



WE REMAIN:

A COMICS COLLECTION OF
INDONESIAN AMERICANS IN
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Edited by Monica Chiu

**This collection is dedicated to
Indonesian Americans in
New Hampshire's Seacoast Region**

*We Remain: A Comics Collection of Indonesian Americans
in New Hampshire*

Edited by Monica Chiu

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1. From the Racial Unity Team Website: "Our Mission: To advance relationships among people of different racial identities, increase understanding, and reduce racial bias in our communities; Our Vision: A future in which Granite Staters fully embrace, respect, and encourage racial diversity and unity so that New Hampshire fosters a genuine feeling of belonging for all who live, work, and visit here." <https://racialunityteam.com/home>

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INTRODUCTION: INDONESIA MEETS NEW HAMPSHIRE

Monica Chiu is Professor of English and American Studies at the University of New Hampshire, where she teaches Asian American studies, race and ethnic studies, American literature, and comics and graphic narrative. Her most recent monograph is *Show Me Where It Hurts: Manifesting Illness and Impairment in Graphic Pathography* (Penn State University Press, 2023). She has published chapters in numerous collections and essays in various journals, such as *Mosaic*, *Journal of American Studies*, *Hmong Studies Journal*, *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, *MELUS*, among others.

I met Reverend Sandra Pontoh in the spring of 2014 when she graciously visited my graduate seminar in Asian American studies (at the University of New Hampshire) to talk about Indonesian asylees to New Hampshire. Five years earlier, I had edited the collection *Asian Americans in New England: Culture and Community* (2014), a project whose impetus was my own ethnographic exploration and subsequent essay on second-generation Laotian American youth in New Hampshire's Seacoast region. The first generation of Laotians arrived in the United States in the 1970s to escape persecution for assisting Americans during the Viet Nam War. That academic project alerted me to the complex experiences of Asian/Americans in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, their various arrivals, contributions, and challenges stretching back to before the turn into the twentieth century.

As a scholar invested in public engagement and community collaboration, I felt the necessity to highlight stories by local Indonesian Americans, a community less well-known than those of Laotian Americans. I chose the medium of comics, a curious selection, at first, for some. But after organizing two comics workshops in event spaces operated by Indonesian communities in Somersworth and Dover, four Indonesian American storytellers stepped forward as well as the lawyer who assisted many in overturning their deportation cases in 2017 during the Trump administration. The situation created understandable challenges to finding more willing storytellers than the few featured in this collection. If the fear of asylum constraints haunted many of the residents eight years ago, dread returns exponentially at Trump's recent November 2024 re-election given his renewed executive attempts to suspend decisions regarding asylum. This horizon of prohibitions makes this a timely collection, introducing readers to local Indonesian American neighbors who work hard to contribute to the economy, raise families, practice their religion, attend college, and embrace the Granite State of New Hampshire.

Until meeting Reverend Pontoh, director of New Hampshire Indonesian Community Support, I had not been aware of the relatively large population of Christian Indonesian Americans in the predominantly white New Hampshire towns of Dover and Somersworth. As reported by Lois R. Shea in the 3 Jan. 2023 digital newsletter of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, "17 percent of Somersworth's 12,000 people identif[y] as Indonesian" (n.p.), an enormous number for such a small city. In Dover, New Hampshire's *Foster's Daily Democrat*, Megan Fernandez reports, "An estimated 2,000 of Somersworth's approximately 11,000 residents are Indonesian immigrants or of Indonesian descent which, combined with neighboring communities, gives New Hampshire's Seacoast one of the largest Indonesian populations north of Manhattan" (n.p). They are Christian religious asylees.

According to M.C. Ricklefs in *A History of Modern Indonesia*, stringent and violent "Islamic activists" were on the rise in Indonesia in the 1960s (333). Indonesian citizens who rebuffed this new form of Islam and its increasing violence turned to Christianity, especially in East and Central Java, or began to practice *Kebatinan* (which Ricklefs defines as "inwardness," infused with mysticism, and informed by various religious beliefs) (333).

The islands' compendium political challenge included that of rising communism in the government. Evelyn Yang explains that in 1965, twenty years after Indonesia won independence from the Dutch, both communists and foreigners (the latter who had lost much in the creation of an independent Indonesia), were working closely with President Sukarno's government (n.p.). The Indonesian Army, however, was disgruntled by Sukarno's leadership, especially his continued attempts to negotiate with the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* or PKI). The Indonesian military murdered a handful of Sukarno's generals, which precipitated a coup during which 200,000 to 300,000 were killed (Yang n.p.). In 1968, Lieutenant General Suharto replaced Sukarno as president, reorganizing governmental channels and banning the PKI (Yang n.p.).

This divided state of the nation was accompanied by politically motivated riots, many with “religious overtones,” states Ricklefs (389). In 1965, continues Yang, “[m]embership in Christian churches surged ... when all nonreligious persons were labeled atheists and were suspected to be Communists ... By the 1990s, the majority of Christians in Indonesia were Protestants of one affiliation or another” (Yang n.p.). Additionally, anti-Chinese sentiment reached an apex in 1988-1989 (Adrian Vickers 214), and because many ethnic Chinese in Indonesia also practice Christianity, they faced attacks on multiple fronts.

The riots in Jakarta, reflected in Ted Closson’s comic “Shelter,” are a prime example of how “[s]ocial and political conflict ... turned into bloody interreligious violence in eastern Indonesia,” claims Ricklefs (389). In Jakarta, one of several centers of Christian-Muslim conflict, “[h]ouses, shops, religious buildings and government offices were burned and thousands of people were killed in the ... months of [1999]” (Ricklefs 389). Retaliation by Christians met with a cry from Jakarta for a “jihad (holy war)” to protect Muslims from provocation by Christians (389). Many Christians left Indonesia, some for New Hampshire.

Closson’s wordless comic moves between New Hampshire and the riots in Jakarta, where Christians and Muslims formerly co-existed peacefully (Human Rights Watch 425). Closson illustrates the emigration of one fictional, but representative, girl and her family from Indonesia’s violence. As religious asylees, they join the growing asylum community in New Hampshire, the girl eventually maturing to become the young woman in the comic who falls into a nightmare. There, she revisits the day she became a terrified child witness to Muslims’ destruction of her Jakarta neighborhood. As Pontoh explains of both Somersworth and Dover, “As Indonesians, community is important to us, so when a person or group came here their families would follow” (quoted from Fernandez n.p.). While all of the other comics artists in this collection interviewed Indonesian Americans, Closson’s research for “Shelter” included perusing a variety of local newspaper clippings, essays, and chapters from books on the recent history of Indonesian immigration.

Reverend Pontoh and Raude Raychel, the latter the founder and executive director of Somersworth’s non-profit Indonesian Community Connect (assisting local Indonesian businesses and collaborating with local town offices to enhance the nation’s first and only “Little Indonesia” [Lois R. Shea]), each tells her own story through comics artists Kristen Lynn Zimmerman (“A Good Mission: The Reverend Sandra Pontoh Story”) and Mercedes Campos Lopez (“The Raude Raychel Story: Growing a Community”), respectively. Pontoh was inspired by her education and faith; Raychel, as she asks to be called, found strength and a role model in her father. In both works, we see their comics avatars struggle with language, racism, and their own personal challenges as they courageously rise to become local leaders in the state.

In 2017, after many such Christian Indonesian asylees had been living in New Hampshire for nearly twenty years, but on expired tourist visas, President Donald Trump ordered them to leave. Not only had they been raising families and working in the state since the late 1990s and early 2000s, but also if they were to return to Indonesia, they feared discrimination, torture, and other retribution at “home,” as nearly 90% of the Indonesian population in that nation practices Islam, not Christianity (Yang n.p.). In the vein of Art Spiegelman’s use of animals as metaphors in his graphic narratives on the Holocaust, titled *Maus I* and followed by *Maus II*, Benji McKerrow in her “Deer and Dragon” draws Indonesian American subjects as Komodo dragons, one of several national symbols of Indonesia. Lawyer William (Bill) Hahn successfully defended many Seacoast area Indonesian asylees during Trump’s first presidency, along with then-U.S. Senators Jean Shaheen and Maggie Hassan, and New Hampshire’s Governor Chris Sununu. McKerrow depicts him as a Boston bulldog, while other non-Indonesian characters are depicted as white-tailed deer, New Hampshire’s state animal.

