

VIETCA: I learned at a very young age acceptance. And I think that really helped me be as calm as I am in my adult life.

I don't stress a lot. I don't over ... I do analyze often, even over analyze sometimes, but if I see something and I can quickly assess that I can't change something about it, especially in this single moment, I'm going to move on temporarily. And oftentimes it's permanently because eventually I'll realize that it's a situation that I can't change or just don't have the energy to put toward changing it. So it's kind of a good thing.

ADAM: In my early teenage years, my mother bought me a t-shirt that said "Wouldn't expecting the unexpected make the unexpected the expected?" The words were white on black background and they had this sorta fuzzy visual effect that forced you to really focus in order to read the words. It became one of my favorite t-shirts.

But it wasn't the visual effect on the words I felt the connection with, nor was it the rough, slightly-raised texture of the letters and words on the fabric. What made it so perfect was the pedantic nature of the message itself. It was like, finally, finally someone or something understands me.

It was about then that I doubled down on the "words matter" credence. I made it a priority to use and say words that conveyed as close to what I want and mean to say as possible.

But a funny thing happened. I couldn't keep my pedantry to the words in my own head. I began to expect others to also be equally concerned with how they say things.

Then a funnier thing happened. I was consistently let down.

Maybe funny isn't the right word.

So I began asking questions, if the person talking meant to say something else or perhaps use a different word. I wasn't trying to make a point or prove anything. I just wanted to be sure I understood the idea behind what was being said. Over time it became clear that can be pretty annoying and I was also told context should factor in if I was missing the point.

And even though that's probably right, still, it always comes back to the same thing for me: Wouldn't using the right words from the start remove the need for context? Why insert Point C if we're only going from Point A to Point B?

I admit, I still struggle with this in my mid-40s, though I've limited how much I open my mouth these days. And that's more for your sake than mine. I've learned it's sometimes better to be confused than ostracized.

Just know, though, that I'd go friendless in defense of the Oxford comma.

My name is Adam Greenfield and you're listening to The People In My Neighborhood.

VIETCA: My name is Vietca Do and I live in Linda Vista, San Diego County.

ADAM: I've known Vietca for about a decade. She used to date a co-worker of mine, though outside of the handful of times we all got together outside of work, I've never really hung out with Vietca. So all I really know about Vietca is what I see on Facebook. For one, she loves themed parties.

VIETCA: And when I turned 25, I started throwing themed birthday parties. So literally, I'm 35 now, so I've had 10 years worth of theme birthday parties. I've done Disney, I've done puns. I've done speakeasies, casino nights. It's like in my blood.

ADAM: And for another, she is one hell of a busy social butterfly.

VIETCA: I'm social, I like to go out, I like to see people, I like to really spend time with people to be quite honest. And I've always been kind of the person who gathers others. I think it's because I think if people are together face to face, they can't be angry.

ADAM: But one thing I've always wanted to know about is her name. I've wondered what it means and if-

VIETCA: My name is actually made up.

ADAM: ... Oh.

VIETCA: My dad thought I should remember where I came from and then where I was going. And so I'm Vietnamese and I was born in California.

ADAM: Right. Vietca. Of course.

VIETCA: It's just a name my dad made up specifically because it was a combination of Vietnam and California. That was it.

Most times people don't think it's a real name. And especially now that I'm on all these dating sites people think it's like a code name, so they actually don't look me up. But unbeknownst to them, they don't realize that they could just look me up and know everything about me because I'm like clickbait, you just look up, my name is everywhere.

ADAM: One of Vietca's passions is writing, which puts her name out in the public eye. As it turns out, this is something she's enjoyed since she was young.

VIETCA: I always loved writing as a kid. I had a diary and it was called Vicky D's diary because growing up I hated my name. I didn't understand why my dad named me Vietca and I couldn't be Ashley or Tabitha or anything much simpler and easier to say. And so I had the little floppy disks, the large floppy disk, right, the three and a half inch with around film that showed in the middle. You put it into this computer that had a black and green screen and I would type away and I would make entries until it was full, save it and then tuck it under my bed for safekeeping.

