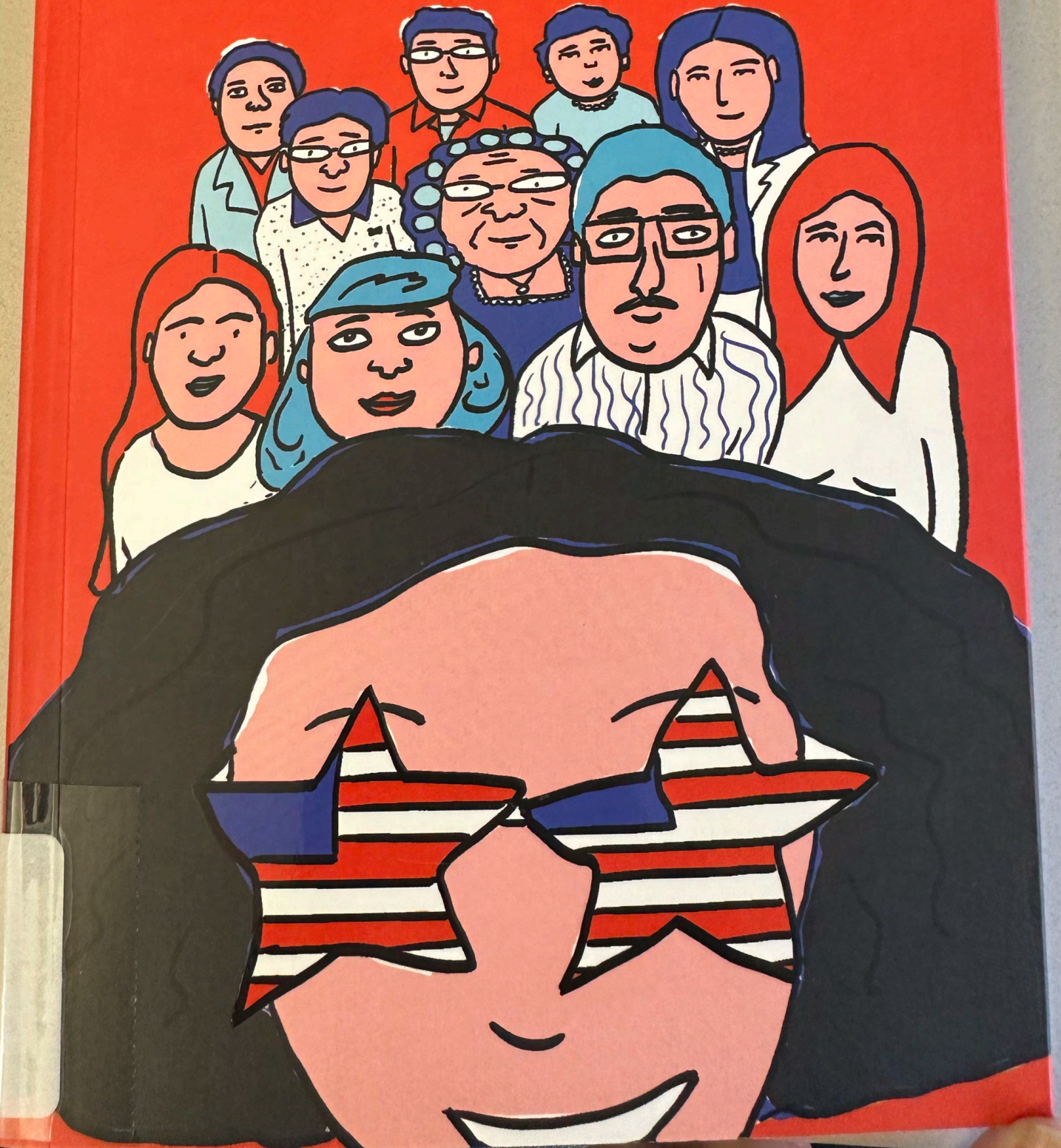


MALAKA GHARIB

# I WAS THEIR AMERICAN DREAM

A GRAPHIC MEMOIR





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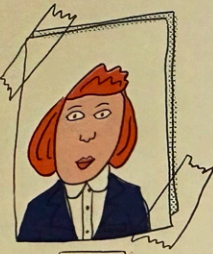
First Edition

