

Kintsugi

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

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After an exhausting day, I eagerly made my way down to the ceramics room where a Kitsune mask awaited me. Kitsune are magical shape shifting foxes in Japan, and I was ready to transform with my creation. As I entered the room, I was greeted by my ceramics teacher's distressed expression.

"Ms. Hall, is everything ok?" I worriedly inquired.

"I'm so sorry, Erica. I pugged the clay incorrectly, and there was too much air, and it wasn't able to escape," she rambled as she slowly revealed the jagged shards of the mask.

I stared despondently at the remnants of my creation. Although I wanted to ask how that could happen, I could only say, "It's fine."

Despite concealer being a great way to hide eyebags, baggy clothes being a great way to hide weight loss, and too much homework being a great excuse for restless nights, being "fine" is a great way to truly avoid how you feel--the ultimate form of deception.

"Just fine" forced a smile on my face in front of my family, friends, teammates, and teachers. I formed a seemingly indestructible mask; however, everything is destructible. The entrapment of the air shattered the Kitsune mask. The entrapment of my feelings shattered my own mask.

Although it is hard for me to express my feelings, my Baba (grandma) was the complete opposite. Kintsugi was her expertise. Kintsugi is not only an artistic process that reassembles works with gold, but it is also a Japanese philosophy that embraces human emotions and imperfections.

Every summer in Japan, I watched my Baba meticulously reattach the fragments of bowls

together with a lustrous gold epoxy that highlighted the breakage. Gold was her secret weapon.

"Sore wa utsukushidesu yo ne," she chuckled after fixing every broken ceramic dish she could find.

"Yes Baba. It is very beautiful," I concurred after every dish she fixed.

With my Baba's death, my access to Kintsugi was lost, as was the way I expressed my emotions. Soon, the "I am going through a lot right now. Can we talk?" turned into "It's fine. Don't worry." Five years of being "fine," until my mask broke.

I slowly lifted the tray off the table. As I inched toward the trash can, warmth surged through my body, my eyes began to swell, and my throat began to tense up. I was crying and I was finally not "fine". Years of suppressed feelings of anger, sadness, and happiness were finally liberated. Kintsugi came back to me.

"Ms. Hall, do you happen to know where the gold epoxy is?" I eagerly asked.

With gold epoxy in my hand, I began the scrupulous operation my Baba had done every day. After ten days, 1000 minutes, and five packages of epoxy, the mask that had once covered myself, my flaws, and my emotions now encouraged me to express them. The cracks within the mask that I would have once tried to hide were now highlighted revealing my true self.

The 1000 minutes I spent improving the mask was 1000 minutes spent with my Baba. After that, I abandoned my concealer and baggy clothes. Late night talks have returned to being the reason for little sleep, and I could finally not be "fine." My

Baba brought Kintsugi into my life and although I no longer need a mask to conceal my emotions, Kintsugi is a constant reminder to express them and be my authentic self no matter what. So, whether it is conducting an FBLA meeting, playing ping pong with my best friend, or working at Aloha Kitchen, I will always be genuine to myself and other people around me. It is easy to get hurt when you are not hiding behind a mask; however, it is easier for me to learn, grow, and love when I am true to myself and others. Plus, who doesn't love a little gold? ■