
Volume 7

Issue 2 *Dignidad, Poder, Resistencia // Dignity, Power,
Resistance*

Article 1

June 2017

Dignidad, Poder, Resistencia // Dignity, Power, Resistance

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Recommended Citation

Munoz, Michael; Gonzalez, Alanis; Spencer, Tallie; Marin, Isabelle; Juarez, Lesly; Reynoso, Christopher; Garcia, Antonia; Goad, Abigail; Martinez, Athena; Gomez, Ruth; Vazquez, Angel; Quezada, Jazmin; Segovia, Jasmine; Wedell, Jordyn; Gonzalez, Yulisa; Mena Hernandez, Laura; and Fernandez, Keiri (2017) "Dignidad, Poder, Resistencia // Dignity, Power, Resistance," *First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/fgv/vol7/iss2/1>

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Dignidad, Poder, Resistencia // Dignity, Power, Resistance

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dignity

first-gen voices presents:

DIGNIDAD, PODER, RESISTENCIA

resistance

MAY 2017 | REPUBLICA DOMINICANA | FIRST TO GO

power

somos arqueólogos en busca de la verdad

hold that crown up

Be a pink pineapple,



& support your uniqueness.



We took the risk
we ask you to take yours.

Welcome to the tellings of us.

loyola marymount university
pontificia universidad católica madre y maestra

first-gen voices. 2017



The Wonderful Life of Michael

Michael Muñoz



My life is a sitcom and I'm the starring role. It's not too technologically advanced to be a Sci-fi or dull enough to be considered a drama. But I feel my life has enough funny, awkward, and happy moments to be considered a sitcom. Of course, that's not to say all sitcoms are consistently joyful and upbeat. Who can forget Jessie's serious drug addiction on *Saved By The Bell*? Or when sex obsessed Samantha got diagnosed with breast cancer on *Sex and the City*? Or the experience of death, which is featured in almost every sitcom (Wanna bet?). These serious moments gratefully impacted the characters within the sitcoms, but not enough to actually change the genre from sitcom to drama. These dramatic moments proved to be pivotal learning experiences for the characters as they continued to learn and grow in under the genre of sitcom. And that is why I feel like my life is a sitcom. While there may be dramatic moments that I will get into later, I do not let those moments define me. I continue on with laughter, humor, and happiness.

As a sitcom, my high school years would be considered one of the worst seasons. I feel as if I need to talk about this season because even though it was bad, it had great character development for me. If I hadn't gone through what I went through in high school, I probably wouldn't be the dynamic character we know today. However, nobody really cared for the show that was my life. It did not garner any attention to anybody relevant. Despite this, I had a great supporting cast, my high school friends who I still talk to to this day, but overall it just fell flat. It was so close to getting cancelled, until the network had good reason to change the series up a little bit: I was graduating high school and heading off into college. Finally, a new and exciting reason to watch the sitcom that is my life. Like *Saved by The Bell*, I would have my own college years. I knew college was my time to shine and break free. I was a bit nervous, it is a new season of my life. What if critics didn't like it? What if my friends or family did not like it? Worse: What if I didn't like it?

When I college finally started, it was met with critical acclaim. Most importantly, I enjoyed it. I had a new supporting cast of friends and professors (while the old supporting cast makes cameo appearances here and there). I was in a new luxurious setting of Los Angeles. What more could I ask for?

Of course there were some struggles and conflicts that would make for very special episodes. What sitcom doesn't have these very special episodes? Often times these episodes were obscene or inappropriate. It sure would've made the Parent Television Council mad if they were to ever actually see these episodes. But these episodes were important. As I mentioned earlier, a sitcom needs to have these dramatic moments. Kind of like life, it has everything; the good, the bad, and the ugly. As I also mentioned earlier, these bad moments help us grow as people.

But during spring semester of sophomore year (the 2nd season of my time at college), I experienced the worst episode ever. I didn't think I would ever survive it. Basically, I had not paid off the previous semester. Don't judge me, I don't have that kind of money. My father said he could take care of it by taking out another loan. Easier said than done. The loan took a ridiculously long time to process for whatever reason. But because I had that unpaid balance, I had a hold on my account. Because I had that hold on my account, I couldn't register for classes. Because I couldn't register for classes, I was not allowed to live on campus. It was like someone pushed the wrong domino that sent me to my demise. I remember thinking during that time, "damn, I can only imagine what the audience who is watching this show is feeling." But this is not a television show, it's real life. I can't just have writers write me a new way out of this dilemma. This was probably my first shot of reality, or the "real world", ever since I started college. Of course realizing that my life is not a TV show did not make me stop thinking that my life is like one. Through all the fears, doubts, and horrors that went through my mind during

that stressful period. I had to keep a positive, creative mind. I imagined that happy sitcom ending. What kept on inspiring me during those trying times was a little advice I heard from an iconic NBC sitcom by the name of *Frasier*. Basically in the show, it was the main character's first day at work and it was not going as well as he'd like it to be. Towards the end of the episode his friend tells him "'Even though things may not happen like we planned, things will always workout.'" That line stuck with me. Fiction or reality, I knew that everything would workout. It may be ludicrous to some, but television is where I get my main inspiration to continue on. Because it has inspired me so much, I would like to work in television in hopes that I can inspire people like television did to me.

Needless to say, that horrible situation I experienced cleared up. My show had a very happy ending, but there are still more episodes and seasons to go. I may have had a happy ending, but who knows how much more tragic (or happy) episodes I'll be experiencing. Nobody will ever know. Life is crazy like that. I'll know is that through the good, the bad, it will always workout in the end.

Currently, my life decided to become an escapist comedy in the Dominican Republic. I don't think anybody imagined that I would be here- not even myself. I'm with the best supporting cast I can imagine and everyone's loving it, most importantly, I'm loving. I don't know how many more seasons of this show will last, but I will sure miss it when it's cancelled.

The City of Champions

Alanis Gonzalez



Lost Champion

I did not want to write this narrative solely about my experience because for starters, I haven't done this in a long while and I just also forgot how to write something so raw and organic.

*Shoutout to college papers *

But in doing so, I realized that I could not write about my college experience without including one of the biggest role models I had in bringing me to LMU.

Jorge Arias was a young man with a heart of gold, a mind full of ambition, and a goal to pursue his education no matter what kind of obstacles laid ahead. As the first in his family to attend a university, he set an example not only for his family, but for his peers, and others around the 65th Street block in Inglewood, as well. While attending schools around Inglewood all his life, he set his mind on pursuing a higher education while being a first-gen, too. As a graduate from Inglewood High School, Jorge went on to attend LMU. As I can imagine, he overcame the obstacles in challenging stereotypes as a young Latino from Inglewood going to such a school as LMU. He broke long awaited barriers and became an overall catalyst for change for our community.

He was my Tio.

"Jorgie", as he is forever known by our family, was three years into his undergraduate career.

Three.

Years.

During his junior year, Jorgie was diagnosed with Leukemia, a cancer of the blood which suppressed his production of normal red blood cells leading to an array of symptoms, abating his health. Although I was too young to understand the seriousness of his sickness, his death was one that struck deep within the LMU community and outward. While some say it is a coincidence that I ended up here, I like to think that Jorgie guided me to experience what LMU had to offer. I pay homage to him because in reality, I would not have the opportunity to talk about my first gen experience, if it weren't for him. Once a Lion, Always a Lion.

1st Base

The streets we grew up on throughout our childhood are the rich soils in which our roots are planted in forever. Holding generations of history, containing aspirations, successes, and even trials, they foster my memory in the clearest, most physical form. That's what the City of Champs taught me, and it is unapologetically a part of who I am. But for many individuals outside, they view The Wood as a place of corruption, a graveyard for fallen aspirations, and breeding grounds for gang-violence and affiliations. The City of Inglewood is unlike any other; the culture, the way the streets groove, and how we've shaped it over time represents beauty and its many im(perfection)s. As a child, I remember feeling the safest in my own neighborhood, even though "safe" was not always in its vocabulary. On 65th Street, everybody knew everybody; whether we went to the same school or played ball on the street with the kids

from houses down the way, the street was our playground. We were young, full of life, and without a damn worry in the world.

Throughout the cracks of the streets down Florence and liquor stores on every corner, sweet symphonies of Tupac and loud ringing bells of the paleteros linger every day. As for me, I was taught how to “bob” my head to Tupac’s “Krazy”, before I even knew how to write my own name, understand the importance of his lyrics, and how they resonated so much with many of us on the block. My first lessons of mathematics came from counting correct change from Hector El Elotero, and my lessons on reading you may ask? Understanding cursive on the side of the soft-serve ice cream truck playing the same lullaby on repeat. *Hums twinkle twinkle little star*

2nd Base

I find that wherever our paths may take us in life, it is always important to remember where you started and the experiences leading up to the present that have shaped you, maybe broke a piece of you, but built you up to be stronger than the day before. That is how I describe myself when asked where exactly I am from. Although at the age of 8 my parents moved us outside of Inglewood to Westchester, there is no way in hell that I could ever forget where we started. I witnessed the divide between the two areas; while one area was more privileged with funding and security, the other area worked with what it had and made the best of it. I must admit, being in a different area for some of my prime years as a teenager made me feel as though I *had* to forget about the big part of me that was developed in the City of Champs. I was surrounded by kids whose parents didn’t have to worry about having enough money to pay for rent every month, who were able to splurge at the annual school book fairs, and who probably never even had an elote in their lives. My experience was way different, and I did not feel as though I belonged. Needless to say, it was a big change, and one that I was not too happy with. I missed the culture *of* Inglewood, and hell, the culture *in* it too. Sure, we’d visit family there as much as we could, but there is honestly nothing that compares to living on 65th Street. Inglewood to me is home, and always will be. (We moved back on my 15th birthday)

3rd Base

To this day, I remember those seven years as rather awkward and very foggy in my mind. My dad’s brother, my Tio Martin once said, “Babygirl you gotta be book smart AND street smart around here”. I would soon come to realize that being street smart is something that thousands of dollars in education **cannot** teach. And while beginning at LMU and continuing my education knowing I had a lot of people looking up to me, those words would always replay in my head. In a way, going to school at LMU is a bit intimidating. Knowing that I have so many people looking to me to work hard and make my family proud, is always something I worry about. Although I can feel their support and the love that they give me, holding everything together, internally is a challenge. I want to make them proud with every ounce of me, but it’s not always so simple. A component to the first gen experience that I have definitely resonated with is the guilt; while I feel the pride my parents have for me beaming through their smiles, a part of me also knows that I need to work twice as hard no matter how tired I am or how many times I’ve wanted to quit. It certainly gets that way; the frustration, the anxiety, and the exhaustion lies underneath the mask of every first-gen student trying to hold it together with a smile. We put up with an invisible, everyday uphill battle at LMU... but it is so worth it in the end. Because even though I

am only **one** individual attending, I am representing **generations** and **generations** of family and others that have had some form of a hand in allowing this opportunity to be in my path.

And if I had a wish, I'd want my parents, most of all, to be able to have this college experience. I don't think I deserved it as much as I know *they* do. I know that sounds a little crazy, but it all just comes down to me wishing that my parents were able to experience this first hand, as opposed to vicariously going to college through me. I look at my parents as two of the most loving, supportive, and strongest people I know. I am so proud to be their daughter, because even though they look at me with pride, I look right back at them because *they* made it all possible. And just as I will be crossing that stage in May to receive my undergraduate degrees, they will be too. Those degrees mean so much more to us than just printed card stock in a nice holder. They represent the extra shifts taken on by my mom and dad at their jobs when times were tough, my sleepless nights finishing up assignments/ studying, and together, our years working harder to lead us up to that moment.