FOR  
MOMMY + DADDY

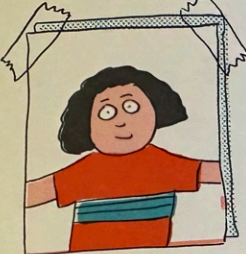




# Meet the Fam



**MOM**  
MALAKA'S MOTHER, WHO WORKS LONG HOURS TO PROVIDE FOR THE FAMILY



**MALAKA**  
A CURIOUS GIRL, JUST TRYING TO FIND HER PLACE IN THE WORLD



**DAD**  
MALAKA'S FATHER, A DISCIPLINED AND INTELLIGENT MAN



**MIN MIN**  
MALAKA'S SPUNKY HALF-SISTER WITH A MIND OF HER OWN



**TITO MARO**  
MALAKA'S MATERNAL UNCLE, KNOWN FOR BEING FUN AND A GREAT COOK



**NANAY**  
MALAKA'S MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER, WHO SPENDS LOTS OF TIME WITH HER GRANDKIDS



**TATA**  
MALAKA'S MATERNAL GRANDFATHER, WHO ENCOURAGED HER TO READ LOTS OF BOOKS



**TITA PINKY**  
MALAKA'S MATERNAL AUNT AND THE MATRIARCH OF THE FAMILY



**DARREN**  
THE SWEET, GOOFY SOUTHERNER WHO MALAKA WOULD EVENTUALLY MARRY



**TITO ARNEL**  
PINKY'S HUSBAND, A KIND MAN WHO GIVES GOOD ADVICE



**HALA**  
MALAKA'S BELOVED STEPMOTHER, WHO TREATED HER LIKE HER OWN CHILD



**SALMA, DONNA, AHMED**  
MALAKA'S YOUNGER HALF-SIBLINGS WHO LIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

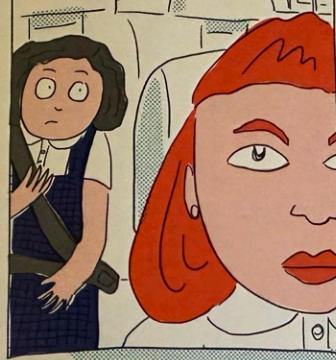


Chapter 1

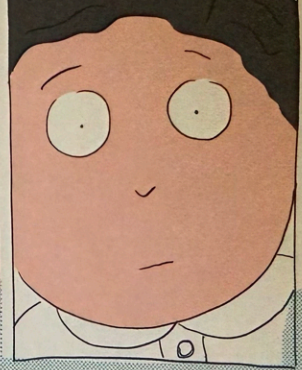
WHEN I WAS GROWING UP,  
MY MOM WOULD ALWAYS SAY:



SHE NEVER EXPLAINED WHAT SHE MEANT BY THAT.



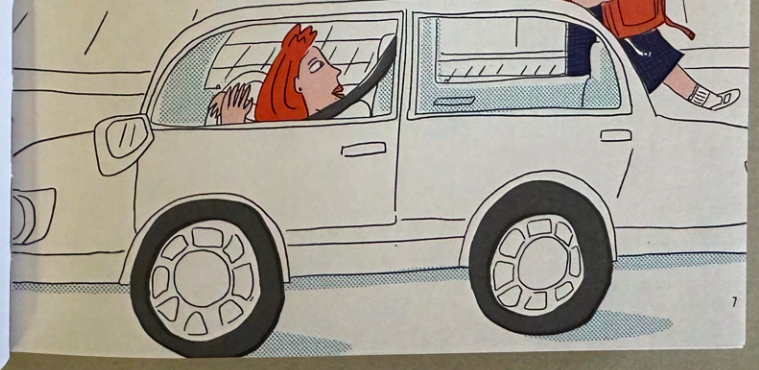
BUT I UNDERSTOOD.



