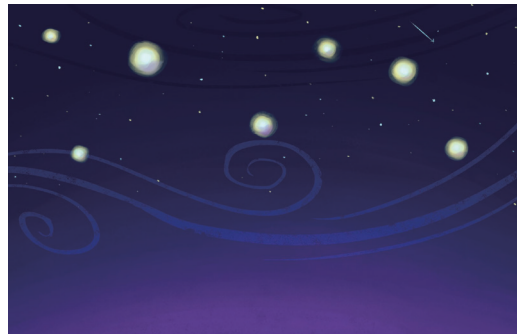


a Hmong translator would explain to her what mental illness was. Nou would learn that she was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Explaining to her mother that it was “treatable” was like hearing Hmong symphonies back in her village, and they watched as her pale face lightened up like the stars in the sky. Mao got hold of both their hands and she softly brushed them with her coarse fingers and thanked them. She thanked them for saving Nou’s life, for her daughter still had the chance to live a full life. However, it was she who saved her daughter.

A cool breeze touched Nou’s face and the sound of the wind delicately breathed into her ears. Every time she lifted the curtains to her lightless room, a ray of sunlight would shine across her face and she’d respond to it splendidly. Exactly one year since she lost Tou Lee, she saw her life slowly

change for the better. At a point, she truly believed that there’d be no cure for heartache or a way to bring her soul mate back to life. Though he was not physically there with her anymore, she occasionally felt his presence when she



gazed into the beautiful eyes of Paj Na. As she watches their daughter slowly take her first steps, words of encouragement pour from Nou’s lips, “Don’t be scared. Go on.”



EACH MIND MATTERS

California’s Mental Health Movement

DON’T BE SCARED. GO ON.

by Chamee Moua

“Shattered glass across the dark pavement road, a column of blood running down the left side of her forehead, sirens approaching at a distance, and a scream so loud that it pierced the ears of bystanders as they watched the unfolding tragedy. November 22, 2003 marked the death of Nou Hlee Yang’s beloved boyfriend of three years and would welcome the life of their baby girl, Paj Na.



The sound of a rooster’s crow awakened her from what seemed like ten years, but was really a week after the tragic accident. Her eyes gazed around the room, and she realized only then that she was home. As she



WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE

listened closely she heard the voice of an elderly man calling her spirit to come back to her body. With that she knew he had split buffalo horns in his hands and was gently tossing them on the ground to see if they'd face up or down. Even though her body ached in pain, she knew exactly what was expected of her, thus made her way to the kitchen and began rinsing dishes and vegetables. "What a senseless girl. She brought this upon herself. Shame!" Nou, aware of what the housewives were saying, kept her head down. A seventeen-year-old girl against the housewives never stood a chance. Flashbacks of the horrible accident began coming back and from there she stayed isolated in her dark, lonely, cold room feeling sorrow, broken, and mentally distraught.



Desperately trying to feel Tou's soft, beautiful face in her dreams, she hysterically cries, but is not alone. Right next to her lays her newborn yearning for her mother's touch. Within a few moments, Nou's mother

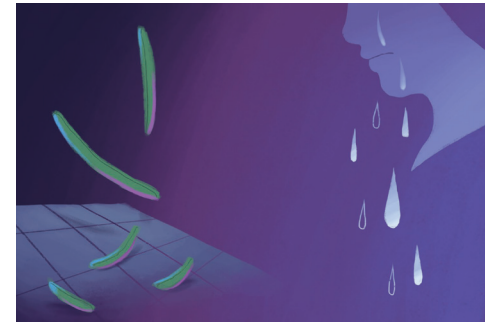
walked in and remembered her mother yell, "hold the baby you selfish child! At this age, you shouldn't be acting so stubborn and lazy. Get a hold of yourself!" Nou's unforgiving days and nights consisted of anger, confusion, and hopelessness from her parents. Neither parent had the knowledge or resources to support their helpless daughter. "What to do" was the closest thing to care Nou ever felt from them.

She wiped a thousand teardrops each day from her blushed-pink cheeks. Neglecting her own daughter and never hearing her father's request for a few dollars to play poker, Nou soon found herself lost and dazed. Always yearning to see Tou Lee once more, Nou imagined him by her side everywhere she went. When her mother brought her to the flea market

to sell their freshly grown vegetables, Nou was verbally incapable of negotiating prices with customers. "Tou Lee" was all that came out of her mouth and many noticed. She suddenly dropped the crisp green string

They were oblivious to the pain that an individual can go through and ignorant for snickering "crazy," "delusional," and "an outcast."

beans to the dusty floor and rushed toward any male she thought looked like Tou. The eyes of dozens of strangers whispered into the ears of one another as if they had never seen such sight before. They were oblivious to the pain that an individual can go through and ignorant for snickering "crazy," "delusional," and "an outcast." More so, blind for not seeing that she herself was like everyone else. Mao, her mother, stood in grief that even after ten months she still could not help her daughter recover from losing the dearest person to her. Tou appeared like an angel from the heavens at the very beginning and left gazing into her deep brown eyes uttering, "don't be scared. Go on." Mao knew she was no



doctor, but had to fight for Nou's life. Despite being illiterate, she found the courage to take Nou down to the clinic and explain to the doctor that her daughter was not like "my old Nou before."

"Men-tal ill-ness?" A term so foreign for this mother from Laos struggling to make ends meet, found a new door to open. Dr. Evans along with