Our pictures are definitely not painted perfectly, but I guess that's what makes for admirable art.

Home

E. 65th St. Inglewood, Ca 90302

"Life is like a ball game, you're always expecting the pitcher to throw a fast ball, but every once in a while you gotta adjust to a curve."

Harness Life's Adventure:
The World Must be Seen
to be Understood

Abigail Goad



Whether we are first-generation college students or not, each of us have a unique story. As the first in my immediate family to complete over three years of college and soon to be the first to graduate with not only a Bachelor's degree in history, but also minors in Spanish and theology with a leadership distinction, I have certainly packed my college years with every opportunity I have possibly encountered. Throughout my college experience, transferring universities, studying abroad on four separate occasions, working two jobs, interning, helping with my family, volunteering, and working hard to remain on the Dean's list, I have realized that it can be easy to focus on titles and resumes. But as a senior with only one semester left, I am realizing that college is not just a place to spread ourselves too thin, it is a chance to discover our true identities. The journey is never easy. However, my adventures over four continents, and eight countries in the past year taught me more about myself and the world than any classroom ever could. Here is my advice for first generation college students thinking about studying abroad before graduation.

Spreading our wings is a necessary reality for each and every one of us. As much as my dad would love for me to be his "baby girl" forever, it is the tearful goodbyes at airport security, midnight Facetimes home, and long-awaited airport reunions that remind us how much we mean to each other. That being said, those inevitable homesick feelings are not as simple as they seem. With each country I have traveled and each family I have grown to love, I realize that "home" is not limited to the four walls surrounding the two bedroom, rented duplex and the single room my brothers and I have shared our whole lives. Home is about love and love is certainly not limited to geographical or political borders. Although I will always cherish Cuba as my first experience abroad, Spain and the Dominican Republic taught me that family expands beyond blood relations.

Living with host families can be scary. Having resided with two separate families from other sides of the globe, I can honestly say that children ease this transition. My Spanish family—the Perez de la Cera del Hoyo blended family, included four children. Sofí, Jaime, Inés and Nico made living abroad instantly feel like home. Having four-year-old Nico sneak into our room when my roommate and I were feeling homesick or confidently snag his favorite treats off our plates at mealtimes transformed two potentially awkward teenagers from foreigners to family. I know that my family in Spain will always be there for me and that I would always do anything for them.

Without participating in the homestay experience, I would have never had the opportunity to discover the history of Spain outside of the classroom. Dinnertime discussions about economics, race, class, and history challenged me to examine the way I see the world and to be more open to others' opinions. Living with older host siblings in the Dominican Republic promoted further social and political conversations. I felt comfortable asking my twenty-one year old Dominican host brother about his opinions regarding the Haitian-Dominican conflicts. Not to mention, his responses to my genuine questions demonstrated his cultural bias. I greatly respect my host families' opinions, because they entrusted me with a part of their identities the moment they decided to share with me. The nature of these discussions would never have taken place with strangers on the metro; these were deep conversations that you only share with those you trust.

Never let fear define your experience. As an American, there are so many perceptions about other countries thrust upon us before our passports are even stamped. My father incessantly voiced his safety fears before I left for both Cuba and Europe. With movies like "Taken" and headlines like Natalee Holloway's disappearance, I certainly do not blame my parents for worrying. Yet in my experience, I have felt more threatened in the United States

than I ever have abroad. With brown hair, a light complexion and deep green eyes, my Spanish mom told me I appeared French (if anything). Armed with approximately five French words and one phrase, Paris transformed into my original case study in determining my passion for solo adventures abroad. After safely maneuvering the Parisian metro all the way to Versailles and all throughout the city, I returned to Madrid ready to take on the world. I believe that a European city has not truly been discovered until I am “lost” on the metro with headphones blasting my favorite playlist. Living abroad is not about going out every night or cashing in on the legal drinking age. I am a firm believer that living abroad is best described by those who know where to find the best peanut butter in all of Madrid, the only grocery store in all of Berlin that stays open on Sundays, can masterfully maneuver foreign coupons and somehow escape the perils of El Corte Ingles (Spain’s astoundingly gigantic department store chain). Ultimately, success abroad is about cultural immersion.

Tourists visit a site; students immerse themselves in a culture. In Cuba, dialoguing with our bus driver every morning while the others quietly slept gave a voice to a man silenced by the tourist industry and wealthy foreigners. My mom suffers from chronic directional challenges. Growing up my older brother, mom, and myself seemingly always found ourselves hopelessly lost in “rougher” neighborhoods. My mom taught my big brother and I to never fear those around us, but rather to take the time to hear their stories. Spain, my longest study abroad experience, offered ample opportunities for those students willing to go the extra mile. Volunteering to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to local adults proved to be a cultural exchange that will forever impact my perspective. The relationship between my students and myself forced us to dig deeper than word order, conjugations, and sentence structure; we shared pieces of our families, our beliefs, our cultures, and ourselves. We became friends.

Studying abroad in Cuba, Spain, Germany, and the Dominican Republic opened my eyes to the rest of the world. It is one thing to look at a globe and realize that the world expands beyond the United States and a completely different thing to experience the cultural differences, moral and historical discussions, social norms, and overall beauty that another culture brings to your worldview. Ultimately, I do not know how these experiences abroad will affect my future career plans. I know that I am now incredibly open-minded to not only the idea of living abroad, but also more open to living and working in different parts of the United States. As an aspiring teacher, I will always remember my first real teaching experience, volunteering at my Madrid campus twice a week in order to teach Spanish ESL classes. The discussions that took place in that classroom redefined the way I look at the world by opening my eyes to different perspectives and the impact of cultural influences and early socialization. Living with host families, particularly those with children, made living abroad instantly feel like home.

As a result of my year of global discovery, I realized my independence, my true identity, and my place in this world. But along the way, I also found that there is always more to be uncovered about this great big world around us and that it is our responsibility to go out of our way to discover it.



with

these

touch

with these

I write

Reclaiming Spaces,
Healing Wounds

Chris Reynoso



We constantly exist in multiple spaces; however, some spaces are simply not created for with everyone in mind. One of those spaces are institutions of higher education; those spaces were created with particular people in mind, and those people were not first-generation college students.

Existing in spaces that have a certain history can be toxic. They can make one feel alienated, alone, and further instill the idea of not belonging. The challenges we face begin even before we step foot in the actual space; on college campuses. From a very young age, non-first-generation students are instilled with the idea that going to college is the norm. Most grow up having already stepped foot in a college campus at a young age—most likely their parents' alma mater—and are provided with college savings funds. Some first-gen students are also instilled the normality of obtaining a college education, often by their teachers in elementary school, but the idea may not be perpetuated in their home.

For me, the idea of going to college was something that my parents did not explicitly instill in me, but rather hinted at and expected of me. We crossed the border so that I could cross that stage one day. The idea of having better educational opportunities for my brother and I was the main driving force that led to us leaving everything and everyone we had ever know, and making the journey to the United States. My parents did the almost impossible; putting me through private middle and high school with hopes that it would give me more opportunities and chances of getting into college. I understand that I had a privileged vantage point because of that, as many first-gen students are not given access to some of the tools and resources that I had while in school.

Even before actually enrolling in a university or college, the application process can be draining and feel like a shot in the dark. Application fees, personal statements, letters of recommendation, and SAT/ACT exams are all obstacles that many first-gen students often

overcome alone. These entry requirements are meant to weed out students who would not be a good fit for the university, many of those being first-gen students. While for some, college is ready for them with an open door since the day they were born, for most first-gen students getting to the door is a hard, and draining toxic process; one which many do not make it through.

The courses that I took while in High School prepared me fairly well for the application process, with my English classes incorporating a component of writing our personal statement and having access to a college counselor whenever I wanted to. Yet again, I reflect on how this is a privilege that not many could have. I am forever indebted to my parents for the sacrifices and economic strife that we faced just so that I could go to that High School.

But even spaces of privilege can be toxic. I clearly remember the letters sent home urging us to make a payment. The red "Past Due" stamp on all of our invoices. My mom had befriended the woman in charge of calling for payments, as her calls were almost a monthly occurrence. The last letter we received was one that read "If the outstanding balance is not in full by the last day of classes, your son will not be able to graduate." I used the money in my savings that was meant to help me afford my first year at LMU to pay off that debt; I owed it to my parents to have them see me walk across the first stage. Although the privilege of attending a private High School and receiving those benefits does not go away, I was already struggling to survive in spaces that were not meant for low-income migrant families such as mine. At the end of the school day, Land Rover's, BMW's, and Mercedes' would roll-up to pick up students from my school; I would walk 10 blocks to my bus stop so that I could make it in time to work my night shift.

Perhaps this is why my transition to LMU was not the biggest culture shock. I had already been exposed to feeling alienated and out of place, and to the extravagant displays of

money. Quickly, LMU became that toxic environment in which I felt embarrassed when my family rolled up in our dusty and beaten up 1995 Nissan Maxima. Shame is damaging, it clouds the mind and poisons the heart. As a first-gen student, institutions of higher education produce this shame, the feeling of inadequacy, of feeling like you do not belong. However, acknowledging and working through that shame is vital to reclaiming the spaces which can produce it.

Starting LMU, I did not realize that being first-gen would be a hard journey, and that obstacles would approach at faster and faster speeds. My first research paper earned me a “C,” my first ever, with my professor making it seem like my writing was not good enough to be in that class. That experience and feelings of not belonging continued throughout my journey the past three years, and will most likely continue my last year and as I venture into higher degrees. Trying to create a feeling of home at institutions of higher education as a first-gen student can be as hard as trying to build a home on sandy foundations.

As spaces become toxic, the need to escape them grows and grows. For many first-gen students, including myself, the thought of dropping out arises at one point. As I was lying in bed, reminiscing on my first week of college, going through my syllabi and realizing the amount of work required, I thought: “I really do not belong here...Maybe I should just get a full-time job, it will be better.” The fear of failure kept me up that night, as I began thinking of what my parents had given up to give me the opportunity to be laying on my college dorm room bed. Quickly, I snapped out of it and tried getting my work done. I would be lying if I said that was the last time I ever thought of dropping out. However, dropping out could also be explained as being pushed out. Some spaces are not just designed to keep us out, but to also push us out if we somehow manage to get in. Through financial, social, and academic obstacles, institutions of higher education impede first-gen students from succeeding.

Reclaiming those spaces is vital and necessary to continue and grow. Through reclaiming of a space, a memory, a history; healing begins. Toxic spaces create ruptures and tears in our hearts, causing it to be painful to step back into them. Reclaiming spaces is not easy, it is an emotion-filled, heart-breaking process. The reclaiming process may break, mend, and re-break a heart. However, the emotions felt while being in that space need to be acknowledged. Whether they are spaces of higher education, or just simply other spaces, first-gen students must work towards fully reclaiming those spaces. But this can also be a constant process, some spaces become toxic even after being reclaimed, forcing the reclaiming process to begin yet again.

Like with physical wounds, the rupture a toxic space creates will leave an emotional scar upon healing. Sometimes, the trauma from the experience may come back when least expected. It may cause anger, frustration, and pain. But by reopening the wound, this time you will be able to choose how to heal it. Perhaps you will take another class with the same professor who questioned your ability to succeed, or perhaps you will become involved with organizations that help heal your wounds, but you will be stronger.

I have learned to reclaim my space at LMU. The day that I cross the stage to receive my degree; the degree that my family crossed borders for, the degree that I was often told would be impossible, the same degree students whose parents went to Ivy League school are receiving, will be the day that my wound will heal, and that I will have successfully reclaimed LMU.