I HAD TO SOMEHOW RISE ABOVE MY PARENTS' LIFE IN AMERICA.



BUT HOW?

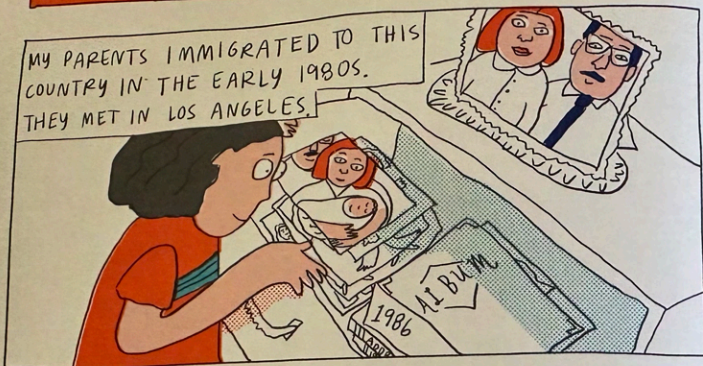




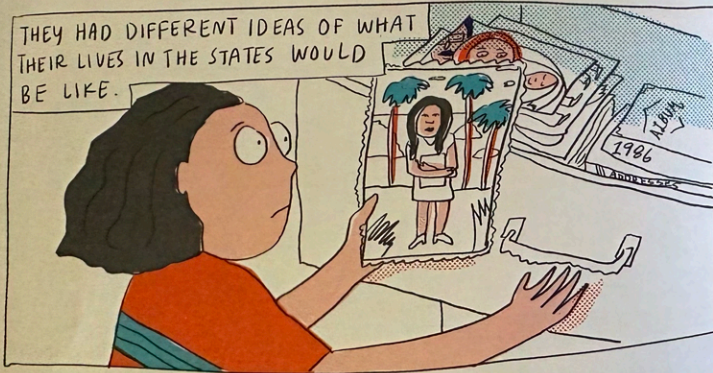
THIS IS A STORY ABOUT THAT JOURNEY, AND IT STARTS BEFORE I WAS BORN.



MY PARENTS IMMIGRATED TO THIS COUNTRY IN THE EARLY 1980S. THEY MET IN LOS ANGELES.



THEY HAD DIFFERENT IDEAS OF WHAT THEIR LIVES IN THE STATES WOULD BE LIKE.

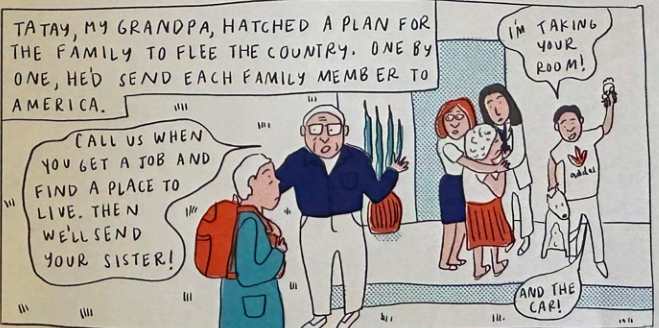


MY MOM NEVER WANTED TO COME HERE.

BUT IN HER HOME COUNTRY OF THE PHILIPPINES IN THE LATE 1970S, THERE WAS GROWING CIVIL UNREST.



PEOPLE WANTED PRESIDENT FERDINAND MARCOS- WHO HAD DECLARED MARTIAL LAW IN 1972- OUT.



TATAY, MY GRANDPA, HATCHED A PLAN FOR THE FAMILY TO FLEE THE COUNTRY. ONE BY ONE, HE'D SEND EACH FAMILY MEMBER TO AMERICA.

