

# The Women Called Mom

By Nila Amin – Walter Johnson High School

My heartbeat slowed as the echoes of the slammed door faded. My mother's stern voice traveled up the stairs. It was another typical afternoon between us, one that began with conversations and ended in pointless arguments. Over time I accepted that this was simply our fate, mother and daughter under the same roof but worlds apart. Still, I wondered why it was so hard for us to understand each other. We should have been closest, yet my mother treated my feelings as if they were alien to her. I figured there was no point in dwelling on it, this must have been how she'd always been.

One morning I was called down to help move old boxes from storage. We worked quietly until she relocated upstairs, leaving me unaccompanied. As I continued, I found a box much older than myself and unable to resist, I looked inside. I saw photographs of people I didn't recognize, worn-out uniforms, and letters in languages foreign to me. But what caught my eye was a card. It was nothing extraordinary; soft yellow with "Come Celebrate" written in delicate lettering. Only then did I realize it was a birthday invitation from my mother. Without my noticing, she appeared in the doorway and was watching the card in my hands. Approaching me slowly, a faint smile tugged at her lips, as in a trance of memories. She explained it came from her sixteenth birthday and recounted that day.

As she told her story her voice shifted into something I'd never heard before, bright with a girlish happiness. I tried to picture her then, nervous and hopeful, wanting to be seen and understood. I listened carefully, taking in every word as if the nostalgic joy might vanish. When she finished, she headed toward the door, but before disappearing upstairs she hesitated and asked me to think about what I would want for my birthday.

As I faced my mother during dinner I silently imagined that 16 year old girl sitting in front of me. I imagined her complaining about having peppers for dinner or telling a story from school and despite never seeing eye to eye with my mother I found myself surprised at how similarly I had pictured her to be like myself. Over the next few weeks I observed my mom in a new light, I took notice of the actions she did and I saw them not from the stoic mother I had been familiar with but as the 16 year old girl who had never stopped trying to navigate her life. As I paid more attention I learned about her and also myself. I traced my clothing taste back to her, and even my love for cinnamon cookies, but more importantly, I recognized how I'd caged her within the role of "mom." From that day on before the occasional argument we had, I pictured that young girl in front of me and remembered once that she's walked my path before.