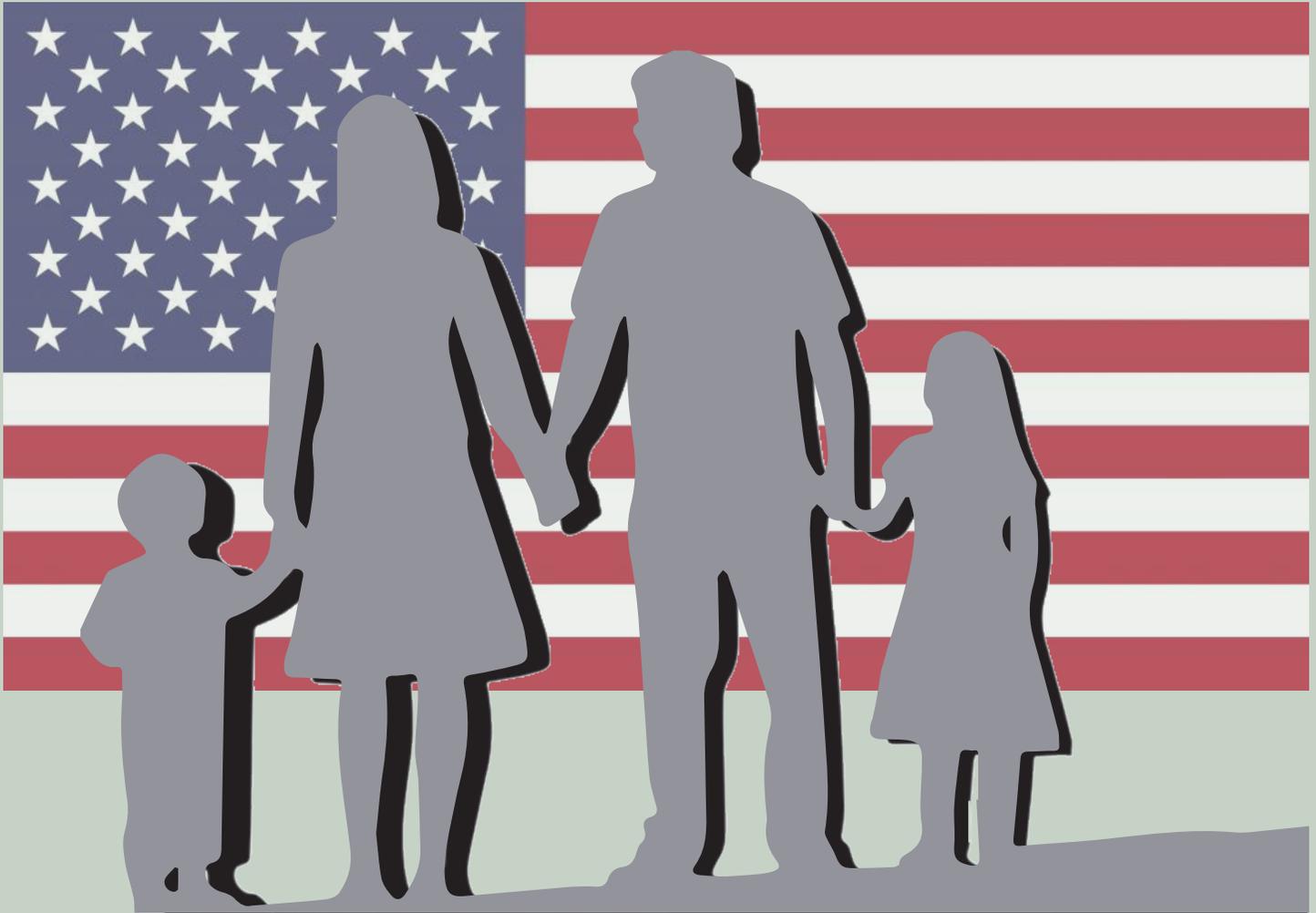


the land of opportunity:

immigrants setting up a path for first generation children

▶ staff writer emma stokic



America: the “land of opportunity.” People come to this country hoping for a better life not only for themselves, but also for their children. First and second generation immigrants are children born in the US to an immigrant. In 2017, the population of immigrant children or first/second generations made up one fourth of all U.S. children (Child Trends). Although growing up in the United States as a first generation child has great benefits, kids also face their own difficulties because of their background.

“I feel like growing up I faced an identity crisis,” Elizabeth Ramjit, child of Caribbean immigrant parents, said. “Who should I be friends with? How can I embrace my culture- or

even should I? There was just no one like me.”

First and second generation immigrants struggle with the tension between retaining their parents’ original culture and background while still adapting to their current home. Nevertheless, most immigrant children, including people from our SA community, want to associate with where their parents are from, as it gives them a better perspective and broader knowledge of their family’s culture.

“I really appreciate my culture because Hispanic and Latino people have a tendency to really unite with each other on a different level than Americans,” Junior Vitor DaSilva said. “There’s the custom of whenever you meet someone you hug them and kiss them. There are

so many countries in South America, and I have the opportunity to learn from so many different people when we come together.”

Cherishing their backgrounds is, fortunately, seen as a trend in younger kids as well.

“My life is different from kids born to American parents because I have a lot more culture,” Fifth Grader Johann Bhagat, son of Upper School Chemistry Teacher Claudia Bhagat, said. “I am American, German, and Indian. I really love my background because it gives me more perspective and variety in life for things like traditions and food.”

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However, there is more value to first generation children than just the appreciation of different cultures and food.

“First generation immigrants are typically most successful because they saw their own parents’ hardship, encouraging them to work even harder to get a better life for both them and their future family,” Slavica Stokic, SA parent, said.

Upper School Science teacher, Claudia Bhagat immigrated to the U.S. in 2005 from Germany. However, it wasn’t an easy ride for her to get to the position she is in now.

“The most difficult aspect of coming to the U.S. was that no one knew me and I didn’t know anyone,” Bhagat said. “It felt as if I didn’t exist in the beginning. I could not have my parents vouch for me, so I had to learn to be independent.”

The culture of the US and of an immigrant’s home country can be very different. Trying to adapt to new circumstances of life without knowing anyone is difficult on its own. People

sometimes expect to feel as if they are still living in their homeland while they are on American soil. This mentality can be hard to get out of as they venture out into the world.

“Americans are more friendly,” Bhagat said. “If you talk to a German or ask a question and the answer is no, Germans are very openly honest and blunt, sometimes even too blunt to the point where it’s considered rude here. When I came to America, people answered in a very polite way. Sometimes they are too polite, so I do not understand if they are saying yes or no. Their etiquette and culture is very different so it was hard to adapt.”

The struggle of adapting to a new environment in addition to also having to manage a stable financial standard of living is a task that immigrants must face on a daily basis. They can find themselves at a disadvantage in society when searching for job opportunities.

“My parents immigrated to the US from Brazil because my dad was offered a job by UMMC,” DaSilva said. “We were kind of lucky in that prospect, but now my mom works two jobs to support the family. If my mom had been born in the US, she would have already gotten a degree in teaching in the US and could be a licensed teacher. Right now, she can only teach English as a second language in smaller organizations.”

Being a first generation immigrant myself, I am proud and thankful to be the daughter of my parents who did their best to understand the American way of life in their twenty years of living here. They did everything in their power in order to raise me as an “American” and set up a successful life path for me, as many other immigrants do for their children. .

“The most meaningful aspect of my daughter having us as immigrant parents is getting a wholesome idea of different values, perspectives, and influences on life mainly by being exposed to other environments and cultures since she was born,” Stokic said.