Marek Bennett records Tim Sombah's narrative in "A Story of Hope." Sombah's parents were spotlighted in the media during the Trump administration's deportation cases. Using Sombah's telling, fraught with his parents' anxiety about an unwanted return to Indonesia, Bennett draws their fear and the final, joyous outcome. The remaining comic depicts the immigration of Angelia Fendiana when she was just a girl; as a young adult, she successfully graduated from the University of New Hampshire in 2023, as illustrated by Angel Trazo in "Growing Up Asian American: Angelia Fendiana."

Why use comics to tell these stories? For Julia Alvarez, in the foreword to *The Most Costly Journey: Stories of Migrant Farmworkers in Vermont, Drawn by New England Cartoonists*—an exemplary impetus for this collection—she reminds us that storytelling is “the most healing and lasting balm” for those refugees, asylees, and migrants who are forced by economic necessity or by threat to live or work elsewhere, in a not-home. It is so “empowering and self-affirming,” as the narratives come from the storytellers themselves (vi). Furthermore, I add that comics provides an exceptional opportunity to use visual metaphors. After we see artists' creative representations of all manner of subjects addressed in the collection, readers cannot un-see them. Bennett, for example in “A Story of Hope,” illustrates the heads and faces of U.S. government agents and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E) officials as square, blank television monitors, at least in my interpretation (see pages 63–65). Two elements stand out when reading this image. First, when bureaucrats' expressions are left blank, Bennett invites readers to fill them in: are the commissioners bored? unsympathetic? disgusted? How might asylees who are checking in with I.C.E. describe their experiences with its agents? How do they feel? Second, the concept of a tv monitor suggests the officials' lack of humanity. They are more machine than human, checking documents by rote, ignoring any reference to asylees' emotions.

In “Shelter,” Closson draws Jakarta-based Muslim rioters who loot and then burn the shops of Christians (and ethnic Chinese Christians)—smashing furniture, knives in hand—their white, pupil-less eyes embedded in all-black heads. They evoke the specter of sheer terror experienced by the shopkeepers and residents, as Closson imagines. The eerie, phantom-like apparitions haunt the imagination, a small visceral-visual representation of how trauma might work: it returns in memory long after a horrific event seemingly has passed.

For Hilary Chute, “Comics, with its proliferation of frames, suggests plenitude,” she writes in her study *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (16). “[W]hat can be crammed into the frame for display” is what she calls “fullness ... the density and accumulation of evidence” (16). It is also an exercise in how to read that fullness: in the western mode of reading from left to right and from top to bottom, comics encourage us to pause on an image, a juxtaposition, an artistic choice. A reader can gaze around a panel's interior; they can explore across the gutters (the gaps between panels). Comics' elements of composition, juxtaposition, and sequencing all contribute to various analyses and interpretations. For example, in “Growing Up Indonesian American: Angelia Fendiana,” artist Trazo draws repetitive squares across pages 72 and 73 to rope them together visually, including the drawing of a rectangular photograph that breaks the frame at the bottom of page 72; the image of an oblong tv screen on the middle of page 73; and the inclusion of a school supply list on a piece of square paper below. The layout across the pages, taken as an entire entity rather than as individual elements, assists our eyes in moving across visually harmonizing panels. Note that Fendiana's cartoon hand holds the photo and later the shopping list, another repetition that assists the eye in absorbing the whole and the parts. When enjoying comics, then, we read for both content and for visual play.

The collection consists of an array of artistic styles—aesthetics that themselves can be used for interpreting comics. Trazo’s depiction of Fendiana’s first view of the JFK airport and of New York City is an aerial one, more densely drawn than the nameless city on Bennett’s first page of “A Story of Hope.” In fact, Bennett’s artwork is overall less detailed, wherein a series of lines illustrate buildings, stick figures represent people. Inevitably, some readers will prefer one style over another, yet each comic, despite artistic choices, conveys a variety of content related to emotions, situations, and relationships.

This collection does not represent an iconic immigrant or asylee story, but rather illustrates multifaceted stories, from various experiences of growing old and starting life over in a nation not of one’s birth, of growing up as part of the 1.5 Indonesian American generation, of the joys of university graduation, and of fears of deportation.

Rather, this slim comics collection represents an important slice of New Hampshire’s history needing broader depiction in various genres, the medium of comics only one approach among many. I hope this product of creative public engagement and of the artistic work of many hands across the nation will highlight our community leaders and members, and also provide context behind who has arrived in New Hampshire lately to build our communities. In the fullness of this framing, I repeat Reverend Pontoh’s words: “In the past we thought we shouldn’t share our stories and challenges. When we tell our stories [however,] more people know about us and welcome us” (Fernandez n.p.).

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2. Contributors to the collection, for example, investigate Boston’s South Asian American immigrants as well as Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees; others historicize New Englanders’ reactions to Japanese acrobats who toured the region in the mid-nineteenth century; an historian offers a nuanced reading of an 1824 Chinese student’s friendship album (a notebook filled with the author’s personal reflections and those of his peers) that she discovered at the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut, among other surprising connections between the East and New England.

3. In an article in the 3 Jan. 2023 digital newsletter for the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Lois R. Shea writes of Raychel, “Her vision: To create, in a revitalized economic center of downtown, the country’s only Little Indonesia district — drawing business and tourism, while driving community strength and connection” (n.p.).

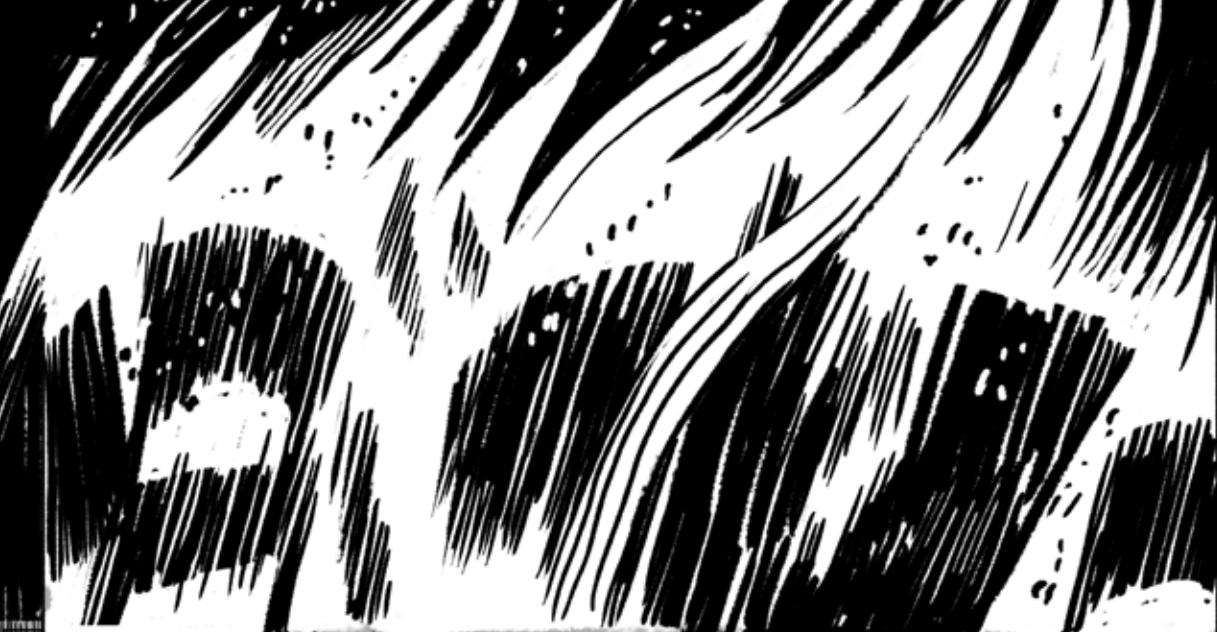
SHELTER

Ted Closson is an educator, writer, and artist living in Maine. He graduated in 2009 from the University of Maine at Augusta with a BA and in 2012 from the University of Houston with an MFA. His comics and visual work have been published in *Drawn to MoMA: MoMA Magazine*, *The Nib*, *Beyond: Queer Sci-fi and Fantasy Comics Anthology*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Alphabet Anthology*, *University of Houston Alumni Quarterly*, *Hobart Literary Journal*, *The Rumpus*, *The Good Men Project*, and *Storychord*.