\*"LABAN" MEANS "FIGHT" IN TAGALOG.



MY MOM, WHO WAS IN HER EARLY 20s, DIDNT WANT TO LEAVE. SHE CAME FROM AN UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS FAMILY, AND LIFE IN MANILA WAS EASY.

\*THE MAID



A LING AURING\*! CAN YOU TELL THE DRIVER I'LL BE READY IN AN HOUR? AND PLEASE IRON THE DRESS ON MY BED! THANK YOU!!

SHE ALREADY HAD AN AWESOME JOB.

THE WEDDING GUESTS WILL BE ARRIVING AT 6 P.M.!

THE PENINSULA MANILA



AND EVERYTHING YOU COULD GET IN THE U.S. YOU COULD GET IN ASIA.



SIMON + GARFUNKEL



HALL + OATES

ADIDAS!



COOL BAGS!



SEIKO WATCHES!



WRANGLER JEANS!



RECORDS!



WHY WOULD I WANT TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES?

TO TOIL AWAY? TO COOK MY OWN RICE? TO COOK MY OWN FOOD? WASH MY OWN DISHES?

I'D HAVE TO WORK HARD TO MAKE A LIVING. I'D HAVE TO

START FROM THE BOTTOM.





BEFORE SHE KNEW IT, TATAY TOLD HER IT WAS TIME TO JOIN MY UNCLE IN AMERICA. SHE WAS TOTALLY HEARTBROKEN.

they've all come to look for AMERICAAA\*



\*MY MOM HAD LISTENED TO "AMERICA" BY SIMON AND GARFUNKEL A THOUSAND TIMES, BUT HAD NO IDEA WHERE THE PLACES IN THE SONG - MICHIGAN, PITTSBURGH - WERE, OR WHAT THEY WERE LIKE. SOON SHE'D FIND OUT. IT WOULD BE 15 YEARS UNTIL SHE RETURNED TO THE PHILIPPINES AGAIN.

MY DAD, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD BEEN SCHEMING TO GET TO AMERICA SINCE HIGH SCHOOL.



GROWING UP IN CAIRO IN THE 1970s, HE WAS OBSESSED WITH AMERICAN MOVIES.



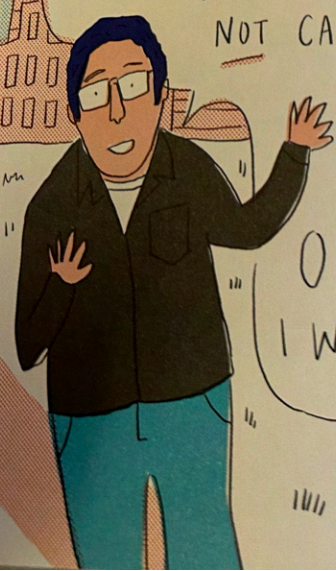
\*LET'S GO IN ARABIC





AMERICAN MOVIES INSPIRED ME. ESPECIALLY ONES ABOUT NEW YORK, WITH ALL THE HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS AND THE CARS AND THE SHOPS AND THE MALLS. SOMETHING INSIDE ME CLICKED AND SAID: "YEAH, THIS IS WHAT I WANT."

AMERICA. NOT EUROPE. NOT AUSTRALIA. NOT CANADA. NOT BERLIN, LONDON, PARIS. I WANT OPEN SKY. I WANT AMERICA.



BABA, I'M LEAVING EGYPT AND GOING TO AMERICA. IS THAT OKAY?

GO FOR IT, MY SON!

BROTHER, CAN I STAY WITH YOU IN DENMARK FOR A WHILE TO SAVE MONEY FOR MY TRIP TO THE U.S.?

OK!

HEJI! PLEASE BUY THIS PAINTING I MADE. TAK!

