



## Mary Jane Shirakawa

Mother of Keiko Budech, General Manager's Office, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Manager I

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**Mary Jane's story illuminates universal themes of cultural assimilation, the enduring power of family bonds, and the lifelong journey of self-discovery.**

As a Japanese American, Mary Jane's journey is intricately intertwined with the historical legacy of World War II, which forced her father to relinquish all he held dear and endure the confines of a Japanese incarceration camp. Growing up under the shadow of pervasive anti-Japanese sentiment, Mary Jane's parents shouldered the weight of their anxieties, swiftly immersing their children in white culture and bestowing them with anglicized names to foster a sense of belonging and assimilation. Now, as Mary Jane matures, she continues to navigate the complexities of her childhood, unravel her identity, and explore what it truly means to be a Japanese woman in America.

Mary Jane, Keiko's mother, selfless and nurturing, devotes herself to caring for her family, often at the expense of her own wellbeing. The intention of this artwork is to encapsulate the essence of her boundless love and the profound sacrifices she makes to ensure the health of her family.

Mary Jane's story illuminates universal themes of cultural assimilation, the enduring power of family bonds, and the lifelong journey of self-discovery. Within the artwork, Mary Jane is symbolized through the presence of ferns, passion fruit vine, and the bird of paradise. The ferns represent her time in Seattle, embodying the nourishment and

support they provide to a thriving forest. Additionally, ferns are revered for their medicinal properties, absorbing pain and offering healing. Passion fruit and the bird of paradise plant represent Mary Jane's childhood in Hawaii. Passion fruit, with their numerous seeds, care for the next generations until they are ready to grow and flourish on their own. Similarly, the bird of paradise plant, often seen with its majestic green leaves, reveals its breathtaking flowers only in favorable conditions. In many ways, Mary Jane, like the bird of paradise, embodies the steady support and shade of the big green leaves. But in rare moments when she can prioritize herself, her creativity and artistry bloom, shining forth like the resplendent flowers of the bird of paradise.







## Meeramma Naidu

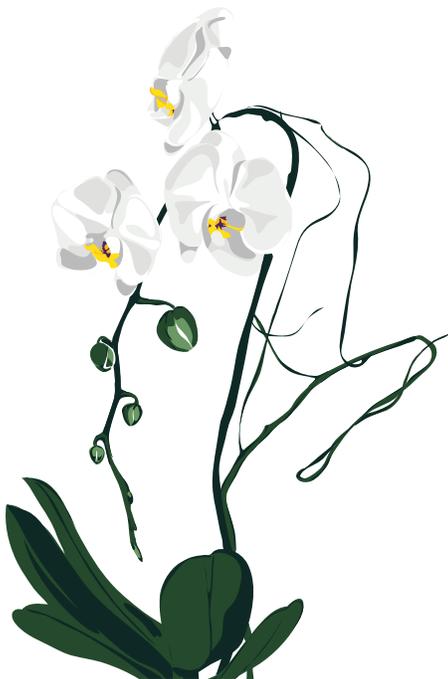
Mother of Vilash Naidu, Bus Operations, Transit Operator

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This portrait of Meeramma Naidu captures a woman whose essence cannot be confined to a single role or moment.

In the tapestry of life, Meeramma Naidu, Vilash's mother, stands as a living testament to resilience, a symbol of the enduring spirit woven through the fibers of motherhood and entrepreneurship. Her portrait is an homage to the rich, symbolic textures of the banana tree, the coconut, and the orchid—each an emblem of her multifaceted nature.

The banana tree, known for its regenerative prowess, mirrors Meeramma's exceptional ability to recover and thrive through life's cycles. Like this robust tree, she is a matriarchal presence that continues to give, her spirit sprouting anew with each challenge, offering sustenance and shade in life's relentless sun.



Resembling the coconut, Meeramma embodies the tree's versatile strength. The coconut is a beacon of purity in Hindu culture—hard and resilient on the outside, yet nurturing within. Its every part finds purpose, reflecting her various roles: a businesswoman, a family anchor, a provider, and now, a caregiver in a new land. Her life, like the coconut, is a narrative of practicality and profound utility, a life that sustains and enriches those around her.