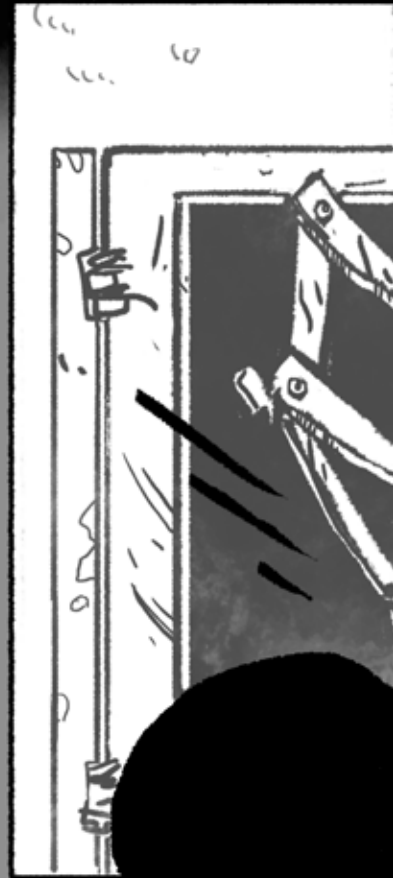
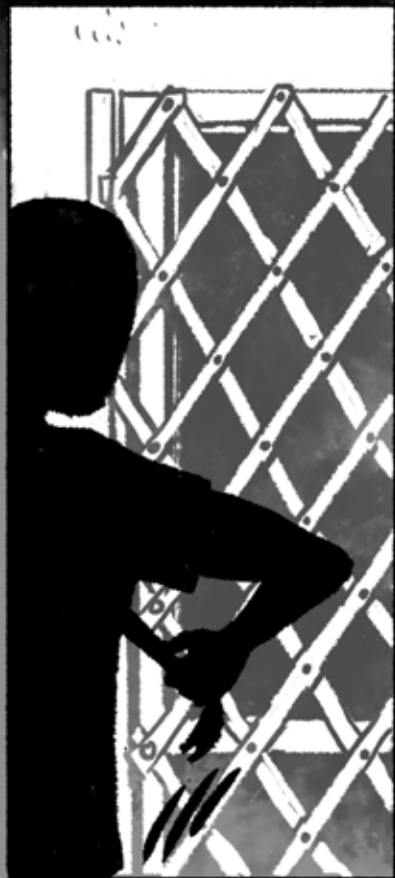






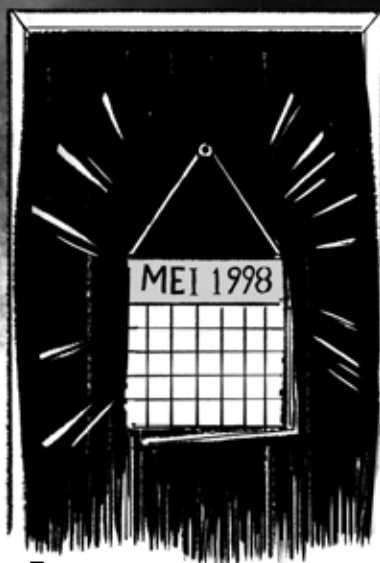






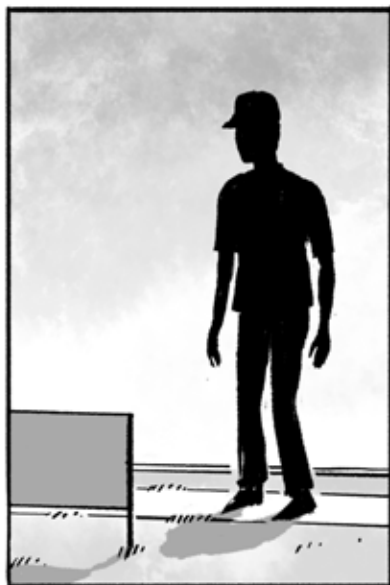














“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.”

PSALMS 27:5

A GOOD MISSION: THE REVEREND SANDRA PONTOH STORY

Kristen Lynn Zimmerman is an artist, storyteller, world builder, and cartoonist based in Oakland, California. Her comics and stories weave magic, memory, and nonfiction to repair intergenerational trauma, reconnect us to ancestral wisdom, and open new possibilities for the future. Through her stories she explores themes of family, queerness, dis/ability, belonging, and creating home. Kristen is the creator of the graphic novel *Ten Thousand Beloved Communities* (Beloved Communities Press, 2023), *Decolonizing Journeys* (Decolonize Race Project, 2023), and many other self-published and commissioned comics. She loves teaching, applying comics to real-world world building, and is an adjunct professor at California State University, East Bay.

A GOOD MISSION

The
Reverend
Sandra
Pontok
Story

INTERVIEW
& COMIC BY
KRISTEN
LYNN
ZIMMERMAN

Madbury, NH
AUGUST, 1998

I WAS A STUDENT
STUDYING THEOLOGY IN
HOLLAND, MICHIGAN
WHEN I GOT THE CALL
TO COME HERE TO
NEW HAMPSHIRE.

I PLANNED
TO GO BACK
TO INDONESIA
AND TEACH
AFTER MY
STUDIES.

BUT IT WAS A
DIFFICULT TIME FOR
EVERYONE IN
INDONESIA...



REV SANDRA PONTOH



ESPECIALLY FOR THE
CHRISTIANS, BUDDHISTS,
AND CHINESE DESCENDANTS.



WHEN PEOPLE LEFT
THEY DIDN'T CARE
ABOUT PAPERWORK.



↑ Kedatangan Internasional
International Arrivals
→ Keberangkatan Internasional
International Departures



THEY JUST
WANTED TO
SURVIVE.



WHILE THEY WERE TRYING
TO START A NEW LIFE
IN THE U.S., I WAS IN
SEMINARY.



I WAS STUDYING LANGUAGES
AND THE OLD AND NEW
TESTAMENTS.



I PLANNED TO GO BACK TO
INDONESIA TO TEACH.



BUT THEN I GOT A CALL...



WHEN I FIRST GOT HERE,
COMMUNITY MEMBERS DIDN'T
SHARE THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS.



WE'RE SO HAPPY
YOU'RE HERE!



EAT!

WE TRIED
TO GO TO
THE
AMERICAN
CHURCH
BUT...

WE COULDN'T
UNDERSTAND
ANYTHING. WE KNEW
WE NEEDED A PASTOR
WHO SPEAKS INDONESIAN,
AND WE CALLED
YOU.

I WAS REALLY INDEPENDENT, I DIDN'T HAVE
A CAR, AND I WANTED TO GET TO KNOW THE
COMMUNITY, SO I WALKED EVERYWHERE.



HEY! THAT'S THE
PASTOR!

STOP TO SEE IF SHE
WANTS A RIDE.

YOU'RE
WALKING?!



YES!
I LOVE TO. IT'S
JUST LIKE HOME

CAN I
VISIT YOU
LATER?



YES!
WE'LL BE
HOME.

THEN I FOUND OUT THEY
WERE STRUGGLING.



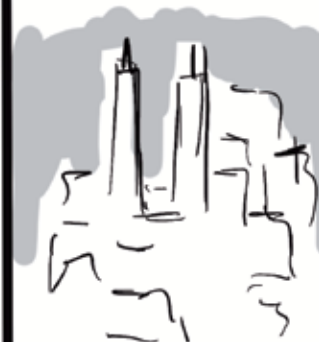
AND PASTOR,
MAYBE YOU CAN
HELP US WITH
SOMETHING.







THE TWIN TOWER ATTACKS
HAPPENED.



AND ALL THE MEN FROM
MUSLIM COUNTRIES HAD
TO REPORT TO IMMIGRATION.



INDONESIA HAS THE
LARGEST MUSLIM POPULATION
IN THE WORLD.



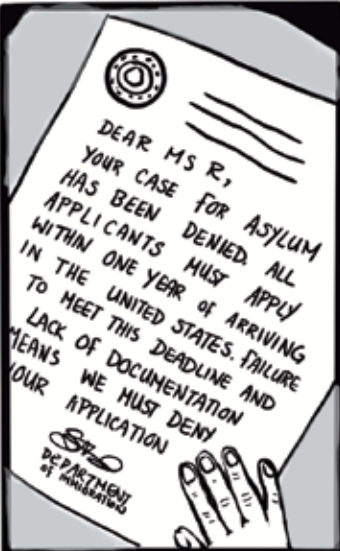
ALL THE INDONESIAN
MEN, WHETHER THEY WERE
MUSLIM OR NOT, HAD TO
REGISTER.