HELLO. I AM FROM EGYPT. WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

INSHA'ALLAH \* I GET IN!!!

\* "GOD WILLING"

SIR, YOU HAVE A PACKAGE...

LONDON, UK

OH MY GODDD!



IT TOOK HIM OVER HALF A DECADE TO COMPLETE THE PLAN, BUT HE DID IT.

# ALHAMDULILLAH!

LONDON, UK

Congratulations! You have been accepted to UCLA's School of Management.

HE WAS GOING TO AMERICA.

\*"PRAISE BE TO GOD" IN ARABIC

JUST AS MY MOM PREDICTED, LIFE IN AMERICA WAS TOUGH.



MEANWHILE, DAD WAS ANXIOUS TO GET HIS CAREER STARTED. HE WAS DETERMINED TO MAKE IT HERE.





MY DAD WAS MY MOM'S MANAGER.



HEY! UH, DO YOU WANNA WATCH INDIANA JONES WITH ME AFTER WORK?

WHO, ME?

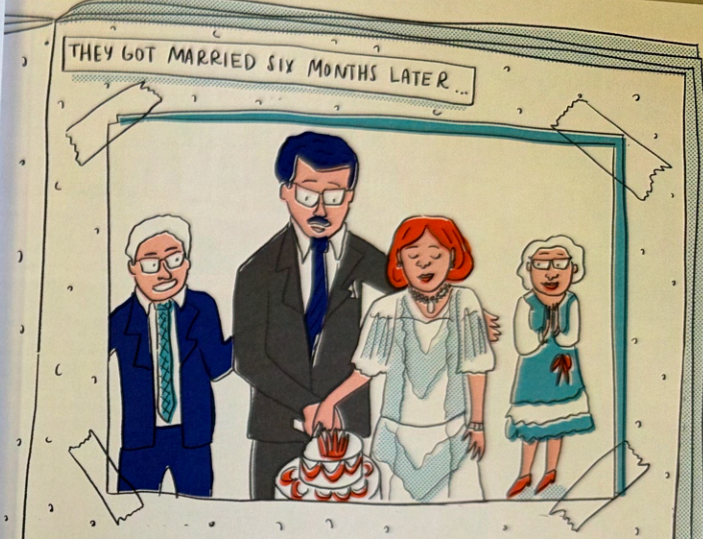
NO, THE GHOST AT THE FRONT DESK. WHO ELSE?!

SHE LIKED HIM BECAUSE HE WAS FUNNY, HE WAS ALWAYS DRESSED NEATLY, AND HE SEEMED SMART.



OMG! HE'S GONNA RIP OUT HIS HEART!

THEY GOT MARRIED SIX MONTHS LATER...



AND HAD ME A YEAR AFTER THAT.



WHY IS SHE SO BROWN?! WHERE ARE HER BLUE EYES LIKE HER DADDY?

OH WELL... I'LL CALL HER "BROWNIE"!



Pantaloon Galoon

AND THERE THEY WERE... TWO IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR AMERICAN-BORN DAUGHTER, IN A STRANGE NEW LAND.

open

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP! →

Don't Think...

Buy!

EAT MORE

STUFF STUFF STUFF

CHIKIN COOP

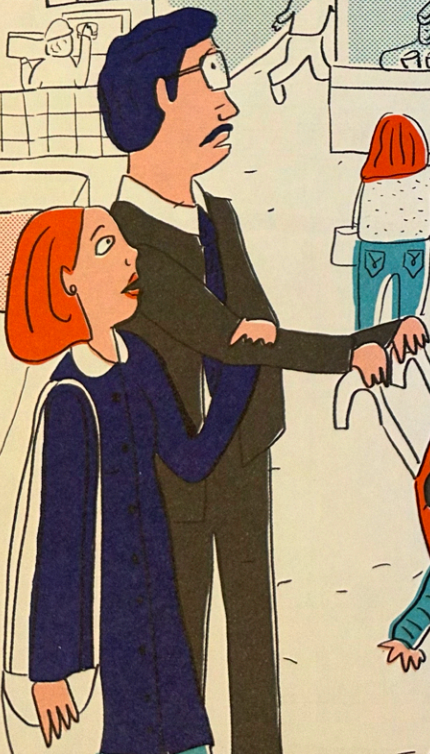
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ULTRABURGER

MISTER NICE CREAM

PIZZA AS BIG AS YOUR HEAD!