The orchid represents Meeramma's delicate balance of strength and care. This favored flower, with its need for precise nurturing, parallels her journey. With a tender hand and an unshakeable resolve, she cultivates beauty and prosperity in the most unyielding circumstances, her solutions blooming in the face of adversity.

This portrait of Meeramma Naidu captures a woman whose essence cannot be confined to a single role or moment. It is a celebration of her entrepreneurial spirit, her cultural heritage, and her unwavering support for her family. Through the symbolism of the banana tree's resilience, the coconut's utility, and the orchid's delicate care, we see Meeramma's life—a beautiful, continuous act of love, an orchard of humanity where she is both the gardener and the nourishing tree.





## Xí Lê

Mother of Linh Hoàng, Mobility Division, Marketing & Sales Specialist III

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### **Xí's personal narrative represents the collective immigrant experience—one marked by unwavering determination to surmount unimaginable odds.**

The experiences of Linh's mother, Xí Lê, mirror the struggles faced by countless immigrant women. Born amidst the Vietnam-American war, she navigated through the hardships of poverty and starvation following Vietnam's independence. As the eldest in her family, she selflessly shouldered the responsibility of caring for her ten siblings. Despite marrying a man who later became abusive and battled alcoholism, she summoned the courage to embark on a quest for a better life for herself and her children in the United States.

Her personal narrative represents the collective immigrant experience—one marked by unwavering determination to surmount unimaginable odds. Moms, like Xí, confront discrimination and racism in their daily lives, often lacking the necessary language skills or knowledge to navigate the intricate systems designed to support them. Yet, they persevere. They work tirelessly, sacrificing their own wellbeing to provide for their families. In defying societal expectations and norms, they emerge as resilient, successful, and independent women.

In each artwork, layers of symbolism intricately intertwine to reflect the multifaceted lives of these extraordinary

women. Xí's unwavering wish for her family and loved ones to have "just enough" is embodied by the presence of a papaya tree—a symbol of abundance and sufficiency. In Vietnamese culture, papaya carries the meaning of "just enough," and during the new year, papayas are placed on shrines to wish for sufficiency in the upcoming year. Additionally, the lotuses in the foreground represent her enduring humanhood, resilience, and strength. Like lotuses that grow in muddy waters but bloom beautifully and emit a delightful fragrance, Xí, despite the tragedies and hardships she has faced, continues to radiate joy and beauty into the world.







## Nurkhan Khudaiberdieva

Mother of Nasir Khudaiberdiev, Rail Division, Project/Program Manager III

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**This portrait invites you to see Nasir's mother not only through the eyes of her son but also as a universal symbol of maternal strength.**

In the portrait of Nurkhan Khudaiberdieva, Nasir's mother from Central Asia, we witness the embodiment of enduring strength and nurturing spirit that defines her essence. She is depicted standing tall and unwavering like a birch tree, rooted in the fertile ground of sacrifice—a testament to her protective nature and the sustenance she provides. The birch's slender leaves allow dappled sunlight to filter through, symbolizing her ability to let in just enough light of hope, even in the toughest of times, encouraging growth and resilience.

The moonflower, rare and enchanting, mirrors her exceptional patience and the quiet

persistence in her heart. It blooms in the silence of the night, a perfect metaphor for her belief in the inevitable dawn that follows life's darkest moments. This rare bloom signifies her faith and the serene certainty that with time, change will come.

Like the tulip, she possesses a delicate backbone that stands defiant to the harshest winds of challenge. The tulip's vibrant colors reflect the life and joy she brings to those around her, while its steadfast stance in the face of adversity speaks to her indomitable will.

Nasir's mother is the gardener of her family's spirit, sowing seeds of unity, culture, and heritage of Kyrgyzstan. Her favorite hue of green whispers of fresh beginnings and the undying promise of renewal—patience made visible. She serves not just as the bearer of life but as the bold curator of hope, guiding her family through life's ebb and flow with grace and wisdom.

This artwork attempts to portray Nasir's mother not only through the eyes of her son but also as a universal symbol of maternal strength, an anchor in the shifting sands of time, a beacon of light in the obscurity of challenge, and the eternal gardener whose love blooms in perpetual spring.