IN 1998...



IN 2001...





I JUST FORGOT BECAUSE I AM A PART OF THIS COMMUNITY,
I NEVER QUESTIONED IT.



OUR SMALL CHURCH,
IT'S LIKE A FAMILY.



WE KNOW
YOU DON'T COOK.
WE MADE YOU
SOP BUNTUT.



THE KIDS CALL
ME MAMA.



MY TEACHING
NOW FOCUSES ON HOW TO
LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR,
ALL NEIGHBORS.

I THINK MY
CHURCH
MEMBERS
GET SICK
OF ME
SAYING IT...

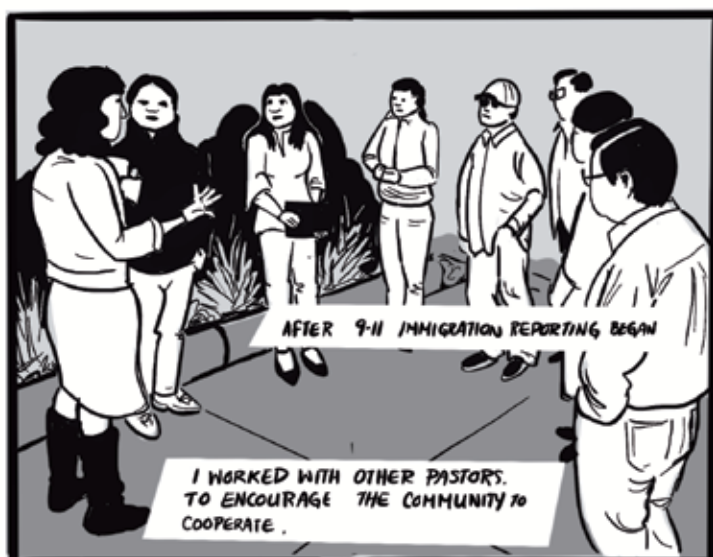
BUT
THEY
ALSO
GET
IT.



WE'VE BEEN
TALKING. WE WANT
YOU TO START A
NONPROFIT...

... SO YOU
CAN HELP EVERYONE
IN OUR COMMUNITY WITH
IMMIGRATION ISSUES.







I WAS SO
RELIEVED!

NOW OUR ENTIRE
INDONESIAN COMMUNITY
IN NEW HAMPSHIRE IS ABOUT
TWO THOUSAND PEOPLE.

MOST PEOPLE HAVE
THEIR PAPERWORK, SO
WE ALSO HAVE MORE
LEVERAGE AND POWER.

OUR CHURCH
COMMUNITY IS NOW
98 PEOPLE, WE HELP EACH
OTHER, AND WHEN WE HAVE A
CELEBRATION EVERYONE
SHOWS UP.

I JUST FEEL SO THANKFUL.
THANKFUL THEY ASKED ME TO COME
AND THANKFUL THAT I SAID YES.

THE RAUDE RAYCHEL STORY: GROWING A COMMUNITY

Mercedes Campos López is a cartoonist, illustrator, and printmaker based in Virginia. She has a BA in biology from Oberlin College and an MFA from the Center for Cartoon Studies. She is the creator of the Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo (MICE) mini-grant awarded comic *Sleepover Sleuths*. Her works span a broad swath of topics from comedies about witches to science comics about the COVID pandemic. She is very passionate about using comics in education and science communication. She loves baking competition shows and her dog Huitzi. You can see more of her work on Instagram @merfish comics or on her website mercedescamposlopez.com.

The Raude Raychel Story

Growing a Community



Interview and Illustrations by Mercedes Campos López

We arrived in LA two days before my 10th birthday.



After a month, my parents and I moved to New Jersey.



It took us three days, the bus stopping every two hours.



None of us spoke English.

At that point, I had only taken one month of English classes back in Indonesia.



All I had was this little English-Indonesian dictionary with basic conversation to take us across the country.



It was challenging- going from one station to another, transferring buses, and trying to find the right places with just that little dictionary.



But I was young and fearless- not embarrassed to just ask.



We stayed in New Jersey for three months before being sent to New Hampshire.



Dover, NH, April 1998

At that time, there were fewer than 50 Indonesians in the area.



It was hard. Nowadays the church arranges housing for pastors, so we stayed with another member of the community the first few months.



It's funny now- two large beds and a whole family would stay on each one.



We were there for two to three months until we were able to get our own apartment.



Growing up, my dad always said his calling was being a pastor.



For Indonesians, a pastor is the leader that people look to for advice, guidance, everything in life.



People needed help and guidance beyond spirituality, and my dad filled that role.



And even after everything we had been through, my dad still opened our home to the community.



Our house became a hub for people who were just settling in New Hampshire.



Church service would be held in our living room.



Everyone came, even from different denominations, because he was the first and only Indonesian pastor in the area.



Each bedroom in our house had four or five beds open to anyone who needed them.

Over the years, more and more Indonesians came to the area because there were a lot of job opportunities.



My dad would take them in for two to three months.



He would help them find jobs, places to stay, etc.



He would drive them to work everyday at 5 or 6 in the morning.



And pick them up at 4 or 5 in the evening and take them home for dinner.



I remember he would take them to temp agencies, and he would always bring me along because I was the only English speaker.



I'd try my best to help, but I was only in 6th grade at the time.





I've stayed in New Hampshire except for a year, when I worked in New Jersey as a waitress.



I wanted to experience what it was like somewhere else.

But New Hampshire was still my home. My family was still here, so I came back.



I got married, and I had my son Aaron, and a few years later my daughter Abigail.



When I was 22, I opened up a boutique focused on Asian trends, and a year later, I opened a second one focused on American and European trends.



I was all into business. I loved it. It was what I studied, but I didn't find my real passion until years later.



In 2013, I became involved in planning a lot of Indonesian festivals to promote Indonesian culture.



I really found myself drawn to promoting our culture, in helping my community.



In 2015, I went through a divorce and became a single mom of two.



My dad was helping me out a lot, but he had gone through a divorce of his own and two strokes and was going back and forth to Indonesia..



Ultimately, I ended up giving up my business, and it felt as though my world was falling apart.



Thankfully, I knew about the resources available to me.



And I understood so much of our community doesn't have access to these resources because they don't know and don't speak the language.



This cemented in my mind even more when I was working as a special education teacher, and I saw a lot of Indonesian kids in the school struggle.



Our community had grown so much, but kids were still experiencing the same problems I had as a kid.



The language barrier was still there, the disconnection between this generation and their parents, the gap between school resources and families.



These kids were shouldering the burden, acting as the spokesperson for their families.



And I was seeing a lot of kids lose opportunities and resources because their parents didn't understand.



At this point, a group of us discussed the barriers in the school and the broader Indonesian community.



So many in our community were missing out, and we wanted to bridge this gap.



We would establish access to information and resources, make connections, and promote the culture.



That's how the Indonesian Community Connect (ICC) got started in 2017.



Our team grew not only in size but also in ambition.



And we have big plans for the future, including building the world's first Little Indonesia.





My dad created this legacy- yes, he was a religious leader, but he was also planting this seed.



I didn't really appreciate it at the time, but he was teaching me.



Teaching me to be kind, to be helpful...



...to never say no to something that could help someone else.



To this day, my door is open if anyone in our community needs support services.



My father died at the beginning of the pandemic in Indonesia.



I wasn't able to attend his funeral except through zoom.



It was really hard, but I'm really proud to continue his legacy- to build on what he started.



And build something better for our kids so they don't struggle like we did.



We've grown the ICC to the point that it's even working internationally.



But it all started with my dad opening his home to the community.



I feel like I'm getting to reap the seed he planted.



DEER AND DRAGON

Benji McKerrow is a non-binary artist from Massachusetts living in New Hampshire. Graduating from the University of New Hampshire with a BA, concentrated in drawing, they strive to continue their creative work whenever possible. McKerrow's work is inspired by children's books and graphic novels. They strive to create a dichotomy between cute animal characters and serious subject matter with their illustrations.

DEER + DRAGON

BENJI
M'KERRROW,
INTERVIEW
WITH
WILLIAM HAHN



★ THE WHITE-TAILED DEER IS THE STATE ANIMAL OF NH
THE KOMODO DRAGON IS INDONESIA'S NATIONAL ANIMAL

VIOLENCE ERUPTED



IN 1998, DICTATOR SUHARTO
RESIGNED.