ADAM: As an adult, Vietca used blogging as her diary, and the topics vary. However, at times, the subject can be pretty powerful and healing for both herself and others.

VIETCA: I wrote about my dad a lot when he passed away in 2013. I didn't talk to anybody about it. It was really bad actually. I wouldn't say I was depressed ever, but I did hold everything together because I was always the person who was leaned on and I wasn't used to being the person who needed to lean on other people. I had to be there for my mom when she was upset that my dad was away. I had to be there for my brother when I felt like he was being picked on, even though he was older than me.

And so it was just my nature to not only please people, but also be there for them. And writing was always there for me so that I didn't have to bring anybody else down. It was always this other persona that I wrote to. And so Vicki D was my handle growing up because I wanted to be Vicky. I didn't want to Vietca I didn't want to be this name that nobody could pronounce. I wanted to pick a name that was similar enough to mine, which I almost changed my name to at one point until I learned to embrace my name.

ADAM: I'm glad she did embrace her name because I have to admit, I'm a fan. It's original and unique and I've never really met anyone like Vietca so it fits.

At one point, Vietca also thought animal science was as big a passion as her passion for other people.

VIETCA: I went to school on an Animal Physiology Neuroscience Degree. That's how I got accepted into UCSD. And then, I don't know, two and a half years in, I was told I had gone to the wrong school. I was working multiple jobs to pay for school and they told me I should have either gone to another school or quit some of my jobs. I can do 1600 hours of volunteer work with any kind of vet organization or I can go to another school like Cal Poly where it's instilled into, it's like a ... what do you call, incorporate it into their classes. And I had made such a good network of friends there that at UCSD that I decided it was better to not go to another school.

So I just changed my major. I like humans just as much as I like animals. And I went that route instead. And to be quite honest, it was a better decision because I'm much more passionate about people than I am about animals. I realized that it wasn't my passion, it was just a hobby. So I volunteered at animal shelters in turned, volunteered at events.

ADAM: So back to people Vietca goes, where she knows her passion is. But here's the thing, after my talk with Vietca, I realized she and I had a somewhat similar family history.

VIETCA: I think my family was very dysfunctional growing up and not even just my immediate family, my extended family.

ADAM: However, here's where I think Vietca and I split. Through my experiences, I went down the route of all humans are bad and mean-spirited and how in the hell am I the only one that seems to see this?

But not Vietca. She took the high road.

VIETCA: So family's fighting. My dad would throw things in the house and I knew it was bad, but at the same time I didn't think I was unique, and I didn't think that what my dad was doing was different from other families and maybe he's not in the majority, but it wasn't like we were the only family on the earth that had problems.

And so I never really took it personally. I just looked at it and said, this is how my life is. I'll speak my truth when I want to, when my mom lets me, because sometimes she tells me to stay out of it and then I would just kind of let it go and then I would just observe. I didn't speak that much as a kid. I was sassy. But in my family, a lot of Asian families are told to keep feelings to themselves, don't speak up, blend in. And I was not that I was 100%, not that, but when it came to my dad, he wasn't around often. So the time that I had with him, I just stayed quiet. I let him be in his space the way he wanted it to be because I knew the minute he left, I didn't want him to think that I shouldn't be a good reason for him to come home.

ADAM: Family's a funny thing, isn't it? The hard part is that it's all just chance, being born into that sort of situation. Vietca, though, became very adept at rolling with the flow of things, for better or worse.

VIETCA: I think I'm a creature of habit. And so I saw what happened and I turned it into a routine. I said, "This is what he does." He comes, he goes, he comes back, he goes again. There's nothing unusual about it. It's come to be expected that this is what I see and this is what will happen.

And to be honest, I don't want to make it sound like there was a denial of bad things. Right? It's not that I glazed over them as bad. They were bad. I think there was some kind of abuse there. I don't know if he ever really hit my mom. I've never seen it happen. But Asian parents discipline their children often, and it's not new. It's not weird for us. It's just a thing. So I never took that personally, but I think what it came down to was acceptance. It is what it is. I could change it by saying something, but by me saying something and it hasn't changed, I'm not going to keep trying and if I speak my truth and it doesn't change anything, things will happen the way they happen and he does leave. And so to me it was temporary, but it was still routine.

