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POSTCARDS FROM HOME

WEEKEND

CLAUDIA LOIZAGA
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

APPLE CAKE AND CAR RIDES

I'm transported into a different world each Spanish summer. The drive up to San Sebastián on the A-1 highway is a portal. This stretch, where the sun-bleached, yellow wheat fields of the Castilian Plateau give way to the emerald rocky hills and cooler air of the Basque Country, feels more like home with each passing year. Most times, my brother sleeps through all five hours of this odyssey, his mouth wide open as his head hangs back; my sister rests her two tiny pomeranians on her lap, who stare blankly into space, thoroughly entertained by their own empty thoughts; my parents sit at the front, playing music and bickering about my father's heavy foot on the pedal; I trace the white lines of the road and watch them blend into a single stream of liquid paint. Besides the hum of background music, it's always quiet in the car; the silence consists of my own thoughts tangled with my brother's steady breaths. Five hours of snoring later, the A-1 spits us out by La Concha's white railings. We peel sticky legs off the leather seats and are ready to eat our collective weight in tarta de manzana. Detangling dead limbs after five hours in a car is objectively miserable, yet here, behind a desk in New Haven, no apple cake to be found, there is nothing I would rather do more than be irritated by the people I love the most.

Contact
CLAUDIA LOIZAGA *at*
claudia.loizagaoliveira@yale.edu.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAIA WILSON

ASHLEY CHAN
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

POPO'S COOKING

On that very day, it became a ritual. I ran up the rickety stairs of my grandmother's apartment after school, almost tripping over the final step. Luckily, I didn't — and my worn-out pink Sketchers Twinkle Toes lit up in celebration with my triumphant stomp. The warm and nutty aroma of sesame oil coming from the kitchen always came to me before the actual sight of "Popo" herself, as she eyeballed oil and sprinkled ginger into her wok with ease. She was making my favorite: fried rice. The ingredients — leftover white rice on one end, pre-chopped char siu on the other — were sprawled across her kitchen island like an artist's paints laid across their palette. Although I couldn't unravel the inner workings of their minds to see the rationale behind these placements, they both instinctively knew where to find the diced scallions or the white acrylic to add onto their canvas. At some point, she became the subject of the canvas that I painted in my mind, framed by pure observation: I noted how the remainders of the day peeked through the dilapidated window blinds, etching the fine lines around her scrunched eyebrows and rendering the soy sauce on her fingers a glistening brown. I still make my way back from class through panting steps up to the threshold. Although I now open my door to Asian snacks arbitrarily placed on the coffee table, on late afternoons when the sun is beginning to set, I'm reminded of my "Popo" as she begins to prepare dinner.

Contact
ASHLEY CHAN
at ash.chan@yale.edu.



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ABIGAIL BERNSTEIN
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

NOT AS BAD AS I THOUGHT

One of my favorite memories of home is the thrifting trip my younger siblings and I took this past year. The sun was hot on that July day when my brother and sister piled into the car with me behind the wheel. We were on our way to a local thrift store. My brother had outgrown all his clothes and was in dire need of new ones. He sat next to me, begrudging the idea of going shopping until I reminded him of the worse alternative: the mall with my mother. My sister was excited and controlled the music from the back seat, talking about all the clothes she wanted to buy for school. I was excited because I love the thrill of finding a "steal" while thrifting and was elated to share one of my favorite activities with my siblings. We ended up at the store for hours trying on ridiculous outfits, laughing over weird T-shirts and debating the practicality of purple cowboy boots. Afterwards, we went to Rita's, our favorite ice cream shop, and at the end of the day, my brother leaned over to me and said, "That wasn't as bad as I thought."

Contact
ABIGAIL BERNSTEIN *at*
abigail.bernstein@yale.edu.

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