

## ANDREW HUANG SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



### ANDREW HUANG

**is an eleventh grader at University School. In his free time he likes to play tennis and draw. He also volunteers for a number of different organizations. He plans to attend college at Vanderbilt University, University of Pennsylvania or Duke and major in engineering or biology.**

“Your mom is a freak.” I tried to laugh, but all I could muster was a weak smile. Like many others who I regarded as my friends in middle school, John\* knew there was something different about my mother and in order to distinguish what he believed was socially acceptable from what was not, he labeled my mother as something inferior. Although I loved and respected my mother, as I glanced over her potion books and ceremonial offerings, I couldn’t help but acknowledge that there was something “wrong” with her. Every time a friend met my mother, he would admit to me with the honest, yet hurtful, statement that he thought my mother was weird, and after hearing each of my friends make the same stinging comment, I began to believe them.

Before entering high school, I discovered that my mother suffers from schizophrenia, a disease which causes her to experience multiple personalities and paranoia. As I grew older, I became increasingly embarrassed to be in public with her, so I never allowed my friends to meet her. For years I neglected my mother, hated her for making my life more difficult and refused to acknowledge her existence. Then, one day, I walked quietly down to the basement to find my mother blankly coloring a children’s coloring book by candlelight, and I realized I didn’t hate her, I pitied her. I pitied how lonely she appeared, how neglected she was by both society and her own family. I realized that no matter how different she was, she was my mother and loved me and cared for me to the best of her ability.

I began to open my world and feelings to my mother once more in the hope that one day we could be the loving mother and son we once were. But I was too late. My mother had never been mentally stable and, following the death of her father coupled with the neglect by her children, she entered a state of schizophrenia far more serious than what she had ever experienced before. She ran away from home multiple times and hid in her room for days out of fear of imaginary threats. I often feel responsible for her loss of sanity, and futilely try to make emotional connections with her.

While I will not give up on my mother, I have diverted some of my effort to spreading mental illness awareness so others will not make the same mistakes I have. I have become a regular volunteer at the Cleveland Clinic Hospital and provide company as well as comfort to people who often feel neglected or lonely. And while not specifically aimed at promoting awareness of mental illness, through my work with my high school’s Multi-Cultural Organization, Gay-Straight Alliance and Asian Platform, I hope to promote the equality of all people, to make all feel accepted, regardless of whom they are and how they differ. My mother, and all those marginalized as “weird,” deserve understanding.

*\*Name has been changed*

