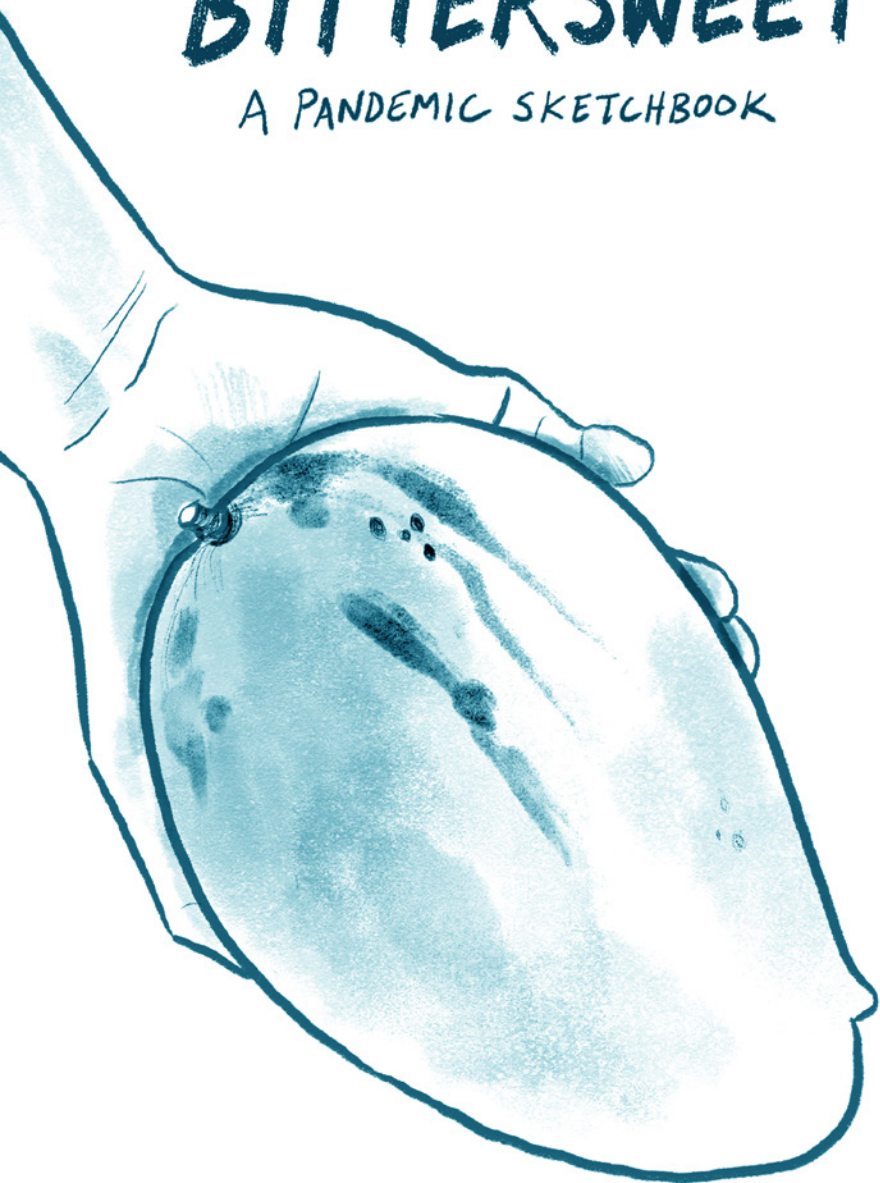


# BITTERSWEET

A PANDEMIC SKETCHBOOK



May 17 - June 1, 2020

Nguyễn Khôi Nguyễn

So much is happening + it's  
all strange + new. I don't  
want to forget this time, so  
I'm keeping a sketchbook.

1.  
Maryland to Florida

Baltimore, MD  
4.45 am  
May 17, 2020

We're all packed + ready to go,  
Thao's mom + Deethra see us off.



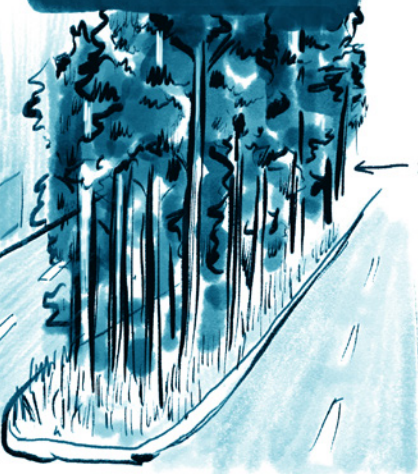
It's quite the distance, but we're optimistic  
we can get to my mom's in just one day.