VIOLENCE AGAINST ETHNIC CHINESE AND
CHRISTIAN CHINESE
INDONESIANS PERSISTED.
MANY FLED.



SOME

FINDING

A HOME IN

NH'S

SMALL INDONESIAN COMMUNITY

THEY RELINQUISHED THEIR
PASSPORTS AND ABIDED BY

ROUTINE CHECK-
INS WITH ICE!

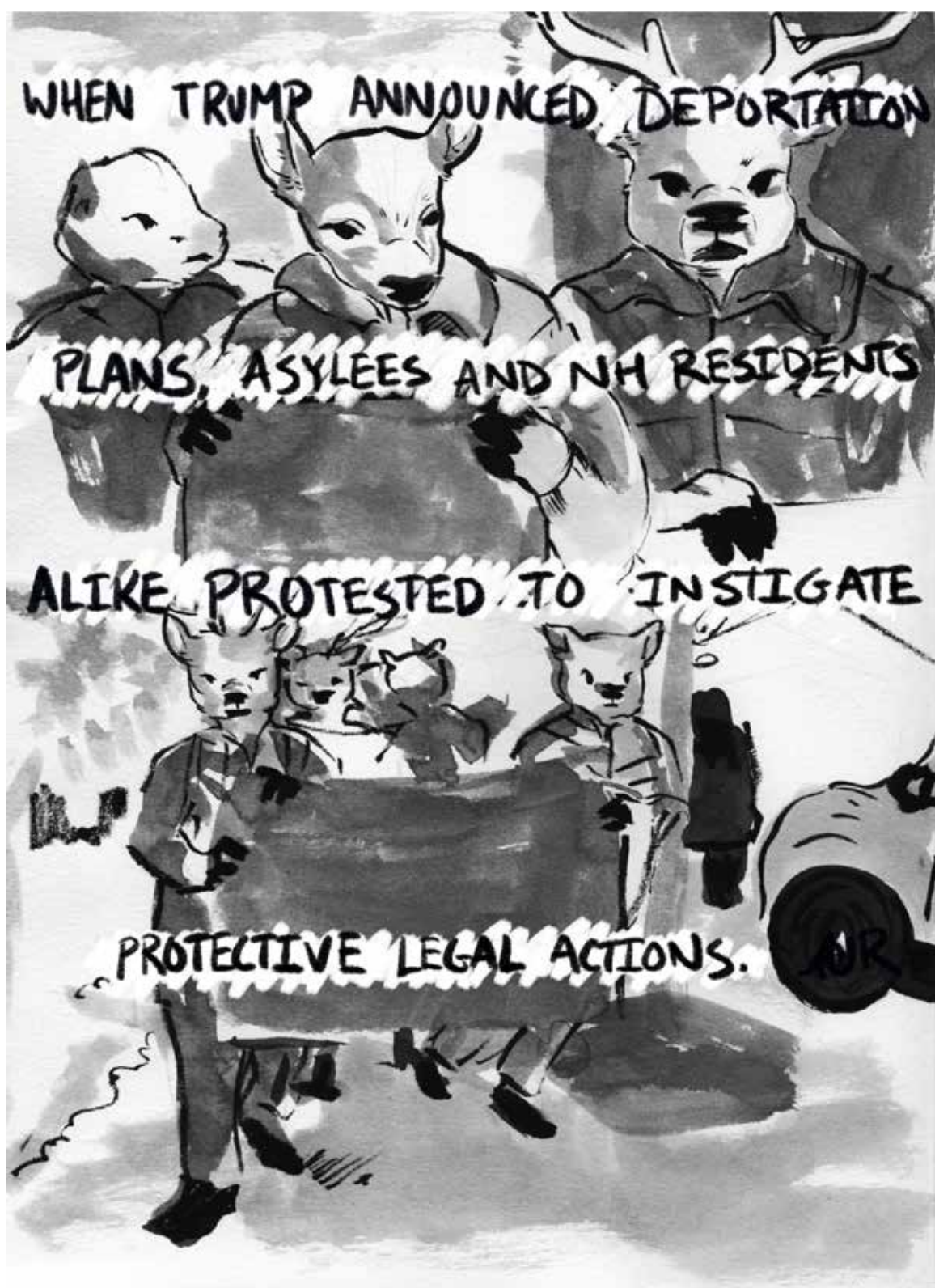
IN ORDER TO
REMAIN IN THE
STATES.





AFTER 20 YEARS AS PRODUCTIVE
NH COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ADVOCATES
AND INDONESIANS ALIKE ASKED;

HOW DID WE COME
TO THIS?





**BOSTON LAWYER BILL HAHN DEFENDED
INDONESIAN CLIENTS IN NH AND MA.**



"A CLIENT OF MINE WORRIED
HER AUTISTIC DAUGHTER WOULD



NOT RECEIVE THE SAME
CARE IF THEY WERE DEPORTED."



"WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN THAT
POSITION AS A PARENT?"

BILL, WITH THEN U.S. SENATORS
JEAN SHAHEEN AND MAGGIE HASSAN,
AND NH GOVERNOR CHRIS SUNUNU,



SUCCESSFULLY FOUGHT ASYLEES'
DEPORTATION.

A STORY OF HOPE

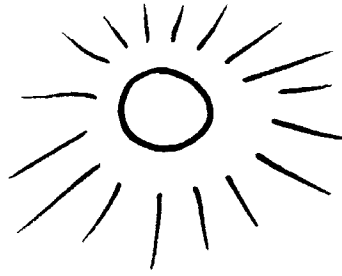
Marek Bennett is a New Hampshire-based cartoonist, musician, and educator who leads discovery-based comics workshops for all ages throughout New England and the world beyond. His comics work includes the graphic novel series *The Civil War Diary of Freeman Colby* as well as drawing, translating, & editing for *The Most Costly Journey* (2021) with the bilingual El Viaje Project. In September 2022, both books were featured at the National Book Festival in Washington, DC. Bennett is the recipient of the 2021 New Hampshire Governor's Arts Award for Art Education. His website is www.MarekBennett.com.



A STORY OF HOPE

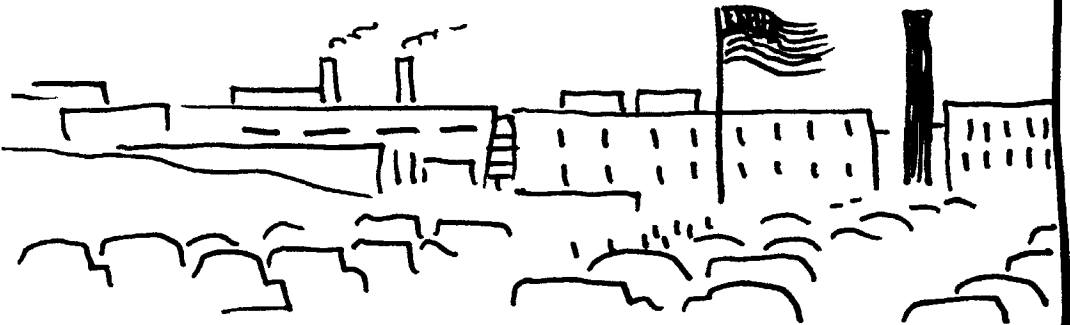
by Tim Sombah
Interview & Art by
Marek Bennett





That summer of 2017,
everything changed
for the worse...

Years before, we'd immigrated to the
U.S. from Indonesia and applied for
asylum due to religious persecution.



We worked hard here. We followed
the asylum laws. We thought we
were living the American Dream...



We thought
we'd be okay.

Then a mandate came down from the new administration...

The government announced today it is broadening deportation categories for several types of asylum...

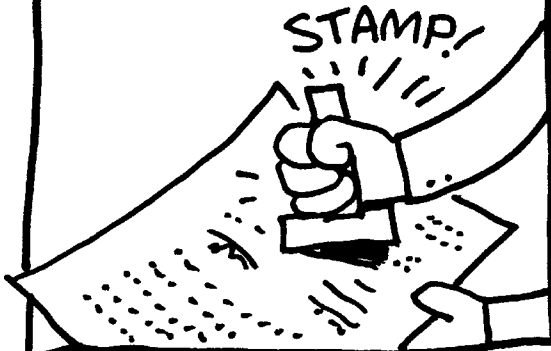


My parents were living under the "orders of supervision," so this immediately affected them...