A un desconocido

Laura María Mena



Estoy justamente donde quiero estar, frente a un papel en blanco y vacío, al cual le urgen las palabras, palabras verdaderas, palabras que salgan del corazón... Quiero llenar este papel de ideas, de emociones, de vivencias, quiero plasmar tantas cosas en él, porque tengo tanto que decir, aunque no sé si será suficiente. No, no lo sé. No vengo a escribirles sobre fantasías, no vengo a hablarles sobre más cuentos de hadas, estoy aquí porque alguien tiene que hablar de la realidad en la que vivimos, y cómo debido a esta, nos vamos convirtiendo en marionetas de un mundo que parece estar perdido. Vengo a hablarles de nuestra tan preciada "libertad," que tanto anhelamos y que tanto aspiramos...Vengo a hablarles de una experiencia de vida, de algo real y tangible, que muchos necesitamos saber...Vengo a hablarte a ti que estás leyendo, porque quiero tener una conversación íntima contigo, porque si te has sentido solo, cansado, triste, rechazado, con ganas de "tirar la toalla" porque piensas que el mundo es injusto, entonces, también estas justo donde debes estar, aquí conmigo, aquí, saboreando mis palabras.

No sé cómo has llegado a esta lectura, si te obligaron a leerla para un trabajo, si te la encontraste en el camino o porque alguien te la recomendó, lo que sí sé es que sea cuál sea la razón, estoy feliz de que estés aquí conmigo. Por tanto, tengo que contarte que en la tranquilidad de mi habitación que se encuentra iluminada con una simple lámpara encendida y los pájaros suenan afuera un domingo por la mañana, hay algo que me causa una sensación de que seremos amigos al final del día.

Entonces te cuento, entre un abrir y cerrar de ojos vuelvo a levantarme, y veo mi reflejo en el espejo, lo que me lleva a una vez más a cuestionarme: ¿qué pasará hoy? ¿qué haré hoy? Se desata algo en mí que me hace pensar que mi reflejo quiere algo más. Me veo feliz y es cierto, lo soy, pero mi sonrisa es débil, débil porque mi consciencia es fuerte y sabe lo que afuera me espera... Una lucha del diario vivir, de decidir ser uno más o marcar la diferencia, aunque me duela, aunque me rechacen, aunque me quede sola, porque sé que al final va a valer la pena, y

veo nuevamente mi reflejo, y lo sé, soy dichosa, pero hay algo que me está consumiendo, o, mejor dicho, hay algo que nos está consumiendo...

La idea de entrar a la universidad me causa gracia ya que no es como lo plantea el mundo, donde nos dicen que seremos libres de decidir, de hablar, de hacer lo que queramos y de poder expresar nuestras emociones. Esa "libertad" que nos pasamos una adolescencia entera esperando, se cae luego de que pasas tu primer año en la universidad y te ves en los pasillos respondiendo ante las normativas socioculturales en las que vivimos, siguiendo un sinfín de estereotipos sin darte cuenta. Y, como te prometí, te hablaré de una experiencia real y tangible, te hablaré un poco de mi primer año en la universidad, el cual fue toda una aventura, y creo que para todo el mundo es casi igual. No quisiera decir que fue un año difícil porque sonará muy negativo, e insisto que a alguien le toca ser el optimista en esta película del diario vivir, y parece que no había otro papel en el guion y ese me tocó a mí.

Inicié la universidad prácticamente sola, algo que rompe con las ideologías que aquí en mi pequeña isla del caribe se suele tener. Partí un año fuera de casa, a ver si mi reflejo encontraba lo que le faltaba, y de cierto modo lo logré. Vi lo que mis ojos deseaban ver, sentí lo que nunca en mi vida había sentido, y por un instante en mi existencia, vi que fuera de mi círculo de confort existían otras personas con batallas más fuertes que las mías. Por lo que desde ese día decidí que cuando volviera a mi país, tenía que hacer las cosas diferentes, luchar por seguir siendo feliz, por ayudar a otros a serlo, pero lo que no sabía era que la felicidad no se podía buscar en cualquier parte, es por eso que mi primer año fue una aventura. Digo aventura porque en la búsqueda de la felicidad, me encontré con otra cosa, me encontré conmigo misma, y en cada clase, en cada compañero, maestro, trabajador, veía algo nuevo de mi ser, y descubría algo nuevo en mí.

Pero, ¿a qué quiero llegar con todo esto? Te confieso que ya luego de esos párrafos, me siento tu amiga, y me siento preparada para decirte lo siguiente, se supone que debo contarte mi

experiencia como estudiante de primera generación, pero no lo soy, no. No fui la primera en mi familia en ir a la universidad, y no sé lo que se siente vivir esa experiencia, pero me veo en la necesidad de decirte algo a ti que posiblemente si lo eres, y que para mí es prácticamente un secreto.

Por consiguiente, si eres estudiante de primera generación o un simple joven universitario, quiero compartir contigo lo mucho que he aprendido en mi corta vida. Primero que todo, no busques ser feliz detrás de un título, se feliz detrás de lo que amas, no dejes de luchar por eso. Nos dicen locos, locos porque nos arriesgamos y nunca perdemos la esperanza y es que sin duda ahí esta nuestra fuente de energía. No olvides quienes estuvieron ahí contigo en el inicio, no vale de nada llegar lejos si nos olvidamos de nuestras raíces. No te sientas solo, siempre hay alguien que la está pasando peor que tú, por ende, trata de entender a la vida, ella simplemente te quiere hacer fuerte, y no, no tienes mala suerte, lo que pasa es que todos tenemos un papel que jugar y ese es el tuyo y este es el mío.

Segundo, no creas que el dinero es la solución, créeme, se lo que te digo, a veces el dinero no te proporcionará esa felicidad que andas buscando, esa unidad familiar que crea en el ser humano un calor interno, que te hace mantener. El dinero es algo cuantitativo que se va, por eso debemos luchar por las cosas cualitativas, porque esas son las que se quedan: los momentos de risa, los momentos de intimidad, los momentos de tristeza, cada uno de esos momentos te han hecho ser lo que eres ahora.

Te digo, no te rindas querido desconocido, porque me levanté viendo mi reflejo que me decía "Hoy es el día de hacer un cambio", y aunque a veces te sientas solo, que nadie te entiende, créeme que se lo que se siente. Así que, si nadie te dice lo siguiente, proponte decírtelo todos los días, dile a tu reflejo: "vales la pena," "estoy orgulloso de ti," "eres valioso y sumamente importante," y sin duda, después de un tiempo verás que sin ti esta película no tendría sentido y

empezarás a ser más feliz, lo que te proporcionará las herramientas para hacer felices a los que están a tu alrededor.

Finalmente, te invito a que busques ser feliz en los lugares adecuados, no en cosas materiales, si no, en cosas emotivas que se quedan dentro de nosotros. Querido desconocido, lo que quiero que entiendas es que no importa de dónde vengas, no importa tu historia, vale la pena ser diferente y nosotros los que tal vez ante los ojos de los demás lo “tenemos todo,” necesitamos saber que ustedes existen. Es por eso que ustedes valen, de una manera u otra nos enseñan a ser agradecidos. Y si eres solo un joven universitario, pues por igual, sin miedo, mirando siempre firme a la meta, con humildad y agradecimiento verás que llegarás a ella.

Ser joven en este mundo no es fácil, lo sé, así que quiero concluir diciéndote esto querido amigo desconocido, que es una de mis frases favoritas: “A veces vale la pena volverse un poco loco, locos amando, locos riendo, locos ayudando, porque solos los locos si saben cómo ser felices, y el que no se toma su tiempo para ser de vez en cuando loco, nunca sabrá lo que es la verdadera felicidad.” Entonces, ¿qué dices si nos volvemos locos?

Laura María Mena Hernández

Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra,

Santiago, República Dominicana

Still Uncertain

Isabelle Marin



The day I was accepted to attend Loyola Marymount University was one of the best days of my life. On the other hand, the day that I received my financial aid package was a completely different story. The day I received my financial aid package was a day that I will never forget and one that still follows me around. It was filled with variations of frustration and uncertainty; feelings which followed me throughout my first year of college and as of today, still continue to. Frustrations about how the federal government and the LMU financial aid office saw it fit for my parents to pay for tuition that was an amount equal to their annual combined household income. Income, of which, was the only way they would keep a roof over our heads and food on our table. The uncertainty, from that very moment on, came from the fact that I could not fathom any idea of how I would be able to pay for all the expenses that go along with attending LMU. We had no type of college savings account that was not something that existed in my family. No one had really ever had gotten as far as I had. How was I to pay so much out of pocket for solely my first year of college? Let alone the next four years. Thinking of this made me angry. It was a different type of anger than any other types of anger I had felt before. A more impactful type of anger. Anger that sparked as soon as I came to the realization that everything I had worked to obtain was on the verge of being pulled out of my arms and shattered right in front of my eyes. All of which was the result of an insanely large price tag that was attached to my education. Yes, other institutions are less expensive, but I did not feel I would prosper as much as I would at LMU. I constantly found myself trying to give my mind good enough reasons as to why I should not attend any university, let alone LMU. I would lie to myself. Constantly telling myself that I was not good enough for any four-year institution. Now, looking back at this, I am frustrated with the concept of falling behind because I was unaware of the resources that were available to me. Something that, in my eyes, goes hand-in-hand with the concept of being First Gen. The

financial aspect of attending a four-year, private institution makes me wonder day to day whether or not it's worth it. When I was in the early stages of the debate with myself, as to whether or not I should go to college, I remember I would constantly find myself on BuzzFeed. On BuzzFeed watching videos of what other people were saying about spending money on university and being in debt and whether or not it was worth it to them. Most of the people speaking said that it was not. This made me contemplate everything I would be deciding. As a result of seeing me struggle to make the decision of where I wanted to go to school based on my family's financial ability, my parents decided to make the ultimate sacrifice by applying to take out a Parent PLUS Loan, to pay for more than 60% of my tuition. Though I will forever be grateful, this is something of which I feel guilty for each and every day, something of which I believe outweighs the gratefulness. Instead of my dad being able to get the house that he's always told us we would one day live in or instead of my mom being able to get the car that she has always wanted, they are stuck working every day, solely to keep a roof over our heads, to keep food on the table, and to keep my education going. As I write this, I have been done with my first year of college for exactly a month. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done in my life. I would have not been able to get through it without the support that I had. I would have not been able to attend college, if wasn't for the sacrifice of my parents. Though this was the case, it also happens to be one of the best years of my life. I grew as a human being. I was presented with so many experiences, such as the ability to go to the First-Generation Student Summit at USC, teach students about Chicana/o Studies at Loyola Village Elementary, be a mentor for El Espejo, and study abroad in the Dominican Republic. Along with this, I have gained so many opportunities to better myself and my communities, such as being a First to Go Scholar, being accepted as a member of the Riordan Program, and nominated as MEChA's Chicana/o Studies Liaison.

Though these experiences and opportunities have been amazing, I am still having a hard time grasping whether or not it is worth it. Is it worth the debt I have put my parents in? Is it really worth it? It is June of 2017. I have received my financial aid package for my second year of college and it is not any better than the first. As of now, I have roughly three months to figure out what I will be doing in regard to school for the next year. I must once again, try and figure out what I will have to do to pay for school, in addition to the funds I will be using that I had set aside from my work study position. My parents are not allowed to take out anymore loans, so that aspect of paying for my college education is out. Though it is something that I was not expecting to have done again, I don't know any other methods for paying the amount I am required to pay out of pocket at this point. I have applied for a countless amount of scholarships, along with a countless amount of job positions, but have not had much luck with that. Even though this is my current situation, I will do whatever it takes and keep hustling until I have the solution. I have hope that I will be able to go to LMU for my sophomore year, but at this moment in time, it feels absolutely impossible.