I take the first shift through Maryland + Virginia. It's a drizzly morning.

8:52 AM  
North Carolina



← majestic pines

Thao's got the wheel for this shift. She pushes all the buttons + figures out cruise control, I snack,

Deconstructed micro-Bánh-mì



Driving isn't so bad when you can take nap breaks + your husband feeds you oranges!

South Carolina

11:15 am

At a rest stop,



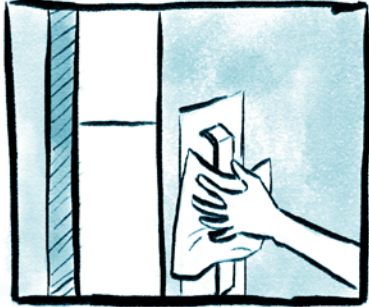
I was reminded of a guy from work years ago.



He would take a paper towel and



use it to open the door when he left.



I remember thinking it was a bit much.



Now, I AM that guy.



Wherever he is, I hope he's OK.



While I'm driving, Thao responds to texts for me.

It's been really easy so far because Thao's an amazing driver! 🐾  
I miss our dog though! 🐾❤️

We don't hit any traffic until Florida.



Florida  
3:23 pm



Florida  
7:49 pm

The sun sets to the soundtracks of a podcast + Sunday mass.



Florida  
8:53pm

We finally get off the highway +  
things start to look familiar.