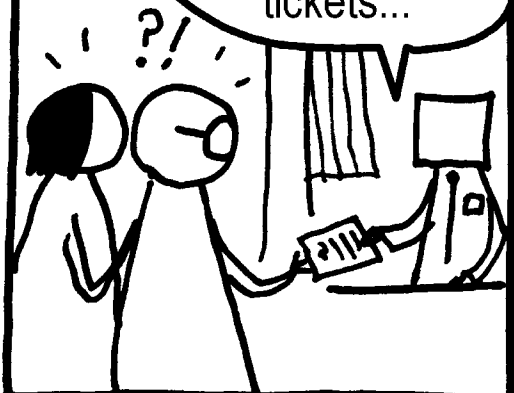
← along with 71 other families in our community.

They all had to report to the I.C.E.* office every few months...



But now:

Next time, bring your departure tickets...



*U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, a federal law enforcement agency.

"Departure tickets"?
What do you mean?!



You're all being deported...
You have to have a flight
back to Indonesia within
the next 3 months.



My parents didn't
have the heart to
come home and
tell me the
bad news...



They got my aunt to tell
me. She tried to cheer me
up... It was a heavy blow.



I couldn't believe it — I was
protected under D.A.C.A.* ...

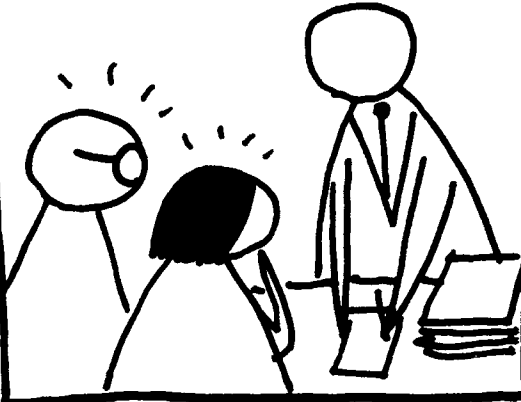


but my parents were
being DEPORTED!

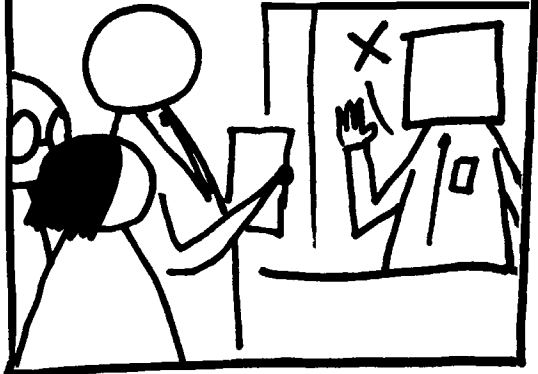
Even telling the
story now, years
later, I can still
feel the anger and
disappointment...

* "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals," U.S. immigration policy allowing some young immigrants to defer deportation & apply for work permits.

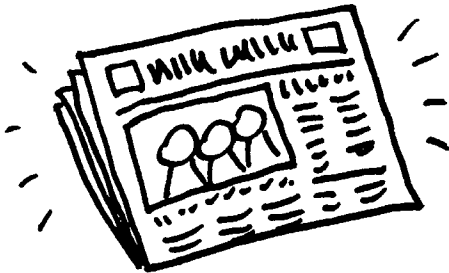
We found a lawyer who could help us...



But I.C.E. didn't care —
Nothing could be done
to change the rules.



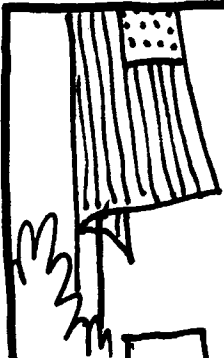
So we started telling
our story to the local
media outlets...



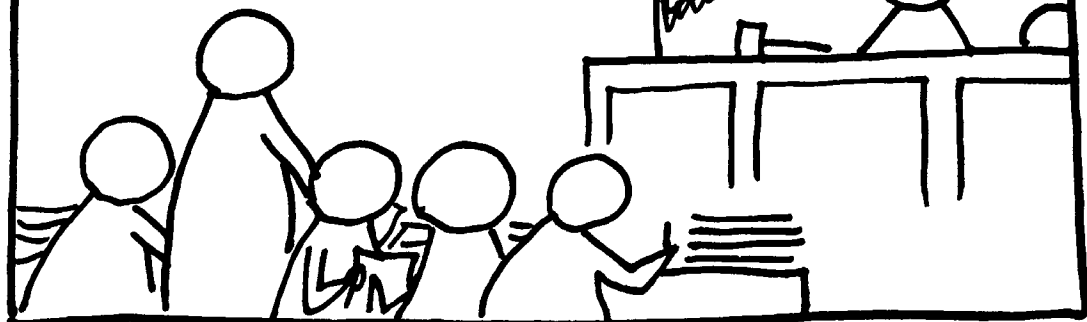
We got good support
from our neighbors in
the community....



They even
organized a
vigil at the
I.C.E. offices
to protest our
deportation.



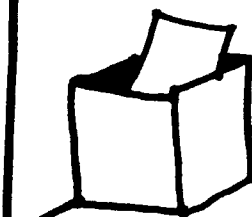
In Boston, a coalition of lawyers was trying to halt the deportations with a class action lawsuit...



But meanwhile, we had to start packing up to leave...



boxing up so many years of our life here...

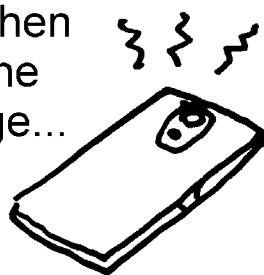


I had taken the day off from work to help out and to spend one last day with my parents..



In less than 12 hours, they would have to leave the country!

That's when I got the message...



It was good news from
the lawyers in Boston...



The judge in the
case had halted the
deportation orders!



It felt like a huge weight had been
lifted from my shoulders...

I don't know
how to put it
into words...



I could
breathe
again!

I ran to tell my dad...



YOU
DON'T
HAVE TO
GO...

YOU DON'T
HAVE TO
GO!!



What happened
that day—it was
a miracle!



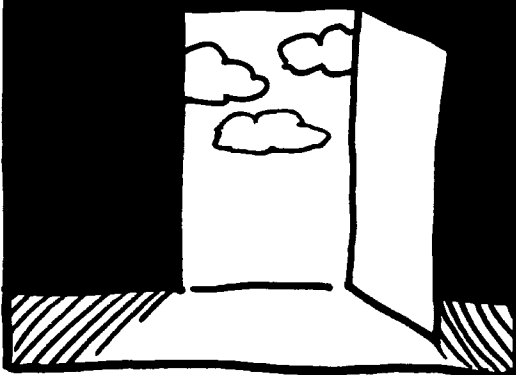
My family went
on to win our
asylum case!



That was March 2020,
the same week that
COVID lockdowns began.



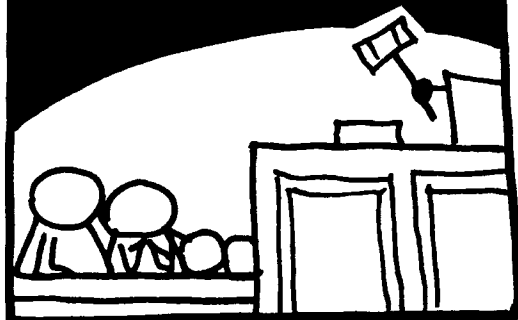
But for us, it felt like a
door was opening...
We could live our lives!



In 2022, I got my green
card... and I got married!
And now my parents can
be here with us,
all together.



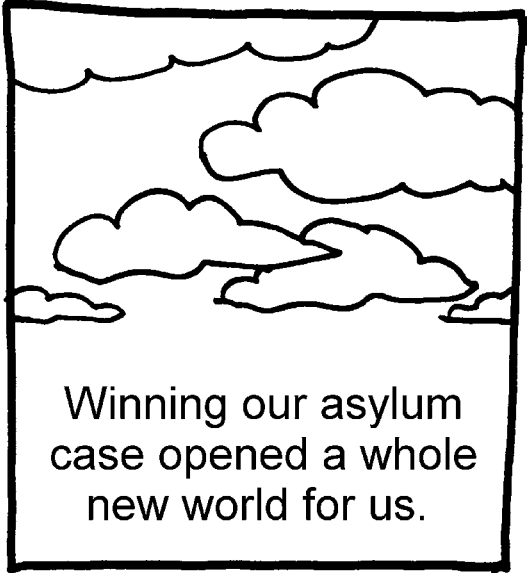
Not all the 71 families
got asylum, though.
Some are still fighting
their deportation.



