

Published November 29th, 2017

## What's inside my backpack

By Karen Rosenberg



Karen Rosenberg is a junior at Acalanes High School. She is the president of the Acalanes Key Club, participates in Track and Field, and is a tutor for Mathnasium in Lafayette.

The things I carry in my head, in my hands, on my back, on my shoulders - both mentally and physically - all add to the heavy burden I drag through each and every day.

Everyone has things that weigh them down. As a high schooler, my backpack represents my life and the things that are important to me, mirroring my livelihood and ideals. Take a peek inside and you'll find my keys, my textbooks and my lunch - three things that heavily influence my life.

My keys represent my home and family. Growing up in an affluent society always caused me to be self-conscious of my financial situation, and I felt ashamed of living in a small, cluttered apartment. While many of my peers don't even know what it's like to share a bedroom, I struggled to share a bed with my mom, niece and sister. My two-bedroom apartment never seemed to live up to the million dollar houses around every corner, but I realize now that the size of my house doesn't mirror my character.

My textbooks are another symbolic item hiding in the pocket of my backpack. While carrying all my school

supplies can be physically exhausting, the mental burden weighs heavily on me. My mother grew up in a third world country and life got in the way of college. My father grew up in a time where education was not necessary to be successful and was reserved to the wealthy few. My siblings never managed to make it through college. Normally this would lower expectations, but instead it pushes me to reach new heights and make a name for myself, something my family never dreamt possible for themselves. But while my family claims to be proud of who I am today, somehow my best never seems to be good enough. I set unrealistic standards, trying to make up for whatever my loved ones have lost, thus causing me to fail in the end. Knowing I am still young gives me hope that one day I will find my true calling and focus on goals I set for myself, rather than on goals set by those around me.

And then there is my lunch. To many, this may seem simple and quite insignificant, but for me, my lunch represents something that I have struggled with my entire life: my body. My friends have said I'm beautiful, my relatives have called me gorgeous, but that is not what I see when I look in the mirror every morning. Instead, I see someone who is overweight and mediocre. I analyze my body, making an account of all the imperfections: my "too Asian" eyes, "thick" thighs, short stature, flat filipino nose. But most of all, I see someone who is not happy with her body. Someone who, at times, isn't confident enough to go to school without makeup. Someone who is ashamed of going swimming in public, in fear that she doesn't look like the girls plastered on billboards or magazine covers.

My friends try to comfort me, saying social media is just a bomb of Photoshop, good makeup skills, and the right lighting, but it's hard to listen when the people telling you this look like supermodels themselves. What hurts most is not seeing those around me with perfect bodies and flawless skin, but hearing from someone you love that "you're pretty, but you could always lose a couple pounds," or "are you sure you want to eat that?"

Every time I go and get boba with friends, or binge eat popcorn at the theater I think about how much I will have to work out to burn this off. Is it worth it? And at some point, I just give up and don't care anymore, thinking, Why am I so ugly? Why am I so fat? This societal expectation has plagued many young women my age, and, sadly, I have not yet figured out how to overcome it.

These are among the many things I carry. The expectations I've grown up having and the expectations I hope to one day diminish. We all have things that we aspire to be, to do and to have, but differentiating this from what others expect of you is the hard part.

What do you carry?

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