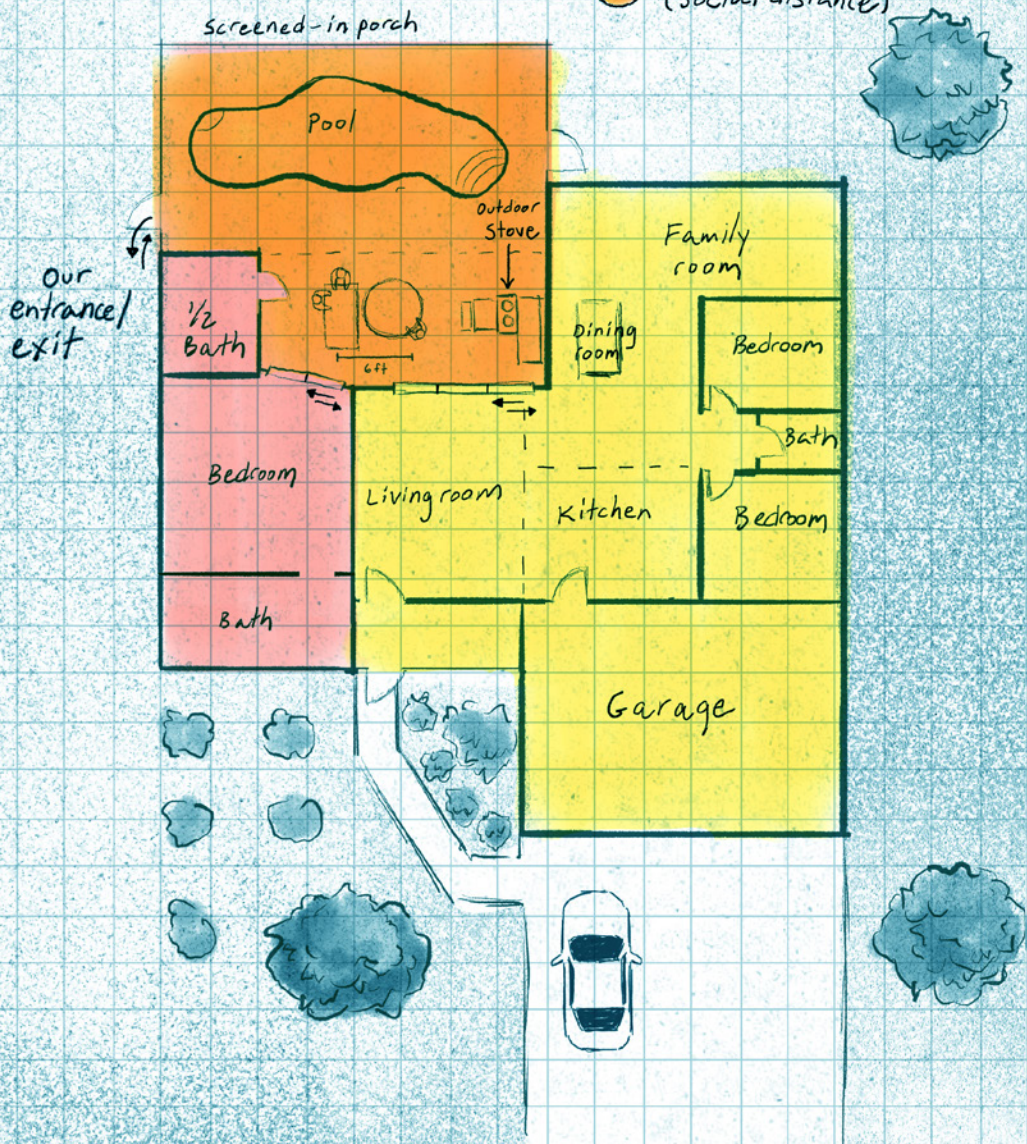




## 2. Quarantine

# Mom's House In Quarantine

-  Our zone
-  Mom's zone
-  Common zone (social distance)



Day 1, May 18 Last night, we sat + talked about our trip w/ Mom before unpacking + going to bed. The trip was already worth it - just to be w/ her across the table.



We slept like logs + in the morning I get up to find Mom washing the bugs off our car.

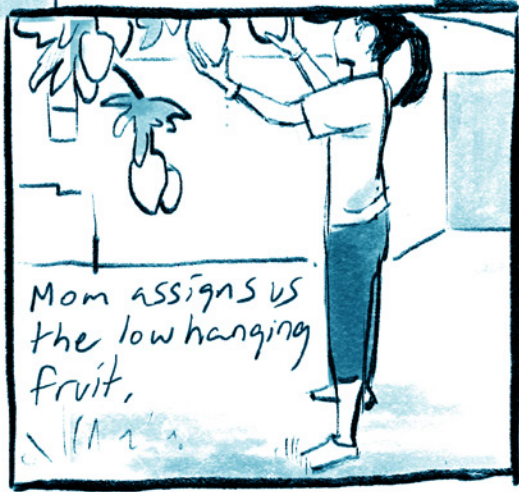


At a bakery, I'm relieved to see a customer w/ a mask but the employee isn't wearing one.





All of dad's mango trees are ripe with fruit so on our first morning - we get right to work.




Mom assigns us the low hanging fruit.



while she handles the harder to reach ones.




This is the most exercise I've gotten in 2 months!



Mom, I don't know how you did all this on your own.



Your dad used to take a bucket + steadily pick mangos each day - through the entire season. He loved his trees.

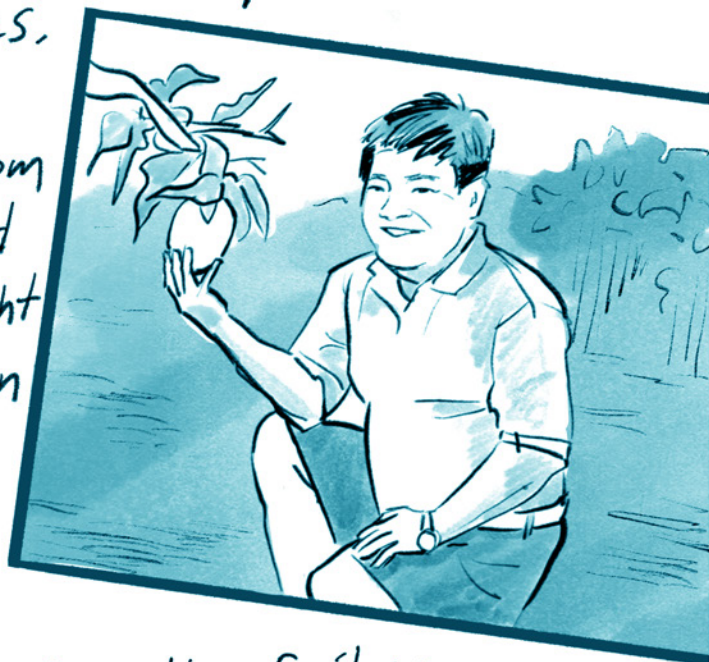


It's been a little over a year since Dad passed. I doubt he ever thought about his legacy, but I'm so glad every summer we have Dad's mangos to harvest.

What's so special about Dad's mangos?

At last count, we've got almost 40 mango trees.

All of them originated from a single seed Bā Noi\* brought with her when she came to America in 1991.



The golden fruit is  
Fragrant, tender,  
+ exceptionally sweet!



\* grandmother on  
father's side

But you don't have to take **OUR** word for it. Here's what our friends say:

Like a slice of heaven!



I could eat a million of these!



So different from the ones in the store!  
The taste!!



Literally, the best mangos in the world.



Keep reading: <http://smithsonianapa.org/lit/bittersweet>