The 2017
deportation orders
put us all in limbo...

There was
no way out...

No end goal.



It opened a door for all the
families still fighting for asylum...



Now people in our community
can see opportunities again...



Now they
have hope.

GROWING UP INDONESIAN AMERICAN

Angel Trazo is a PhD candidate in cultural studies at the University of California at Davis whose research focuses on Asian American media studies, youth cultures, and gender and sexuality studies. Her dissertation is on the Asian Baby Girl (ABG) youth subculture. She received her MA in Asian American Studies from UCLA. Her scholarship and comics have been published in *Alon: Journal of Filipinx American and Diasporic Studies*, *Amerasia*, *Intersections: Critical Issues in Education*, *ASAP/ Journal*, and *Modern Language Studies*. She is a visual artist and the author and illustrator of the children's book *We Are Inspiring: The Stories of 32 Inspirational Asian American Women*.

Growing Up Indonesian American

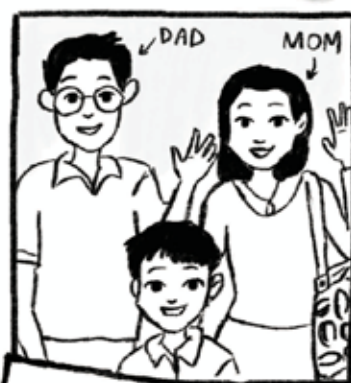
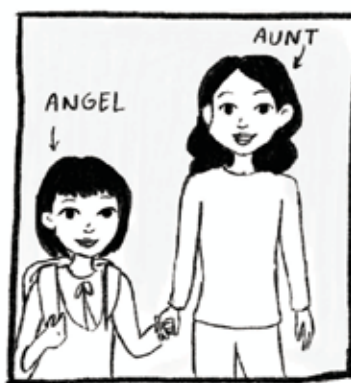
ANGELIA
FENDIANA

Interview +
Illustrations by
ANGEL
TRAZO





I was ten
years old
when I
left
Indonesid...



DOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

♪ WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER ♪

I came to the U.S. in July, a month before school started, so I learned English from watching the T.V. with subtitles.

iCarly

Victorious

The Suite Life

High School Musical was my favorite.

I got excited to go to an American school!

I also had my first American back-to-school shopping experience.

TARGET

- Binder
- Notebook
- 12-pack #2 Pencil
- Glue Stick
- Scissors
- 12-pack Colored Paper
- 24-pack Crayon
- Folder



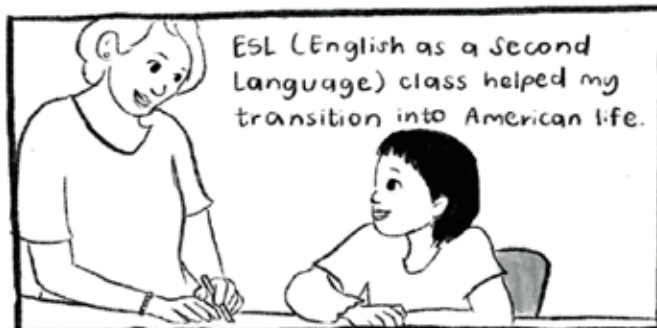
FIRST DAY OF 5TH GRADE



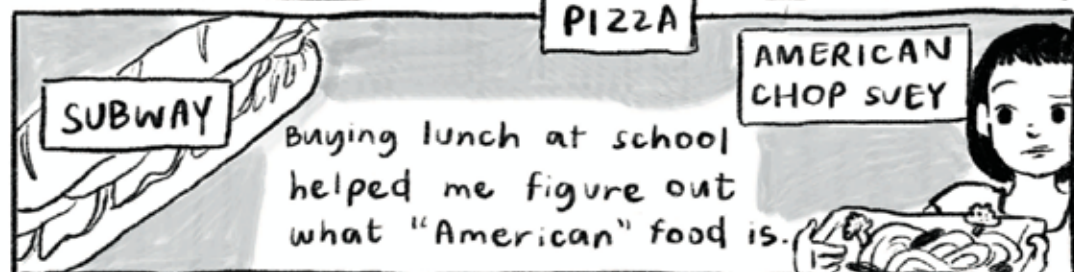
Public school in America was different than Indonesian private school.



You can wear whatever you want. You don't have to write in cursive. You're surrounded by diverse people.



I definitely felt that pressure of fitting in, of looking like everyone else. Otherwise, I'm just foreign to these people. A lot of the time in school, I was the only Asian.



But one day, I got so sick of it. I didn't even care anymore. If people were going to make fun of it - WHATEVER! Because I'm going to have a better lunch than them.

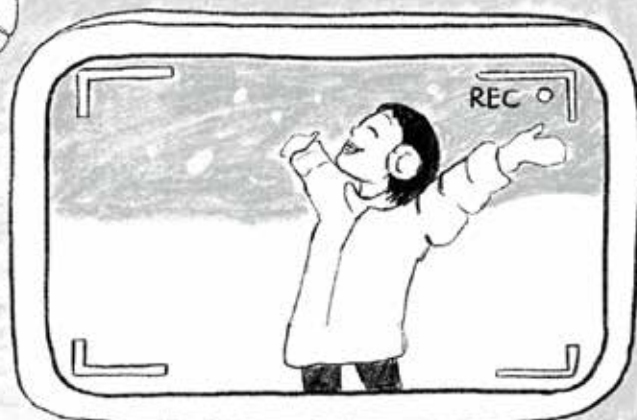


Of course the weather was a culture shock.



Indonesia is tropical and humid.

During the first snowfall, I ran outside with my mom. I wore my purple puffer coat and knock-off UGGs.



I was often the only Asian kid in class and on the swim team.

As a kid, I didn't really experience racism, but I did get comments.

YOU HAVE AN INTERESTING ACCENT.

... ACCENT?
I DON'T HEAR ANY DIFFERENCES IN HOW I TALK ...



In 2014, I joined a traditional Indonesian dance group. I still love it.



Celebrating Our Ocean

We dance at a lot of university and cultural festivals.

My first year of college was at the University of New England during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was in a triple with 2 other Asian girls. We were known as

"The 3 Asian Girls down the hall."



I'd always get confused for my roommates even though we look **COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!**



We all ended up transferring, but we're still close friends.



I transferred to the University of New Hampshire. I was a commuter with hybrid classes, mostly online with in-person labs.



When Junior year came, I made a promise to myself not to let my college experience go to waste.



I met new people and reconnected with friends from high school.

JOIN THE UNITED ASIAN COALITION!

UAC



The Indonesian student Organization had dissolved due to COVID. They hadn't had an event in 2 years. A group of us got together to revive it.

UNH ISA

Come to UDAY 2019!



LET'S MAKE ISA HAPPEN!

SUMMER 2022

We spent the summer figuring out how to bring ISA back.

Indonesian Student Association
- Constitution

FALL 2022

We had our first meeting in September.

I DON'T KNOW IF PEOPLE WILL COME ...

25 people came!

We started holding events like...

Dessert Night

FUNDRAISER



The community donated desserts. For a \$6 ticket, you could eat as many desserts as you wanted. 80 people attended!



ISA & ACU collab

We provided free drinks and desserts to promote each other's clubs.



TERIMAH KASIH!

Thank you for joining us tonight!



Our biggest event was

Indonesian Culture Night

It was stressful since the last ICN had been in 2018. We didn't know how many tickets to sell or how much food to get. We put out 200 tickets - They ALL sold!

3 friends and I performed a dance choreographed by my dance teacher.



We had food from 2 local restaurants.

We ended the night with a dance party and popular Indonesian line dance.



The event was so meaningful because we were able to share a culture that is so important to us and to so many people.

UNH STUDENT ORGANIZATION AWARD CEREMONY

AND THEY SOLD OUT
ALL 222 TICKETS

* GASP *

WITHOUT FURTHER ADD,
I WOULD LIKE TO
PRESENT THE "PHOENIX
AWARD TO THE INDOONESIAN
STUDENT ASSOCIATION!"