Finding Value

Tallie Spencer



I did what some may consider the impossible. I defied all the odds stacked against me, and I strived through. And now, here I am; entering my senior year of college with a 4.0 GPA, as first-generation college student. I guess you can say that I wasn't fully aware of what I was capable of. My family was the best support system I had. Although they never really knew how to help me draft a cover letter, or give me tips to write a perfect resume, they believed in me. That belief carried me far. My goal now had a purpose.

According to statistics, a Black female from a middle-class family was unlikely to go to college. On top of that, having no role models that have gone to college to ask for advice was a challenge in itself. But, with all of these odds stacked against me, here I am. I'm in college, t-minus one year until graduation.

I owe much of my gratitude to my grandparents, who have done more for me than I could have ever imagined. I often reminisce about the days when my grandpa picked me up from school every Friday at 4:30 after he got off work. I miss seeing his red Toyota pickup truck waiting for me in the parking lot. I miss that scent of the carpet car seats, which lingered simultaneously with smoke and new car scent.

My grandparents were always dedicated to making sure that I had everything needed. They supported all of my school plays, attended each and every one of my cheer events, and even rewarded me with money whenever I got an A on my report card. Having my grandparents around was beneficial to me in many ways. My grandmother always made sure to embrace our Polish culture and speak to my sister and I in Polish. She made sure to incorporate our heritage in the food she cooked, as well as remind us of our roots.

In 2013, everything changed. My grandparents moved to Utah, where my sister and I ended up spending most of our summers. Although Utah was great, I noticed that everything

started to fall apart back home, each summer we went. The first summer they moved away, my parents filed for divorce and my mom, sister, and I moved out of the house. We were living in a one-bedroom apartment during my entire senior year of high school. Somehow, this unfortunate situation pushed me even harder to want to leave for college. I was more determined than ever to get into a good school and create a better life for myself. I saw college as the door to reach any opportunity to make it out of the system. I knew college was the only way to provide for my future family and create a life filled with success for myself.

The first year of college for me was a culture shock. On move-in day, I drove up LMU's bluff and the first thing I noticed were the luxury cars cruising down the hill. In a matter of 10 minutes, I saw more Rolls Royce's, Tesla's, Bentley's and BMW's than I have seen in my entire life. People at LMU were rich. I met people whose fathers were the executives of companies like UPS. I started to compare myself to students who used Louis Vuitton bags as their backpacks. Me on the other hand, relied on scholarships and loans in order to pay for school. I wanted to fit in so badly, that I went shopping almost every weekend for new clothes. I was buying so many material things in attempt to impress people that didn't even notice. I guess you can say I went broke trying to look rich.

However, I craved more than material things. I wanted to experience the fun side of college that everyone said it was going to be. By the end of my freshman year, I was introduced to some people who became genuine friends. That summer, we all took a trip together to the Bahamas. That was one of the best trips I've taken throughout my college career, and made me realize that I loved to travel. Being able to travel outside of the country on my own and be away from all my problems for a little bit helped me realize what I wanted for myself out of life in the future. I wanted to experience as many things as possible and absorb many different cultures.

My self-understanding increased as I experienced new things and met new people. Entering college, I did not know what I wanted to come out of it. I came in undeclared, with no friends, and had no idea what it meant to build a strong network. I never knew how to utilize a budget, or pay a bill, or open a new bank account. Also, what did saving money mean?

Going into my sophomore year, I had high expectations for a great year. However, it was one of the craziest semesters where I experienced the most self-growth. I jumped into a relationship that started fast and ended quickly. I was betrayed by someone who I thought I could trust, and that created the person I am today. Because of my experiences during my sophomore year, I became more aware of my surroundings, and I became less naïve. Ever since I hit a low point in that relationship, I've done nothing but climax in my accomplishments at school. I got super involved in extracurricular activities, as well as picked up an additional job for extra money. I joined the Black Student Union on campus, which helped me become acquainted with the majority of black students on campus. BSU was something that I really enjoyed being a part of. I became more "woke," and aware of black issues within the community, discrimination, and inequality. It gave me the opportunity to connect with my black culture and truly understand what it means to be a black and white mixed individual. Fortunately, the organizations that I became a part of on campus helped me learn how to identify.

Throughout my college career, I often felt "too white" for my black friends and "too black" for my white friends. This isolation often left me feeling unsure of how to identify, since people were always trying to place me in their own categories. It wasn't until I joined First To Go, where I met someone who had a very similar upbringing as me, that I was able to come to terms with my identity. Additionally, it was refreshing to finally find a group of students who could relate to my experiences and were also First To Go.

All of my experiences make me who I am today. Without going through what I did, I don't think college would have been a possibility for me. It was me having the opportunity to be the first in my family to go to college, that pushed me to actually do it. Now, I am living in the reality of having accomplished something that my parents never had the chance to do. Attending college has been more than a milestone for me, I've learned so much about myself and started to truly appreciate my value.

Vida llena de oportunidades

Ruth Gomez



When people look at me, there is no doubt I am Mexican. I like to say “tengo el nopal en la frente” (I have a cactus on my forehead). Which is a way of saying I am really Mexican, or as I like to say *hella paisa*. If you hear Banda blasting anywhere on campus it pretty likely that it is coming from me. I have a Mexican flag hanging on my wall and I have a small one stitched on my sorority satin jacket. There is no doubt today that I am extremely proud to be Mexican but that was not always the case.

In 2012, my mother encouraged me to travel to Peru on a school immersion trip even though I was nervous to be that far from home. The trip was life changing – I gained a new perspective on my situation, gratitude for the people who have helped me in life and a new sense of pride. Before the trip, I was not comfortable with who I was. At my high school, I was considered a minority. This caused me to be uncomfortable at school because I was not like the rest of my peers, I wasn’t wealthy or white. I wanted to change who I was to be just like them.

I would beg my mom to buy me Uggs even though I knew we couldn’t afford them. I didn’t want the cheapest Uggs either, I wanted the ones that cost about \$250 because those were the ones my peers wore. I also began changing the language I used. Whenever I would read a Spanish word I would say it with an English accent rather than speaking it like I normally would. I also would use the slang people here would use. When someone would say something funny I would say “lol”, instead of just laughing because that was what everyone said. I did everything I could to fit in, even reject who I was.

My summer service in Peru gave me a reality check. It was hard seeing what life was like for the villagers. Many of the Peruvians I worked with didn’t even have a proper house and had no access to electricity or plumbing. Many of the kids didn’t have diapers because their family couldn’t afford to buy them. I saw a man who had been abandoned by his family because he had special needs on his deathbed. Even though each family I worked with was very poor

they still seemed very happy. They were grateful for what little they did have. This inspired me to be grateful for what I had.

When I came back from Peru, I felt more confident with who I was and comfortable being different. I took pride in being a minority. Instead of asking for more, I said thank you for what I had. Since the trip to Peru, I take pride in being a minority. I was no longer self-conscious about being a divorced child, being Mexican or being from a different background. I often feel ashamed to have been that one girl who rejected her roots just to fit in. I was so ungrateful for all that my parents had done to give me a life full of opportunities. I became the type of person I dislike the most, the ones who reject who they are, but luckily, I have been able to grow from this. This experience has helped me a lot with my college experience. Because of this reality check I have then been extremely proud of my culture and my roots. I own who I am. I am not afraid to say I am different from anyone else. Each role I have has brought me so many hidden blessings that I never expected. This experience has helped me a lot with my college experience.

Being a first generation Mexican American plays a huge role in my life and it is the role I take the most pride in, five years ago you would never hear me say these words. But now I do because I recognize the struggle and sacrifices my mom made for my sister and me. I no longer am afraid to say that I did not have the same upbringing as my mainly Caucasian peers and I am okay with that, because there is beauty in the struggle. My parents made so many sacrifices so that I could have a better life than what they have. They crossed the border so that I could cross many stages and receive many diplomas, awards, jobs, etc. My mom made sure that when she came to the United States, her children would have a life full of many opportunities and that is exactly what I got.

Besides given the opportunity to do travel to Peru, I have been given the chance to travel to Ecuador, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, which I would never have expected. If you would have told me, "Ruth, you are going to travel to any of these countries". I would have laughed and said, "yeah right." I would possibly believe you that I would travel to Mexico because of my family there, but to visit anywhere I didn't have family was not something I expected.

Senior year of high school, I was able to become a certified scuba diver; scuba diving certification was offered through my Marine Biology class. At first, I didn't want to do it, but I thought of my parents and how they have sacrificed to give me a life better than theirs. This was an opportunity I wasn't going to get anywhere else. I asked my mom for permission to take the lessons and she automatically said no. Then, I reminded her how she has always pushed me to try things that sound scary. She thought about it and realized that I was right. She gave me her permission and I was able to take my scuba diving lessons. Being underwater in the ocean was like nothing I've seen before because I was able to experience a whole new world. Every dive shows me a different world because no dive is ever the same.

None of these trips, or experiences would have been offered to me if it weren't for my parents' hard work and dedication. My parents worked tirelessly cleaning houses, cleaning gardens, cleaning gyms, and more just to give us a life full of opportunities. It is because of this that I am not ashamed to be who I am. I am a proud daughter of immigrants, a proud Mexican, a proud first-gen student.



Teach

Antonia Garcia



"No les puedo dar mucho, pero les puedo dar una educación y eso es algo que nadie les va poder quitar."

This was a phrase my mom would tell my sister and me whenever we were struggling in school. Both my parents made it clear that in order to get ahead in this world, an education was necessary, constantly using themselves as an example of what we didn't want. For my sister and me, they wanted indoor, air conditioned, desk jobs, or at least a career that would make us money with a minimal amount of physical labor. To them, an education, more specifically, higher education was the answer to all the potential problems we could face. Because of this, the question was never "Are you going to college?" it was, "What college do you want to go to?"

Although my parents both wanted me to go to college and supported my goals of higher education, they could not guide me through the maze that would be the college admission process. Neither of them had ever gone to school in the United States and they were not very familiar with the "to-do list." All they could do was believe in me, support me, and encourage me to ask questions. At this point in time, it felt as though I was on my own, it was my responsibility to figure out how I was going to get to college. However, I was quickly reminded that I had gotten to where I was with a support system, and that support system was very much still intact.

In kindergarten, I met Ms. Arita, the first and only Latina teacher I had until I took AP Spanish in high school. Because Spanish was also her first language, she spoke English with an accent, making me feel right at home in her classroom. At the early age of five, she saw potential in me and encouraged my parents to let me enter the science fair. Because of her, I continued to participate in the science fair throughout elementary and middle school. She exposed me to the field of sciences, allowing me to realize that I had potential to be great. As a five-year-old, this meant the world to me. Throughout elementary school, she would check in

with me and my parents, offering her time if I needed any help with anything. She helped me establish the foundation for my love and appreciation of knowledge and hard work.

In 3rd grade, Mr. Wilson told me I had a knack for math. I was able to do long division and multiplication faster than anyone else in my class and I got the answer correct about 97 percent of the time. In 5th grade, where I had Mr. Wilson again, he talked to my parents about the California Academy of Math and Science (CAMS) and how great of a high school that was. He encouraged me to join the Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA) program in middle school and take science geared electives in order to get into the high school. He told them that going to CAMS would increase my chances of getting to a good college, he told me that I *had* to go to college; there was no other option for me. Of course, he meant this in the most positive way and as a ten-year-old it was very flattering. However, these words also very nerve racking.

The idea of college, although not completely foreign, was very much uncharted territory. Since I was in primary school, I heard the horror stories of my older cousins going to trade school or community college and dropping out because the cost was too high and the debt was piling up. Of course, they too were first-generation, knowing very little, if anything, about scholarships and financial aid. In addition, many of my aunts and uncles did not support the idea of going to college, deeming it a waste of time and money, saying a high school diploma was good enough to get a decent job and start making money.

