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No Look Pass- Basketball and The American Dream

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NO LOOK PASS



No Look Pass is a film about one girl's search into adulthood to find a sense of belonging in the world. Through basketball, Emily Tay finds peace and herself. Melissa Johnson, the director and producer of the film, No Look Pass initially went to Harvard to create a film on the basketball coach at Harvard, but shifted her storyline when she saw Tay play. Instantly, Tay's talent and more specifically her story captivated Johnson and her film crew. Johnson says, "Emily Tay is a first generation immigrant from China Town, Los Angeles. She was never supposed to play basketball coming from Burma. Her folks wanted to keep her at home and wanted to keep her from the gangs in Chinatown. Finally she wore them down. She watched Allen Iverson's tape until she mastered

his move. As far as I know she is the best basketball woman Asian player in Los Angeles.”

While the film has humor, there is also tension in the film between Tay and her parents. Although, Tay sometimes clashes with her parents due to cultural values, she still attributes a lot of her success to her parents who came to the US for better opportunities for their children. Tay is now in Germany, playing pro basketball, and she talks to us via Skype about her struggle assessing to the different cultures. Tay states, “ I would be living a completely different life if my parents lived in Burma. They came to America with very little money and came to the US with the idea of the American dream and they use that as motivation. They sacrificed so much- sacrificed everything for my brother and me to go to Marlborough highschool and college.”

After the sacrifices of putting their children in one of the most expensive high schools in the US, one of the family’s biggest accomplishments was seeing Tay graduate from Harvard University, allegedly the most prestigious college in the United States. Emily’s dad was in tears as he talks about his daughter’s graduation at Harvard, “ When I was in Burma, I knew of one school in America- and that was Harvard. Now to see my daughter graduate from Harvard University, is a dream come true.”

Even after all of her hard work, Emily said she didn’t feel like she fit in at Harvard-coming from a different background than her classmates. She did what she could do to make extra cash even if it meant cleaning toilets. Tay remembers her life at Harvard, “ I felt a lot of pressure. It was definitely the most stressful time in my life, and I felt pressured to be successful. And to be around people who were brilliant and super rich, it was a tough environment to be around, especially coming from my background and having immigrant parents and not be as wealthy as everyone else. It was definitely tough.”

Basketball was her escapism to not just fit in but to just be herself and let go of all the other pressures. Tay recalls, “Basketball has done everything for me. It’s given me everything in my life- the opportunities to go to great schools- to travel the world and to live in Germany, and to live a very comfortable life. It’s been a really true gift for me.”

Emily’s story conveys the lives of many immigrant families who have the opportunity to come to America and see the clash of cultures between children and the parents- with the barriers of communication. The film captures the pursuit of the American dream, of cultural values and finding oneself, and how basketball is used as a tool to escape.

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