

My name is Nelsie Yang, I am the daughter of Hmong refugees of the Secret War. I was born in Minnesota and have lived here for my whole life. The first memory I have of experiencing racism is when I was put into English as a Second Language class in second grade. For all of my school career I have been in the top 10% of my class. I am a native English speaker and grew up speaking English more fluently than Hmong. Yet these teachers still assumed from the color of my skin and my parents' refugee status I could not possibly speak English as well as white students.

Unfortunately, it did not end there. Fast forwarding later, when I asked my college advisor to review my statement of intent to apply for the social work major program, she stereotyped me. She told me I had a few grammatical errors, but "that's typical for students who speak English as a second language". I have been speaking English for my whole life. When I asked the advisor to clarify, she said "of course English is your second language, you are an international student." These assumptions were very hurtful, especially because I had been working with her for over three years. Now, I was beginning to realize racism is a reality of life in the United States, and I had to change that.

In 2013, I had just returned home from studying abroad in Thailand. While I was there I heard news of increased racism toward Hmong communities. I felt guilty missing these important events while I was away and felt strongly motivated to advocate for justice when I returned. My first experience getting involved politically was with Dai Thao's campaign for council member reelection. I spent hours campaigning for a Hmong candidate I believed will do great things to lift up the Minnesotan Hmong community. This is where I identified my passion to fight for equality and justice.

Leading up to the 2015 caucus I participated in caucus training run by Hmong community organizers to attend the St. Paul caucus. Due to my diligence I was elected to be a Bernie Sanders national delegate at the state delegate election and went to the Democratic National Convention this past summer. This experience has been life changing for me. Now I can envision myself one day in the position to speak publicly about the issues I value, breaking the layers of oppression. Someday I will run for office to be a voice of inclusion for all people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. I will not let my voice be silenced or my pride in my Hmong heritage be lost.