Because of Mr. Wilson's advice, I joined MESA which challenged me academically and began preparing me for my future. MESA also led me to Mrs. Genota, a woman who enjoyed challenging her students but did so with so much love and passion. She saw in me, and many other students, the potentially we many times failed to see in ourselves. She was a tough teacher and an even tougher mentor, scolding us when we felt a project or assignment was too

tough of a challenge and debated giving up. She was the second teacher who encouraged me to apply to CAMS and, although I personally did not think I would get in, I applied anyway. When I received my acceptance letter, my parent and I knew I was pretty much set.

When I attended CAMS, it ranked 3rd in the state of California. With a graduating class of 166 students, a strong focus in math and science, access to college level courses at CSUDH (where CAMS is located), a 100% graduation and college acceptance rate, I was pretty much set and both my parents and I knew it. It was "nowhere but up," until I got to my senior year. During my fourth year of high school, when everyone began college applications and financial aid, I began to feel completely lost particularly because the majority of the students around me had parents or older siblings who had gone through the college admissions process. I was lucky enough to have a group of friends who were also first-generation. Although at first it felt as though the blind were leading the blind, I soon realized that the same support system that got me to CAMS was very much available to help me get to college.

My parents were always there for moral support, they understood they could not offer much help with the actual admissions process but always offered words of wisdom. I went back to my middle school and spoke with Mrs. Genota and Ms. Callen about my college admissions plan and together they helped me narrow down the schools that I was truly interested in. Additionally, Ms. Callen, my middle school English teacher, was able to proof read many of my essays for both college applications and scholarship applications. I also spoke to Mr. Wilson who I stayed in touch with through most of my time in high school by volunteering as a classroom aid. He was able to write me a letter of recommendation for one of the larger scholarships that I received that made it possible for me to even attend LMU. These teachers guided me through the hidden curriculum that many times prevents first-generation students

from becoming college students. And now, almost four years later, I am about to graduate with a multiple subject teaching credential as well as a bilingual authorization.

My journey to higher education would have been a lot more difficult had I not encountered the amazing teachers who saw in me what I never thought was there. I feel that I owe so much to my teachers that I am now on the way to becoming one myself. I want to motivate my future students much like my teachers motivated me. Although my parents were always there for support, as a young student an educator's words of encouragement meant so much because your teachers are "all-knowing." As a teacher, I believe my job is more than to just teach students to pass standardized tests; I want to support and mentor young minds who have the potential to be great but just need that small push.



Dominoes

Athena Martinez



Right in the middle of South Central, Los Angeles, my Abuelito's *casa* was, and to this day continues to be, my little heaven away from the craziness of life. My parents, starting a family as young as they did, were almost always working from what I could remember. They did everything in their power to keep our little family afloat, a factor I will forever be grateful for. As a result, however, I spent most of my early days at my Abuelito Tomas and Abuelita Coco's house. This provided me with some of my fondest memories: running through watering hose waterfalls in the front lawn, constructing dirt castles amidst my Abuelita's beloved rose beds, and singing and dancing all throughout the house without a single care in the world to the queen of Tejano music herself, Selena. It is the place in which my family houses their weekly *carne asadas*, the place in which my cousins and I developed a bond stronger than siblings, and where my Abuelito instilled in me a deep love for *Mariachi* Music and the great Vicente Fernandez. This small yellow house right on the edge of 71st, with its loud rumble of laughter and nosey inhabitants and all, will forever and always be my vision of home.

One of the earliest memories I have of this place comes from when I was about 4 or 5 years old. My Abuelito and I were out in the Patio playing while my Abuelita was inside cooking up a storm. Out of nowhere it started to rain outside, so my Abuelita quickly called us inside to dry up. I remember being a little bit sad because I could no longer go outside, but my Abuelito, the child at heart that he was, quickly came up with a solution so to not let the day go to waste.

Before I knew it, my Abuelito was moving my Abuelita's perfectly placed furniture, creating a big space right in the center of the living room. He then proceeded to run to the closet where we keep everything from clothes, to the good blankets you buy at the *callejones*, to the most important possession of them all, toys and games! From the closet emerged my Abuelito holding a little black rectangular box. He sat right in the center of the now empty space on the floor and

called me over. As soon as I sat down, he dumped out the content of the box, and I can only imagine the excitement little me experienced when she realized what it was... DOMINOES!

For hours upon hours after that, my Abuelito and I spent our time building little houses, knocking them down, and starting the process all over again. We even created what in my mind was the largest chain reaction, lining up the dominoes one by one, and watching them tumble the same way, one by one. It was such a simple way to pass our time, but I remember it bringing me so much joy as a child. Looking back on it now, I wouldn't have had it any other way.

Fast forward about 15+ years, and I am currently a third year English major at Loyola Marymount University, studying abroad in the Dominican Republic-crazy, I know. On my first day here, we asked the tour guide what people in the DR do for fun. Without giving it a second thought he responded, "They play dominoes." And in that moment, I was immediately transported back to that scene when I was playing dominoes with my Abuelito in that little yellow house back home in South Central. Not once did that little girl growing up imagine that she would be where she is today, having all of the opportunities she is currently faced with. That's what is really crazy. However, I'm pretty sure if we asked my Abuelito, he would have known.

My Abuelito has always been my biggest advocate and supporter. When I thought I couldn't accomplish something, he pushed and encouraged me until I was able to not only accomplish, but really surpass my goals. When I told him I wanted to be a writer, not only did he support me, but he told me to strive to be the best. Because for him, it didn't matter what I wanted to do workwise, it was all about ensuring my happiness and making sure that I would strive to be the best no matter what field I would enter. After all, that's what he envisioned for his children, grandchildren, and every generation thereafter when he made the decision to uproot his family and move the United States. He knew that wanted to make sure that regardless of circumstance, future

generations of Escobedo's would have the opportunities to pursue their passions whatever that may be.

My Abuelito has since passed, but I know that he is with me on every step of the journey. While I was in the Dominican, I could not stop thinking about how much I wished my Abuelito was still here with us so that when I arrived home, I could tell him all about my adventures abroad. I wish so much that he was here to be able to share the experience with me, but most of all, I wish he was here to be able to watch me cross that graduation stage next year-because Lord knows he earned that degree just as much as I did in all that he taught me and got me through over the years. Without him, his sacrifices, and his guidance, none of the opportunities currently presented to me would have ever been possible, and without his constant encouragement and support, never would I have been able to take them.

So, for all of the love, and for all of the sacrifices you made to get me to where I am today, thank you Abuelito Tomas. The memories from the little yellow house on 71st St. are ones that I will cherish forever, and for all of the adventures and memories that are to come for me in the future, they are all because of you. Te quiero mucho.



Wonderbread

Jordyn Wedell



My least favorite thing about high school was reciting French poems. Well, it probably wasn't the worst thing about high school, but it was in the top 5.

For Americans, or specifically Wonderbread Americans as I call them, learning other languages is difficult.¹ It goes against their human nature. What is the purpose of learning another language? Everyone around the world speaks English anyway. What was the point? This is the Wonderbread thinking that I grew up around, and it was this type of neurochemical reaction I wanted no part in.

You see, I had 3 motivators to take French in high school. The first one I mentioned before: I didn't want to be another Wonderbread. 60% of the world speaks more than one language, and I didn't want to be left behind.² Sure, learning French would have its challenges, but think about how cultured and educated I'd be. I'd appear smarter and more sophisticated. Think about all of those celebrities who speak French or Spanish in interviews—they're poised a'f. I wouldn't be Wonderbread, I'd be multi-grain. No, I'd be a *croissant*.

The second reason I wanted to study a language was more strategic: it looks good on college transcripts (especially if you take it all four years). So that's what I did. (Be warned, I'm about to brag about myself!!) Freshman year was French I, sophomore year French II Honors, then Pre-AP French, and then AP French my senior year. Yes, I was aiming to be a *buttered croissant, mes amies*.

The final reason was pure chance, but if I was more optimistic, I guess I would say fate. You see, my 8th grade year, one of my favorite teachers of all time taught French as an elective.

¹ Wonderbread Americans are Americans of European descent who never had exposure—or at least had a very limited exposure to—other cultures and/or languages. In other words: white folk.

² <http://ilanguages.org/bilingual.php>

As 8th graders, you were expected to take that class because it was the most “difficult” elective. We were at the top of the food chain at the time—we were expected to be able to handle anything (in reality, we were all merely dough balls). So, I took my French class in 8th grade and I loved it. Not wanting to waste my work, I took it again freshman year. It wasn’t that bad since most of it was a repeat for me. Slowly but surely, my Wonderbread status was fading—the grains were being mixed in!

That is, until sophomore year came along. Context: sophomore year was my worst year of high school, for a lot of reasons. French II Honors certainly did not help. Our teacher, Madame Grossman, was absolutely insane. I knew it was an honors class going in, but this gal was nuts. She was speaking French to us like our names were Jacques Clouseau. She would talk about tonight’s homework and then go on a 20-minute tangent about JFK. Nobody could understand her except for the one freshman who went to an international middle school that taught her French, but she sat in the back playing Club Penguin, so she was no help. We were all deathly afraid of being called upon. Oh, and this was her last year teaching, so she really didn’t give a fuck. She was going out with a bang, and my new croissant-aura was slowly burning.

And then, she assigned it: the poem. We had around 1-2 weeks to memorize the poem before we had to say it in front of the class. Everyone said the same poem, and we’d be graded on multiple aspects, like memorization, pronunciation, and execution. We were all terrified.

Il pleure dans mon Coeur

Comme il pleut sur la ville

It rains in my heart

Like it rains on a city

Accurate.

But looking back, I'm not sure why me and my classmates were so nervous. Maybe it was because we were so new to the language and our accents were so bad. Maybe we were scared of messing up, failing miserably, and getting a horrible grade, and that horrible grade would factor into our quarter average, and then our quarter average would go down, which would make our semester average go down, which would make our GPA go down, which lessens our chance of getting into college, which means community college, and at that point your life is over, so have fun making coffee for 40-year-old soccer moms for the rest of your life, and...

Honestly, how stupid! I'm literally in the process of taking summer classes at a community college to transfer to LMU right now.

But even though it was stupid, it didn't *feel* stupid. Our fears of failure were crushing and real and stunned us from getting the practice the assignment was meant for but that point never really got across because it was for a grade. I hate grades, but that's another story.

When I said my poem in front of the class, it came out jumbled and fast and probably sounded horrible to anyone who actually knew the language. But it was okay, because everyone (except the Club Penguin girl) was horrible. And since we were all horrible, nobody got a bad grade. Nobody went to community college (even though there's nothing wrong with community college). Our lives weren't over. We survived Madame Grossman, who I now think of fondly and who I hope is enjoying retirement. We said many more poems over the next few years (one was about an artichoke, which I still don't understand). Our French class had a great time together. We were truly *amies*.

But for a certain time, it rained in our hearts but not in the city, because let's be real, this was in Texas and it never rains. My point is that I hated French poems because of my own fear,

and that fear paralyzed me from actually enjoying myself. Not only in French II, but it kept me from enjoying high school in general. Not a good way to live your life, *mes amies*.

But you know what, here I am today and I am alive and well. I'm pretty solid in my French skills, and if you ever asked me to memorize another poem, I'd punch you in the face because memorization isn't learning and that shit scarred me. But even though it scared me, it helped me in the long run. For instance, I went to the Dominican Republic over the summer, and I don't know any Spanish...but you know what I could understand? Things that sounded like words in French. It's so clichéd, but life's difficulties really do prepare you for the future.