ADAM: This ability to place things in a specific light in order to handle it as best as possible seemed to have helped Vietca in her adult life and the jobs she's held, especially the bartending job.

VIETCA: Which one? Had like nine. I love, I talk, I still talk about marching to this day and I haven't bartended in almost two years, but I loved bartending. I can't really pinpoint exactly why I loved it. I excel at a lot of the things I choose to put my mind to and I was very good at it. I picked it up really quickly. I had always told myself I wanted to become a bartender. And to me it represented a lot of things in my life that I felt were lacking up until that point.

ADAM: In 2013, things sorta fell apart for Vietca. In July of that summer, her father passed away. Only a few months later, she and her boyfriend, Danny, my old co-worker, split up.

VIETCA: And then literally one month after that I lost my job. So like shit hit the fan really fast and I felt like I took it with great stride, right? I was unhappy at my job, but I only kept it because the economy was sucky and I wanted something "Stable." But then when I got let go, I thought, well, "If it's just as risky having a job where somebody else decides my fate and my finances, I should just work for myself."

And so I said, "What else do I want to do?" And I said, "I've always wanted to bartend." So I went on Craigslist called the first bar I saw, started working there, thought I would die, and then ever since then I just started doing things that I was tired of waiting to happen to me. And I wanted them to happen for me. And I made them happen myself. So I loved bartending. It was just something that I told myself I would do and I did it and I did it well.

ADAM: Ok, so these jobs and paths don't sound like what a kid would say they wanted to be when they grow up. So were there any passions Vietca had as a kid that she's into now?

VIETCA: I always wanted to be an astronaut when I was a kid. Now I'm still really into astronomy as a hobby. So, I guess maybe many of the things I was into as a child were no longer professional passions. They've now become personal hobbies or personal passions. I read prolifically as a kid, right? I found out that the most books you can check out from the library is 60 books. And that was because I tried to check out way more than 60, and I had to put books back and I read them all. They told me I couldn't read that much in two weeks or three weeks. And I said, "Well, I bet you I can." And I did. And then I came back and I checked out another 60 books or whatever the number was.

And so, no I think anything I really enjoyed as a kid I still tried to enjoy now unfortunately, the answer is I don't enjoy them with as much time as I would like.

ADAM: If you can't tell just from her voice, Vietca's pretty young still. She has definitely lived a lot, both good and bad, but there's still plenty of time to live more.

So if she could do anything she wanted, you know, that she hasn't done already or she doesn't need to learn a new skill, what would it be?

VIETCA: I think I would love to be a writer and not have my own stories. I mean, I feel like I have a fairly interesting perspective in life, right? I don't think I'm more unique than other people, but I think I'm more willing to be honest about myself. And maybe other people than others are comfortable with. I thrive in discomfort, right? I don't mind being there. I don't mind leaning into my feelings.

So when I was traveling and doing all this destination traveling work, destination planning work, housekeepers would come and talk to me. Bellboys the front desk people. And I heard insane amount of stories that were so fascinating and their stories should really be heard. And I think I would love to be the story teller for these unknown voices and kind of do it in secret right when I was bartending, oh my God, you would not believe how many stories I have just from bartending alone. And I drive for Lyft now. I just never had more than ... I had less than two jobs at any given moment. But the things people tell you in the three minute rides that you have are just amazing. So, I would love to be a writer and I don't need credit for it. I mean clearly I would want to get paid for it, but I think the more anonymous I am, the more likely people will continue to tell me these stories.

ADAM: Thanks for listening to The People In My Neighborhood, a podcast series about the connections we have with friends and neighbors.

A big thanks to Vietca for taking the time out of her night to talk to me.

VIETCA: You're welcome. I'm actually really flattered that you asked me to do this for you. I hope I gave you a really nice and honest answers.

ADAM: So until next time, I was reminded baking for one is not possible so I've got a bunch of extra peanut butter cookies I thought I'd share.....