YEAH!

LET'S
GOOO!



Now that I've
graduated, I
hope the current
students can
continue what
we started.



Sometimes, I feel like I have an

identity
crisis

WHERE

I'm Indonesian.

I was born in Indonesia.

But, I'm not fully Indonesian.

I also have a Chinese side.

it's a
deep
question,

ARE

which
some

people don't realize

Now that I live in
America, am I
"Indonesian
Chinese
AMERICAN"?

I worked at a
Chinese restaurant
for 6 years. We'd
have family-style
Chinese dinners, and
they liked to teach
me Mandarin.

I don't quite identify with china. Even though my ancestors are from there, my grandparents and parents were all born in Indonesia.

We definitely practice Indonesian-chinese culture. We celebrate Chinese New Year. My family speaks Hokkien and Mandarin. I can understand Hokkien fully, but I can't speak it in the right accent.

YOU

FROM?

I've lived here for 12 years. Going back to Indonesia (I've been 3 times) is a culture shock. I left as a kid so the house I lived in, my neighborhood, seem smaller.



Indonesia itself is diverse with different languages and cultures.

PAGE + COVER DESIGN

Suchana Subedi is a visual designer who wears exclusively Converse and Doc Martens. She is a voracious reader of comic books and likes to find typos in published novels. Her location is somewhere between Seattle, Washington, and Dover, New Hampshire. She loves British chocolate and falls asleep to the sound of artificial rain on her Google assistant.

Subedi describes the process she used to create the cover design and unify the collection:

I feel I only truly began this project when I started reading the stories. The illustrations impressed me, the storytelling was compelling and, most importantly to me, it was incredibly informative. This allowed me a lot of material to absorb and play with. I noticed that the range of topics featured in the stories included everything from community to personal identity, religion, or immigration. This made finding a singular subject matter for the cover difficult. I also did not want to take attention from the look of the individual comics and the work of the artists, so I decided not to go the illustrative route for the cover. Instead, I looked to the stories themselves to craft the cover design. Two stories that struck me included Zimmerman's "A Good Mission: The Reverend Sandra Pontoh Story" and McKerrow's 'Deer and Dragon.' I found the community aspect of the latter to be especially compelling because it depicts how just one person can make a difference. Its illustrations also caught my attention for their personification of iconic and national animalia.

I stumbled upon batik during my research. Fabric is such a great signifier of culture and nationality. Different countries, regions, and cultures have developed their own methods for creating cloth. Indonesia has a rich textile history, and their fabrics and dyeing techniques are unique and identifiable. More than just fabric, however, the material symbolizes thousands of strands coming together, similar to the construction of a

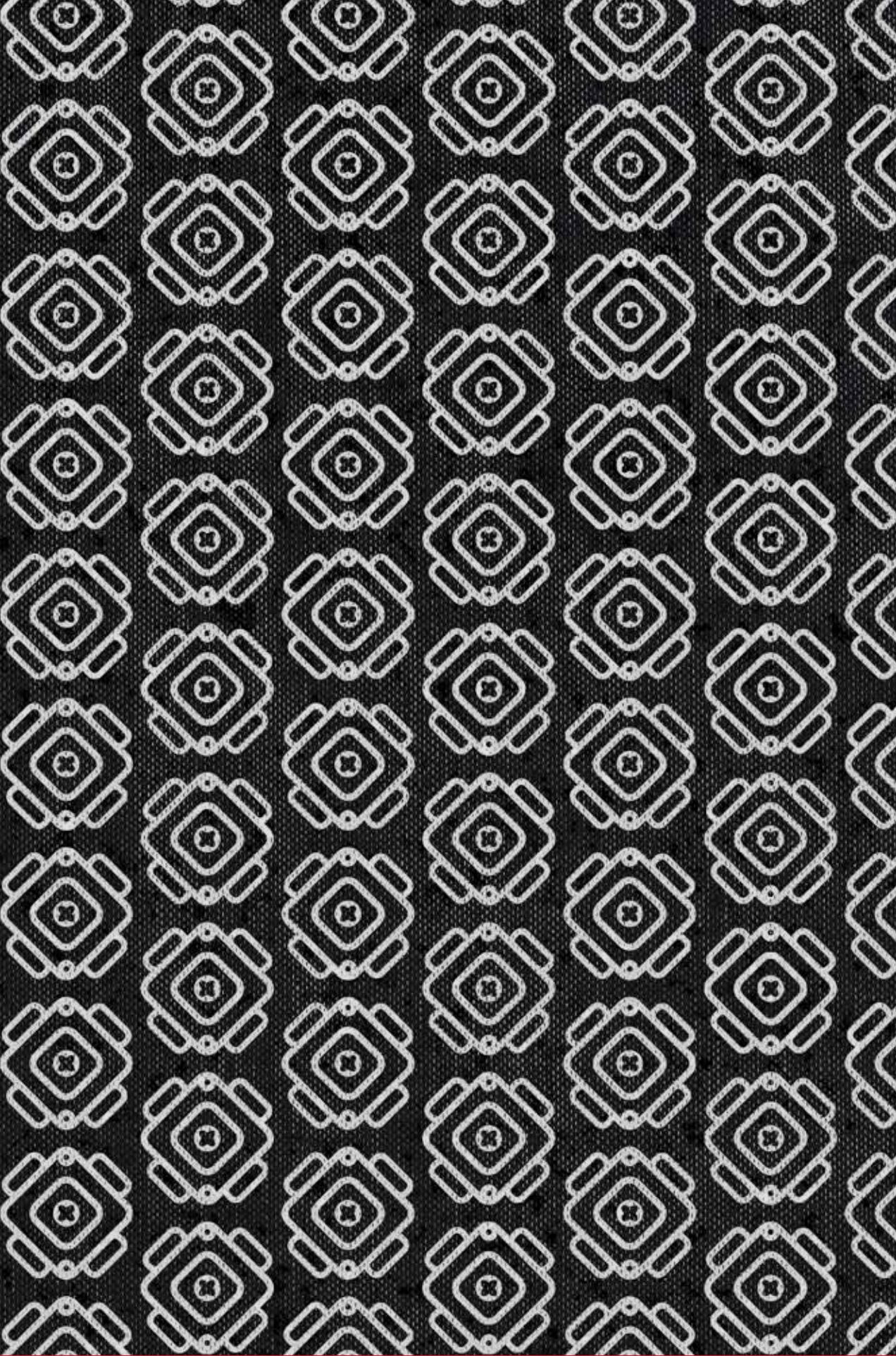
community. The phrase “cut from the same cloth” came to mind. I wanted to make clear that the addition of Indonesian asylees to the Seacoast area was a welcome event, mutually beneficial for those non-Indonesians already living in both Somersworth and Dover, New Hampshire. New arrivals are not simply being transplanted; they are not disrupting the careful pattern of New England living; but rather they represent a welcome addition to a region’s mixing pot.

In addition to referencing Indonesian batik, I recreated the texture of linen to enhance the pattern and design. A granite texture, as an homage to the New Hampshire as the Granite State, adds additional effect. Each singular cell in the design is thus a placeholder for individuals in the larger “pattern” of a community.

Finally, a ribbon of red along the bottom edge of each page is representative of the Indonesian flag. Also along the bottom edges, a rhombus-shape encloses each page number. Both the repetition of the color red and the similar shapes on the cover and for the page numbers aesthetically unify the collection while still allowing each page and each comic to be artistically unique.

DESIGN ASSISTANCE

Liese Zahabi is a graphic/interaction designer and Associate Professor of Design at the University of New Hampshire. Her academic research focuses on search as a cognitive and cultural process, and how the design of interfaces can change the experience of digital search tasks. Her creative design work explores how the nature of search manifests itself in visual patterns and sense-making, how the digital record influences memory and our understanding of history, and how language and image intersect within the context of the Internet. She recently published her first book, *Beyond the Search Engine: Design of the Online Search Experience*, with Routledge. Even though her research focuses so much on the digital, her heart will always belong to books, typography, and the printed word/image.





A COMICS COLLECTION OF INDONESIAN AMERICANS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

An anthology of personal stories, in comics form, about emigrating under duress from Indonesia and building a new life in New Hampshire. Including interviews, historical accounts, and short stories, this collection features an intimate view into the Indonesian American community in the Granite State.