Now you may be wondering, but Jordyn, did you achieve your goal? Are you still Wonderbread? Well, I may not be the flaky, buttered croissant I wanted, but I'm...a type of bread. I've got some grains in me, I've been burned, I've got some butter inside but more strawberry jam than anything else, and I wish I had some more yeast in me so I could rise more easily, but I'm my own piece of bread, nonetheless. Unfortunately, not gluten free, but we'll see where life takes me.

La vida se compone de desafío

Yulisa Gonzalez



La vida se compone de desafío, los cuales se deben de enfrentar, resolver y tomar decisiones, a veces, en milésimas de segundos para poder llegar a la meta que uno se propone. Cada obstáculo que uno supera deja un aprendizaje único en cada una de las personas, sin importar que sea el mismo obstáculo, es decir, que cada persona tiene un aprendizaje diferente aun sea la misma experiencia. Yulisa, al igual que otras personas, ha pasado por muchas pruebas en la vida para estar donde se encuentra; cursando las últimas materias de su carrera en la mejor universidad del país (PUCMM). Sin duda alguna, digna de admiración. Yulisa es una joven dominicana de 22 años de edad, simpática, cariñosa y deseosa de aprender algo nuevo cada día que pasa. Proveniente de una familia humilde, donde prevalece la unión. La tercera de sus seis hermanos. Estudiante de primera generación, porque sus padres no alcanzaron un título universitario debido a no tener unos padres que se preocuparan por sus estudios.

Durante mis estudios he tenido que enfrentar desafío que me han moldeado hacer la persona que soy hoy en día, una chica dinámica, contenta, amable, trabajadora, sencilla, abierta a los cambios, entre otras cualidades.

Realice mis primeros estudios en una escuelita que existía en mi campo, era multigrado, allí aprendí a leer y a escribir, después, fui trasladada a la escuela más cercana que estaba ubicada en el municipio de Janico porque la escuelita llegaba hasta cuarto de básica. En la escuela de Janico termine mis estudios básicos. Realice mis estudios secundarios en el liceo Juan Ant. Collado, donde me gradué de bachiller; para mí y mi familia fue una de las mayores satisfacciones obtener mi diploma, pues, a pesar de ser la tercera de mis hermanos, fui la primera en obtener ese título.

Por otra parte, mi mayor deseo era realizar una carrera universitaria, pero de donde yo vivía era muy difícil viajar a la ciudad donde quedaban las universidades, así que mi padre me

dio la elección de mudarme para la ciudad si quería estudiar en la universidad. Aunque yo no quería mudarme de mi campo—por lo cual llore mucho—termine mudándome, pues mi deseo de superación por alcanzar mi meta era más grande que mi deseo de quedarme a vivir allá. Una vez viviendo en la ciudad, mi vida se complicó, pues nada era como yo pensaba, como yo creía. Cada día que pasaba debía de enfrentar un desafío. Después de dos meses, entre a la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, estudiando contabilidad. Después de tener un año cursado, la directora del liceo donde estude me llamo para que llenara unos formularios en PUCMM sobre una beca que estaban ofreciendo en educación, sin pensarlo, corrí, lo llene, y fui aprobada. Me dieron la beca.

Esto fue otro desafío de mi vida, el cambio de universidad fue muy drástico. Al inicio me enferme mucho y después me quería retirar de la universidad. No sabía Inglés y en la universidad, es un requisito aprobar nueve cursos de inglés para poder graduarse. Después de mucho consejo por parte de familiares y amigos, continúe con la carrera en la universidad y me apunte en un instituto para poder alcanzar una buena base del idioma. En el instituto me iba súper bien, pero en la universidad, no avanzaba. Termine retirándome del instituto porque casi no tenía tiempo para dedicarle a las clases.

Así fue pasando el tiempo, curse todas las materias de mi carrera e incluso ya sustente la tesis. Ahora, solo me falta cursar los últimos tres cursos de inglés para por fin obtener mi título universitario. A pesar de estos desafíos, alcancé mis metas.

Yulisa Gonzalez

Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra,

Santiago, República Dominicana

YOU UNDERESTIMATED US

LOS - GOBIERNO
TIENEN - EL - DE VER
DE - AYUDAR - AL - PUEBLO.

YOU THOUGHT

LOS - GOBIERNO
TIENEN - EL - DE VER
DE - AYUDAR - AL - PUEBLO.

THE MOMENT

LOS - GOBIERNO
TIENEN - EL - DE VER
DE - AYUDAR - AL - PUEBLO.

THINK

LOS - GOBIERNO
TIENEN - EL - DE VER
DE - AYUDAR - AL - PUEBLO.

WE'D STAY SILENT.

LOS - GOBIERNO
TIENEN - EL - DE VER
DE - AYUDAR - AL - PUEBLO.

LOS - GOBIERNO
TIENEN - EL - DE VER
DE - AYUDAR - AL - PUEBLO.

AGAIN.

Taking Risks

Jasmine Segovia



Never in my life would I have thought that I'd be sitting in a classroom at Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra in the Dominican Republic, writing this piece. Prior to this First to Go study abroad trip, I had never been out of the country. And even though I knew this trip would be a new learning experience, I could not help but feel anxious at the thought of being more than 2,000 miles away from home staying on the small island of Hispaniola. I am typically the type of person that lets fear take control, rather than conquering it. I prefer to know the plans ahead of time so that I can mentally prepare myself for the activities to come. Taking this trip was a big leap for me since I knew I would be out of my comfort zone. Having this in mind, my goal for this trip was to say yes to every opportunity and adventure presented to me, despite all the fears and concerns that my mind is quick to create.

A day before my trip, I had a panic attack. I could not stop overthinking all of the possible "what ifs" that could happen on this trip. My first concern, the airplane. What if I died before even getting to the Dominican Republic (D.R.)? Our group had to take 2 airplanes, one from LAX to JFK, and another one from JFK to STI. That is a total of 8 hours being thousands of feet up in the air. While this may be a common fear, my mind kept feeding off of all the overthinking I was doing. Then, I kept worrying over my mother, and how my host parents in the D.R. would treat me. My mother is a single parent and it's just the two of us at home. So naturally, I worried about leaving her for 10 days alone. And ultimately, I was concerned about adjusting to a new country, its customs, and way of living.

On Monday, May 15th I boarded the first plane at 10:05 pm. As I walked to my seat, I began to feel a familiar sensation. My heart began to race, the palms of my hands began to get sweaty, and I felt like throwing up. I had the strongest urge to run out of the main gate door. I began to feel anxious and incapable of continuing. But either it was yes or no. Either I would

take a huge step forward for my family, especially for all the hard efforts and sacrifices my mother has made for me to get here, or let my fear of traveling stop me. After a few internal debates, I buckled my seatbelt, held my friend's hand, and my journey off to Santiago began.

Five minutes before landing, I could see out through the airplane window the endless patches of green trees and the Santiago Monument. After passing through the gate and immigration, I began to wonder if the D.R. was like El Salvador. My entire family is from there, and I've never had the opportunity to visit. With these thoughts, I exited the airport's main doors, and immediately a blast of hot, humid air hit me. The climate was extremely different from Los Angeles. There were palm trees surrounding the airport and it was not windy. There was also an unusual amount of car honking and every conversation I could hear was in Spanish. I experienced culture shock because I have never had the opportunity to be in a country filled with people similar to my own and a country where the dominant language was Spanish. It felt unusual but in a wonderful way.

Once the program director arrived, we got inside a small bus with curtains on the side—a typical bus in the D.R. for tour groups. As we drove to our host family's house in Reparto Universitario, I noticed the architecture and the way the community interacted. People randomly crossed the streets, no one obeyed street lights, and some roads were very narrow. After driving for about 30 minutes, we finally arrived to our destination. My roommate and I were placed in Casa numero 8, Calle 7. The house had a beautiful garden in the front and it was a one story house. I had my own bedroom and bathroom, and so did my roommate. The first thing I did once I was in my room was sit on the bed. I felt overwhelmed by being in a completely different place. I hated being out of my comfort zone, but what could I expect? I was in a completely new place.

From there on we officially began learning about Santiago. There were three main components to this trip. We learned about the Dominican Republic from a cultural, historical, and adventurous point of view. Beginning with the cultural, I learned to eat traditional food such as casaba, a hard flat bread made of yucca that was originally created by the native indigenous people of the Dominican Republic, the Taino. I ate Mangu, a mashed green plantain, had lots of Lechosa, papaya, and their plato tipico, which consisted of beans, plantains, and rice. I also learned how well of a community they functioned as a whole. Everyone said “saludos,” “buen provecho,” and “a la orden.” Every Dominican person I conversed with was very kind and loving. However, despite how welcomed and loved I felt, I could not help the homesickness I developed on the trip. As this was my first time out of the country, and away from home for a long period of time, I could not help but feel this emptiness inside me. I missed my home, the food, my mother, and just feeling comfortable. It felt so weird having to depend so much on others, let alone deal with the heat and bugs.

Additionally, on one of the days we had a scavenger hunt throughout the city so that we could familiarize ourselves more with the city of Santiago. My expectation was that it was going to be visiting different cultural locations, but in reality, it involved running across streets and using conchos, a common mode of transportation in the D.R. In Santiago, people do not obey traffic rules, and not all streets have traffic signs. Therefore, whenever we had to cross the street, we had to find our opportunity to run between traffic. It also did not help that everyone honks over there, which over time I learned that it wasn't necessarily a bad thing. In the D.R., people say hello by honking, to signal their arrival, and ultimately, to hurry pedestrians crossing the streets. Throughout our hunt, we used conchos, which are small little cars that fit up to six people, and serve as the D.R.'s main form of public transportation. In the conchos no one used seat belts, and

people sat on top of each other. Was this safe? Absolutely not, but that was one of the various ways to immerse ourselves in their culture. To the Dominicans, this was a common thing, for travelers, it was a new experience. However, with time, I became accustomed to everything that was new and unusual for me.

Along with immersing ourselves in the culture, our First To Go group also gained knowledge of Dominican Republic history. We learned about the conflicting relationship that the Dominican Republic had with Haiti, and the history of Trujillo's dictatorship. First, our group took an hour bus drive to a Haitian Batey. This is one of the poorest areas of the Dominican Republic, and one that is heavily populated by Haitians. This was a mentally challenging moment for our group because we witnessed the harsh realities of poverty. This community had to live with minimal resources. Walking through the Batey, I felt as if we were intruders in their community. If I were them, I would not want privileged people taking a tour of my community and examining how I lived my everyday life. It seemed a bit uncomfortable and disrespectful. But, to my surprise, the entire community welcomed us and they showed us the growth and improvements their community had experienced in recent years. It made me very happy to see how important education and extracurricular activities are for them. For example, three boys, one Dominican and two Haitians, formed a band called the Street Boys, and their main purpose was to teach their community about creating music. We were able to donate a speaker so that they can continue to pursue their passions and help advance their community. This particular Batey is also progressing through the English classes provided for the children. Community members teach kids in their community in order to provide a form of sustainability for the future.

In addition to this visit, we learned more about Trujillo's dictatorship, and watched the movie "In the Time of the Butterflies" and visited the museum that commemorated the life and

work of the Mirabal Sisters. There, we got to learn much about the Mirabal sisters, specifically Minerva who helped create the revolutionary movement to bring down Trujillo. Her story is impactful because she helped spread awareness of all the injustices Trujillo was inflicting on the people of the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately, these activities lead to death of her and her sisters, Patria and Maria Teresa, who were also members of that activist work. The museum, which was actually the house in which the sisters once lived in, also housed their tombs, which was located in the gardens. It was a very surreal experience.