ACOTY



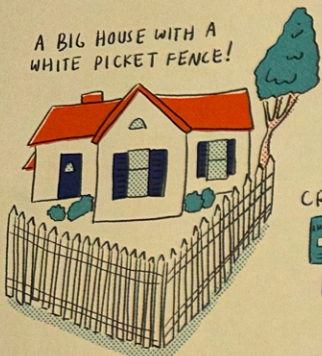


THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY TO THE...

# American Dream!

AND TO MY PARENTS THAT MEANT:

A BIG HOUSE WITH A WHITE PICKET FENCE!



A TWO-CAR GARAGE!



CREDIT CARDS!



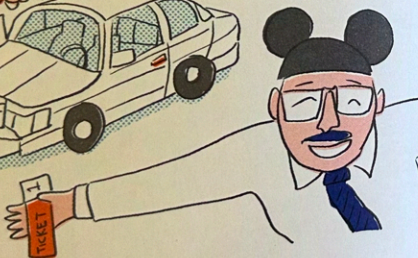
LUXURY HANDBAGS!



A MERCEDES BENZ OR A LEXUS!



ANNUAL TRIPS TO DISNEY WORLD!



ENOUGH MONEY TO SEND BACK HOME TO THE PARENTS!



RALPH LAUREN POLO SHIRTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!



KIDS THAT WERE AMERICAN - BUT NOT TOO AMERICAN!

LIVING AT HOME UNTIL YOU'RE MARRIED IS A GREAT WAY TO SAVE MONEY! 8PM IS A PERFECTLY REASONABLE CURFEW FOR AN 18-YEAR-OLD ON A FRIDAY NIGHT!



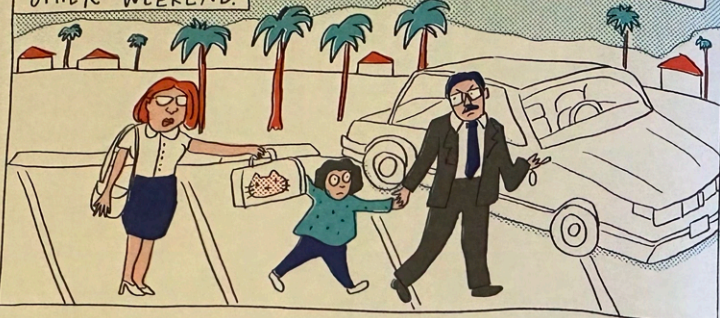
WELL, ALMOST ON THEIR WAY. THINGS WERE TENSE AT HOME.





EVENTUALLY, MY PARENTS GOT A DIVORCE.

I MOVED IN WITH MY MOM. MY DAD GOT A JOB ABOUT A THREE-HOUR DRIVE AWAY. I WOULD SEE HIM EVERY OTHER WEEKEND.



FOR MY MOM, LIFE RETURNED TO THE CRAZY HECTIC LIFE SHE HAD BEFORE ME. EXCEPT NOW, SHE WAS A SINGLE PARENT, JUGGLING A FULL-TIME JOB AND THINKING FOR TWO.



MY PARENTS HAD SO MANY HOPES FOR THEMSELVES.



THE REALITY WAS THEY WERE SO FAR FROM WHAT THEY WANTED.



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, MY PARENTS WOULD TELL ME THAT BEING MARRIED TO EACH OTHER WAS THE CLOSEST THEY EVER GOT TO THE AMERICAN DREAM.

