of interest, current affairs, gastronomical experiences, and other arbitrary thoughts and opinions (according to me) about life and living it. hiphiphapa, the name of this project, is a personal account of experiences and ideas from the vantage point of a mixed race Asian American person who straddles the line between two important - dare I say critical - generations: Gen X and what some of my peers call "Geriatric Millennials."

I very much do not like being lumped into the entire Millennial generation; "Geriatric Millennials", though, I'll tolerate, as long as the group of us "geriatrics" encompass only those of us born in 1980-1985. I understand that I'm not technically a Gen Xer. Similarly, I find it irritating to be grouped in with Millennials. This is why I'd rather be considered one of a no-name/non-existent generation - a generation that lies between Gen X and Millennial. Generation Unseen and Unheard, of Analog and Fine Taste. Yes, I made that up.

The other line-straddling I do in my daily life involves refusing to own a car (again) for as long as my body can take living and working in LA without driving a car; not to be in or seek to be in a committed romantic relationship; not to have children; and not to let a singular job define me. I believe I've read enough and been in therapy long enough to know that this preferred behavior and correlating lifestyle is rooted in a deep lack of trust in and of others, including myself, as well as a subconscious tendency to always be disappointed with and in others, as well as myself. The irony is that I know - theoretically - that I am capable of anything and can be good at and am good at almost anything I do or set my mind to. But there is something missing, something void in my own psychology, and it's something I can't seem to pinpoint in plain English. Japanese, maybe. There is a Japanese aphorism that encapsulates some of what I think I'm getting at: 腕を磨く which reads, "ude wo migaku", which means, "to polish one's arm", which alludes to constantly polishing one's skills and improving oneself. My theory and present conclusion on my little dilemma at the moment

is actually quite simple - I don't know what I want. And while that is true, I also want a lot of things.

### **On the idea of "joy"**

Growing up with the kind of mother I did, - she wore the pants - I was conditioned to believe that taking time off work (or school) was for absolute emergencies only. An arm or leg had to have been severed in a freak accident for my mom to call out sick at work or for me to not go to school. There was no regard for "emotional well-being" nor was "I don't feel like it" a reason to not work or go to school. It wasn't even a phrase we were allowed to use. "'I don't feel like it?' Oh, really? So you're just going to live your life saying 'I don't feel like it' when you're faced with any remote level of challenge?" is basically what my mother would verbalize, gesticulate, and/or somehow communicate with her eyes squinted and mouth pursed. The fact that she would say this in Japanese or communicate non-verbally in a "very Japanese" way somehow had a deeper effect than if it were communicated in English or gesticulated in an "American" way. Japanese guilt is powerful, inescapable, and superstitious. So much so that it precedes you before you come out of the womb, and follows you long after you're six feet under.

"Boundaries" and "mental health days" were not in our family's vocabulary nor were those terms a part of American society's vocabulary at the time. I recall this because the people I knew with jobs went to their jobs and had a level of dignity and pride at their jobs - whether they were truck drivers and members of a union or restaurant servers, grocery store clerks, bus drivers, pizza deliverers, hair stylists, and others - that I just don't see today. Everyone working is unusually tired. What I do see is the closing of a chapter of the last generation of middle-class working people around my parents' age who were able to provide for their families that's not possible today. The "hard work" idea seems to be on a path of deterioration for my generation. The general American psyche among the youngest of the current working generation when it comes to "work" - working-class work specifically - is that manual labor is unnecessary or not as necessary. Sure, it's not everybody, but the fact that when I take a walk outside in America and see almost everyone my age and younger, working or not, with their faces glued to their phones, I'm concerned for the future. I blame the internet and an apathetic government. What happened to being thanked for for a hard day's work on your feet? What happened to feeling a sense of pride at your job, whatever your line of work? What happened to being able to provide for your family and save money as a middle-class working person? Why do some of us - is it just millennials? I don't

know - feel guilty for not having worked hard enough, not having provided enough, not being loyal enough to a company (shown through working outside of paid hours)? Do the young Millennials and the Gen Z'ers have it right with the "I have boundaries" thing?

The downside of the work ethic I was indoctrinated with by my mother - and Japan by extension - permeated in all areas of my life throughout my youth and now, into middle age, to the point of emotional and psychological paralysis, lethargy, and living in constant existential crises, unsure of anything or the meaning of it all.

I'm at the home stretch of my 30s, an experience I'm actively trying to embrace in real time without too much out-of-body objectivity, a default habit of mine that I've come to learn (through therapy and introspection) is actually a defense mechanism. Living with and in "39" has been an exercise of constant questioning, asking myself what I'm deserving of, if I've worked hard enough, reflecting on what Jack Benny meant all this time, and likely for the first time ever in my life, asking myself what I really want in this life as I'm living it. I've been told thousands of times to not take my youth for granted, to see youth as a fleeting privilege, to be fearless, to take risks, to dive into something, anything, head first. It always made sense in theory. Now, at 39 and change, I understand this to be the ultimate and utter privilege. There is no time to waste. Life is short. The hypocrisy, the conflict, the frustrations, the anger, the questions, the dissatisfactions, the loneliness - all of it is part of the human condition and is necessary. To look at life from the other side, a different perspective, the brighter side of things, is my challenge.

### **On happiness**

Growing up, happiness wasn't part of my vocabulary, at least in my household. My mother drilled it in me from the moment I could comprehend the system of "transaction" and "work" that life and living came at a cost. To believe otherwise is a falsehood, a sign of ignorance, a rejection of truth and reality. The first time I asked my mother to buy me a pack of Bubblicious gum at the grocery store, she said, "Do you know how many hours I have to work to pay for that pack of gum?" and broke down the math for me, by hours and minutes. My mother waitressed at a Japanese restaurant at the time - it was probably 1990 when she gave me this lesson on work and money - and was earning \$3.80 per hour plus tips. So, one 50-cent pack of gum would cost my mom (before taxes and tips) 15 minutes of work. That is how she broke it down for me. Several years later, in my adolescent

phase of pre-teen angst, I asked her to buy me a walkman (used!) at Circuit City. At the time, in the cassette walkman display area of Circuit City where brand new, handy, battery-powered cassette players were neatly displayed on the wall, there was a special hidden drawer underneath the display of walkmen that were filled with used and returned walkmen with marked down prices. How did I know this? My father loved going out - even though he was broke - and making small talk with sales people whether it was Circuit City, an open house in a new housing development community, a diner, or the donut shop. In conversation, probably through trying to haggle some kind of deal to buy a video recording device, he figured out that there indeed was a way to buy a good, relatively new piece of working home video equipment at a price that involved a compromise. This is how he discovered used/returned walkmen sold at a lower price. And this is how I knew that if my mom would just buy me a walkman, I could get us a "deal." I eventually got a Sony Walkman - with the reverse mechanism so you didn't have to take out the cassette and switch sides, and the AM/FM radio features. It wasn't the super fancy one I wanted - the yellow and grey one that was "waterproof" that retailed for \$79.99 and was \$40 used. I got the solid black and grey Walkman with all the same features minus the "waterproof" and used the hell out of it through high school until it started mangling the tape.

Recently, at work, one of the young twenty-something staffers blurted out, "why can't we be happy?" after my boss and I gently reminded everyone that the cost of goods are up and to be mindful of using in-house ingredients and supplies. This staff had a point, and so did we. Where do we draw the line to find the happy medium? Maybe this is the point? That settling to agree and finding compromise is *not* the goal, and that the challenge in getting there *is* the point? Is this the lesson from upstairs? Perhaps. If that's the case, I'm ok with it.