After all of these events, however, the one that I found to be the most impactful occurred during the last two days of the trip. On those days our group traveled to the 27 Charcos and Playa Ensenada. The 27 Charcos is a tourist location in the Dominican Republic where people have the opportunity to jump off of 27 waterfalls (however because of the time limit, our group was only able to jump off of 13). After walking through a river, a 45 minute hike up the mountain, and a couple of tarantula sightings, we arrived to our first waterfall. The sight was truly breathtaking. The waterfall was surrounded by tall trees, big rocks, and the water was a beautiful deep blue color. The only issue for me was the fact that the first waterfall was a 25 foot fall. Once again, my mind began to picture all of the scenarios that ended with me hurting myself during the fall. I let all of my friends go before me, and with each splash that could be heard below, my anxiety increased. That was until one of the program directors looked at me and said “yes or no”. Was I going to jump, or was I going to take the stairs so we could simply move onto a different waterfall. Immediately, I said yes. I knew my heart was set on gaining new experiences and overcoming my fears. So, as the second to last person to go, I was like, “fuck it.” I’ve come too far and have already risked my life crossing streets, riding conchos, and coming on a plane for more than 2,000 miles to not jump. I stood on the edge of a rock prepared to jump, but each time I looked down, the water

looked so far away and everyone looked like little ants below. I was so scared, but then our group started cheering me on! And as they counted to three, I jumped off the cliff. In the air, it felt as if I was on one of those freefall roller coasters. I felt butterflies in my stomach until I submerged into the water. Coming up I could not help but have the biggest smile on my face. My arms were shaking a bit because of the adrenaline rush, but it felt amazing to have forced myself into this experience. Overcoming my fear made me feel like I could do anything in that moment. I am an over thinker by nature, and it definitely happened this time, but this was an opportunity for personal growth. I had my doubts and concerns, but I did it and jumped anyways. Sometimes taking a step further can be difficult, but with the proper guidance and support that I got from the Dominican tour guides and my peers, I was able to do it. From there on, I did not miss out on any waterfall. I jumped them all with a huge smile because I knew that this moment had become a milestone in my life.

The second amazing experience I had at the D.R. was going to Playa Ensenada. At this location, we were set to take a boat to a small island in the middle of the ocean to go snorkeling with fishes. Again, I was nervous because I had only been on a boat once in my life previous to this experience. By now it shouldn't be a surprise that I was worried about this, because this entire trip so far had been an emotional rollercoaster with trying things that made me uncomfortable. Right out of the gate, our group was separated into two boats because 17 people could tip the boat over, which is something I for sure did not need to experience. Once on the boat, I just took a deep breath, calmed myself down, and reassured myself that I had to do this. Not that many people in the world have the privilege to say that they climbed on a boat in a beach in the Dominican Republic. So I held onto the edge of the boat, expecting to go very slowly, but nope! I was totally wrong. They started the engine and the two boats began racing to the destination. At first, it wasn't

the best sensation when the boat would skip over the water, but then it became fun when my friends began to laugh about it. Halfway to the island, our boat drivers told us to get off. We all looked confused because we were literally in the middle of the ocean in this small patch of clear water surrounded by the deep blue sea, they told us that this was the only part that was shallow. So we got off, and I can now say that I have swam in the middle of the ocean. The water was so nice and warm and we stayed there for about five minutes. Then we continued onto the small tourist island where we began snorkeling. I fed the fishes bread and got to see the beautiful coral reefs. After being there for about an hour I thought our adventure in the ocean was over, but then the kind men who took us there gave us a tour in the middle of the Mangrove trees. Many times in my life I had seen pictures of these trees in nature videos, but never expected to see these during my trip. We stopped in the middle of these mangrove forests, and the boat drivers told us we could get out. Not that I wanted to, but I was the first to say I'd get off and try. We were there already and I knew well that I wouldn't get this opportunity again, so I knew I had to do it. Then, two other of my peers joined me, which made me feel happy because I took the first step.

With all these first experiences and adventures I lived in the D.R., I learned the true power our mind has over controlling our fears. Each time I felt out of my comfort zone, I felt the urge to run. From the beginning 'till the end, the entire trip was baby steps for learning the process to which I can get over my fears—the plane, experiencing homesickness, the concho rides, jumping off of waterfalls, riding a boat, etc., were all a part of that process. The best life lesson I have gained from this trip is, “You realize that the point of maximum danger is the point of minimum fear. It's bliss.” The lesson for me was, “why were you scared the night before?” “What do you need that fear for?” “Fear of what?” “God places the best things in life on the other side of terror. On the other side of your maximum fear, are all of the best things in life” (Will Smith). I can't

reiterate how strongly I relate to this message, because it is true. In life, we must take risks in order to grow, and my time came this year. I am thankful that I chose to take this trip and push myself beyond my limits. I feel like a stronger person, and if it weren't for this trip, I would not have gained the new friendships, my beautiful Dominican family, new insight into our world, and be grateful for how privileged my life is.

Absolute Confidence

Lesly Juarez



I am a first-generation college student who walks with pride and assertiveness, but it was not always the case. Developing confidence came hand in hand with understanding my experiences as the first in my family to attend college. I had never understood the meaning of being a first-generation college student and the significance I have as a student attending a four-year institution. As a community college transfer student, I had simply identified as the student who was passionate about studying Political Science. Completely denying being a first-generation college student and trying to be another college student seemed like a much easier route than trying to understand my first-gen experience. Three years ago, at the age of 18, I felt embarrassed to not know certain things such as how to create a four-year plan, the grading system at my community college, and what to discuss at office hours. Some days I was afraid I was not going to transfer out of community college. I took every winter session and every summer session. For two years, the mere thought of having a “break” was nonexistent. During the academic year, I took the maximum number of units allowed. I wanted to nothing more than to accomplish my goal of transferring to a four-year institution within two years.

These were just some of the things I thought everyone else knew or was supposed to know and I was embarrassed about not knowing. I later learned this was part of the hidden curriculum and I was not the only first-generation college student struggling with this issue. As time progressed, I learned how certain things work—but I am still learning. The urge to figure school out on my own was desperate. I am embarrassed to admit how the hastily thought of leaving school crossed my mind as a first-year undergraduate student. I wanted to quit but quite frankly, I did not know how to quit. As I was questioning my commitment to being a student, I began to understand this was what it meant to be the first in the family to go to college.

I know I want to study politics because it is at the heart of who I am. I could not quit because I wanted to hone in my skills as social scientist and potentially attain a law degree. My mother who passed away when I was 7 years of age, would not have wanted me to quit. I often reminisce my mother talking to me about the menial work she was forced to do as an immigrant to this country. I no longer consider my undergraduate career as an adverse time in my life. I see it as an opportunity I needed to take. I knew that as a first-gen student, I had been a black hole in the classroom for far too long and I was not letting myself grow as an individual. I now know that understanding my identity is significant to my first-gen experience because it has given me a strong sense of self that allows me to carry the love and support of my family, friends, faculty and counselors; the struggle and hope of my parents, and the strength and resilience of those who want to follow my example. I witnessed that resilience and strength when high school students and other community college students ask me about the process and what it is like to be at LMU.

Everything I now carry with me keeps me grounded as I navigate through a culture completely different from my own; it's what motivates me as I progress in my educational career. Going into my senior year at Loyola Marymount, I have come to learn to accept my identity as a first-generation Latina college student. I was once asked, "what does it mean to be a first-generation college student?" and I answered, "I don't know," I was ashamed of my response, but if I was asked this question again today I would answer it with absolute confidence.

Three Pieces

Jazmin Quezada



A place I call home

The Dominican Republic is a place I call home
A place where I feel safe
A place where I am more than okay
A place where I am not alone

With its bright full colors and its complex history
With its rhythmic sounds and wondrous carnival colors
With its welcoming Dominicans I now call family
The Dominican Republic is a place I call home

Falling in love with the music
Falling in love with the Caribbean
Falling in love with tostones
Falling in love with chinola
The Dominican Republic is a place I call home

Its streets
Its buildings
Its language
Y su historia llena de cultura

With its roots full of power and its ocean filled with energy
I learned how to swim
With its powerful currents and its rocky floors
I had the power to jump off waterfalls
With ocean surrounding la Hispaniola
I learned to overcome

I wrote this poem the day after I came back from the Dominican Republic and I wanted to summarize how amazing that experience was for me. I consider my host family as my direct family and I consider myself Dominicana de corazón because it's a place where I see myself, a place where I found a direct connection with my Mexican roots. During my 10 days in the Dominican Republic I was challenged both mentally and physically. I was challenged mentally because I am the first in my family to travel outside of the United States and Mexico, first in my family to be in a different country where I have no connection with, a different country in

which I was more than 8 hours away from home (by airplane). I was challenged to try new food, challenge to be in a humid, but hot weather, challenged to jump off from waterfalls when I didn't know how to swim at that time, and I was still able to overcome all of that.

Unseen

Is it my peculiar way that shields my voice in
Is it my peculiar way that dims my voice down
“I wouldn't want to be you because no one listens to you...”
Is it my peculiar way that no one notices the signs
Is it my peculiar way that hides the truth for you to see
Well of course it is, you see over me... How hard can that be
Is it my peculiar way that when I am gone, after dimming on and off, after failing to obtain my last breathe of oxygen will I be seen
Well of course not, my peculiar ways will shield that in
So why wait, why be an extra body, if my peculiar ways will never be heard
Not by any of you at least.

So I'm a long and lost full cause
That you can't even tell
That after months living in your shell
You didn't even help

By the end of this long-full journey
I am not fighting for you to hear
Nor am I fighting for you to tear
But to help the lost and forgotten, before we disappear.

I wrote this poem during my 10 days in the Dominican Republic, because at one point I felt alone and that caused me to reflect on my life. Every detail within this poem illustrates what goes on in my daily mind, and every word are constant thoughts that I battle with just being a minority in a society that is not accepting. I wanted to illustrate a huge issue in our society regarding mental health illnesses which is a topic close and dear to me. There are many individuals who do not feel supported nor cared about just by being different, by not fitting in and it is important to highlight these issues because every human life matters.

A Single Heart

A family of 10 most loveable than that
A family here alone, yet powerful like that

A dozen cousins and unknown relatives
Billions of miles away
With a dozen memories unmade
A dozen memories lost when create
With a bond, too far to sustain

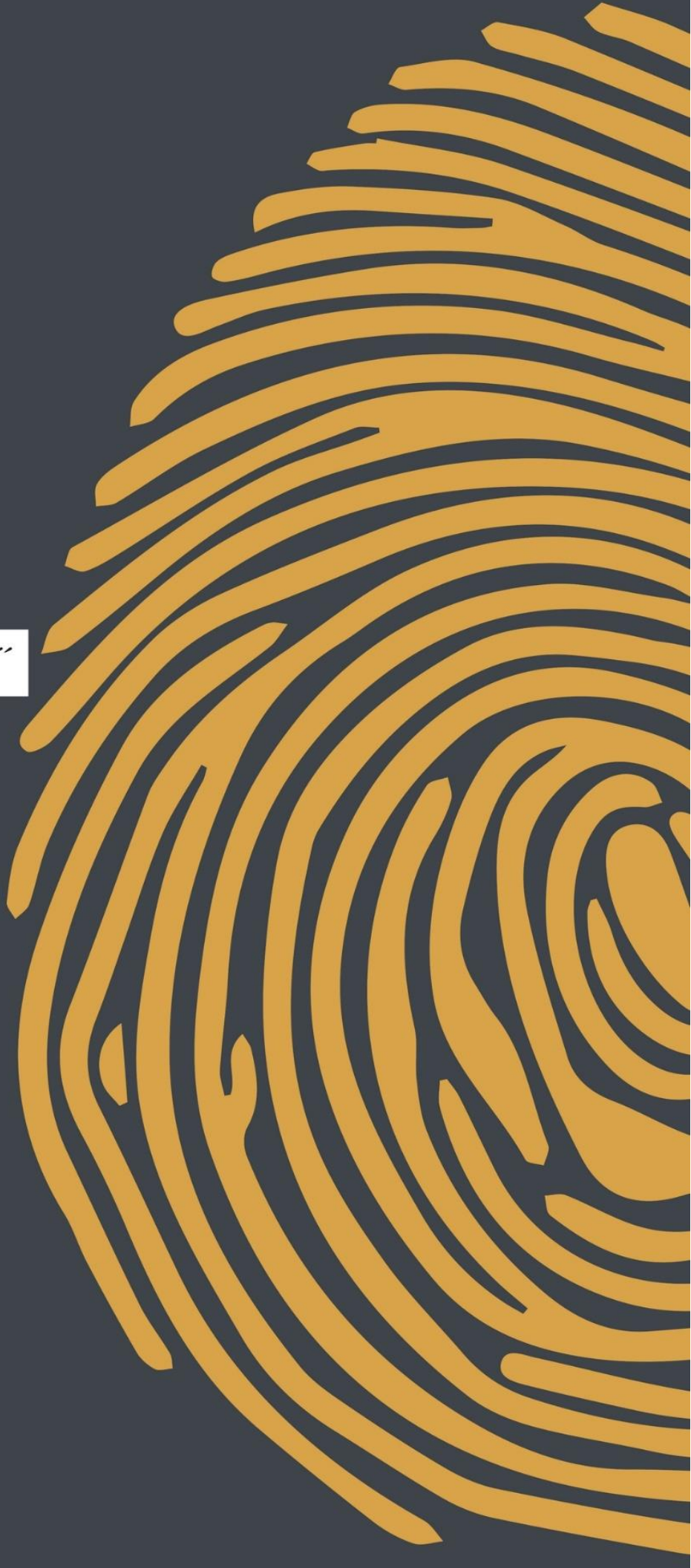
A dozen sacrifices my parents made
A dozen issues they had to face
A dozen amount of hate they had to endure
A dozen of tears were let out each day
And with their painful sleepless nights
They were able to raise a family of ten

Yet a dozen kisses is what I received
A dozen hugs I am honor to get
A single heart I am glad to form a part

My family is the only thing I have in this world, all of my relatives are back in Mexico. I have no cousins, no aunt, no uncles here in the US and I hardly ever use these words. When I go to visit my cousins I no longer feel a part of their lives. My parents being alone in this world had to endure so much on their own and with only one income they were able to raise a family of 10 and that's something I am proud to form a part of.

Trascender hacia lo “utópico”

Keiri Fernandez



Desde pequeña he tenido limitaciones y dificultades para lograr mis metas. Muchas de ellas han sido a nivel emocional y económico. Sin embargo, nunca he dejado de soñar. Durante el camino me he encontrado con personas que me han dicho “tú no puedes,” “es difícil”. En cambio, no me he detenido y siempre he luchado con mis propios miedos. Considero que el miedo es una emoción caracterizada por una sensación irritante por un peligro real o imaginario que nos impide avanzar, no es real, solo nos quiere limitar y engañar. En el transcurso, no puedo decir que no he sentido miedo, claro que sí, es parte de la vida. Sin embargo, quizás este no sea tan malo después de todo, tal vez debemos tener algo que nos empuje, que nos haga cuestionarnos; ¿Todo esto es real? ¿Si otros han podido, por qué yo no?

En primaria y secundaria nunca fui una persona popular entre mis amigos, quizás porque compartimos intereses diferentes y lo que es diferente es tachado como raro por la sociedad. A veces me he sentido luchando contra la corriente. Pero en la oscuridad, siempre habrá un rayito de luz, iluminándonos el camino. Así como he tenido personas negativas, he tenido personas positivas en mi vida—ejemplo de ello son mis padres que siempre han querido que estudie y me han apoyado. Por eso, ser estudiante de primera generación es un privilegio, nos lleva a cuestionarnos y salir de la zona de confort.

Después, pasé a otra etapa de mi vida, la universitaria, con dudas, pero con fe, solicité una beca en una de las universidades más prestigiosa del país y fui aceptada, lo cual no podía creer, pero no estaba soñando, era real. Una de las mayores dificultades que tuve en mi vida universitaria fue esperar por horas un aventón para llegar a la universidad. Así mismo, superar el inglés que se enseña en la universidad. He pasado momentos difíciles, sin embargo, he tratado de mantenerme firme. He llegado casi al final de esta etapa, lo cual quiere decir que cuando se quiere, se puede superar las adversidades. En suma, ¿qué es lo que quiero? Quiero trascender, ir más allá de mis propios límites, superar las restricciones que la vida me coloca, vivir, crecer. Muchas personas dicen que nos vamos a poner viejo estudiando, pero la vida nos pasará de igual forma y por qué no llevarla haciendo algo que nos gusta. De ese modo, disfrutamos mejor el camino.

Esta es mi historia, pero todavía no ha terminado, continuará...

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Santiago, República Dominicana



Roses

Angel Vazquez



"Lord God, I come to You a sinner. And I humbly repent for my sins. I believe that Jesus is Lord. I believe you raised Him from the dead. I would ask that Jesus come into my life. And to be my Lord and Savior. I receive Jesus to take control of my life. And that I may live with Him from this day forward. Thank you, Lord Jesus For saving me with Your precious blood. In Jesus name, Amen" (Maya Angelou).

Sunday evening, August 23 1998, at St. Francis hospital in the city of Lynwood, I, Angel Vazquez was born as a premature baby. Fast forward 19 years into the future, and I am a 5'6 200+lbs young man attending Loyola Marymount University. I grew up in the city of Compton, something that is always mentioned by me some way or the other, in all my conversations. I attended a public elementary school and was later placed in private middle and high schools by my mother because she didn't want me to consume the negative influences that the community had to offer. I am now a rising sophomore at Loyola Marymount University, my top choice of 28 schools that I applied to and 23 schools that I got accepted into. I do not mention this to brag, but to show appreciation to my parents who enforced a foundation that was A-1 on me. And also, because I did not understand what college was until about Junior and senior year when the application process struck me and if you would ask me my dream school before this I would respond with "I guess El Camino Community College cause everyone goes there." My success is motivated by my love for my people, especially by parents and family, yet sometimes it seems like I give zero fucks about them through my actions.

South Central is the neighboring community of Compton, and has been labeled as my second home by myself because many of my good friends reside in this neighborhood. Both cities are home to a breed of hustling Latino and Black individuals, full of dreams and aspirations, daily fighting against the struggles of systematic oppression implemented by income, violence, lack of resources, and gentrification. The Rose Garden in particular, is right in between the California

Science Center (to the left) and the University of Southern California (to the right). I visited this place for the first time after graduating from high school during the summer of my incoming freshmen year at LMU. I was bewildered, amazed, and left in awe at the beauty of the flowers in a place that is supposed to be “ugly,” a place that the media portrays as “dangerous.”

The truth is, the city is full of people with anger and hope with lack of resources; these people seek ways to finesse the system either through an easy route of entrepreneurship of illegal drugs or illegal/delinquent means, or pain driven and never-ending work to move their family out the hood someday, or to at least become financially stable. My family has worked hard to get me to the place I am and to set me along a path away from the negative influences of the mad city. I do not mean to brag, but whenever they speak of me, they speak highly of and hold me to high expectations as the first to attend a private four-year institution. This does not mean I grew up completely ignorant to the people around me; I was exposed to the negativity during middle school with the people I was around outside of my household. The irony: my mother sent me to a private institution, “Para que se me saliera el chamuco,” to not be exposed to the negative influences. The once loving and always joyous young boy then turned into a cold and serious person at home. Expressing myself and my feelings during this time was almost non-existent. I have lost the count of times I hit and or fought my little brother; I remember grounding my mother on the floor once because we got in an argument; striking my uncle a few times then shoving my grandma away because she tried to stop me; and upper cutting my dad cause I was mad. To this day I do not know if they still remember, nor do I remember apologizing; these memories eat at me every time I reminisce. I cannot believe how toxic I have been to myself and to those that I so dearly claim to love.

“We live in a world on two different axles. You live in a world, you living behind the mirror. I

know what you scared of. The feeling of feeling emotions inferior” (Kendrick Lamar).

“I wanna tell the whole world about a friend of mine. This little light of mine and I'm finna let it shine. I'm finna take y'all back to them better times. I'm finna talk about my mama if y'all don't mind” (Kanye West)

Juana Meza, born in a small town in Mexico called San Nicolas near Morelia, Michoacán, emigrated to United States as a child with my grandmother and two brothers after her father died in a car accident. Fast forward 28 years later, and I was her first born child. Over the span of the next 18 years, are memories of unconditional love. My childhood memories are filled with beautiful things whether that be special foods when I would get sick, support when I would be sad, motivation during my basketball games, and help on my homework; even when she did not understand it. Shit, now that I look back, my mom was and still is my number one fan. Despite the amount of times that I have rejected her affection, she persists. Her never ending fear of something happening to me is kindled whenever I ignore her texts of “where are you” “Como estas?” or “Da señal de vida.” How are my actions a portrayal of love? I am a hypocrite.

“Es un buen tipo mi viejo...”

My dad, Mario Vazquez, has been my greatest coach. With very few role models to look up to, I have sought many virtues of my dad over the past few years. Whenever I think about my dad I think of three things whether good or bad: 1) his discipline 2) his humbleness and composure 3) and his determination to work. I remember growing up hating him because I feared him. For almost every little bullshit I would get either a lecture or a whooping. I remember his saying, “Si me odias, es porque soy un buen padre” or “If you hate me, it's because I'm doing a good job parenting you.” I guess I can agree that he did a good job. I would never admit this to any of my parents in person though. His humbleness and composure were another thing I have learned to look up to. He helps others without seeking reward. And the last, his determination to work; the man is a machine and seems to never say no. It is incredible that the guy would come

home after work every day and say “No quiero escuchar problemas tuyos, ni de la escuela” is the same man who I grew to love unconditionally, the same man who would massacre me in basketball at the age of 11. Unfortunate to say, the man that I so dearly care for and value is the same man I disrespect and at times ignore.

“I don’t know if I ever told you this, but I love you dawg. I got yo mothafuckin back. Just know that” (Eminem)

My brother, Lorenzo, is four years younger than I am. We have had a shaky relationship growing up, filled with fights and harsh words. My parents always compared him and his academic success/motivation or lack of to my own success and would often feel the harsher side of both parent’s due to frustration caused by his unwillingness to do school work. His lack of motivation nearly got him denied from Verbum Dei High School, the school that helped improve with my attitude and character. He has now finished his freshman year with amazing grades, has an idea of seeking an electrical engineer major when he attends college which means he now has that exposure that I did not have. I would never tell him this in person, but I am proud of his accomplishments and cannot wait for his future success.

The Rose Garden is my family, my people; the Latina/Latino/Latinx/ black communities. Our culture, our people are full of beauty. We are the roses. Like the rife poverty and gentrification going on in this neighborhood, coldness, “seriousness,” and lack of emotions began taking over my body and began affecting my family; the roses. My recent visits and recent exposure to the place embodies that change of heart that I am slowly progressing towards. And the institutions surrounding it are the pillars and values that my parents have engraved in me. I no longer want to be a toxic to myself or to my family.

history

peace

resistance

archaeologists/arqueólogos

identity

repair

healing

belief

praxis

in search of/en busca de

deconstruct

justice

love

space

truth/la verdad.

remedy

creation

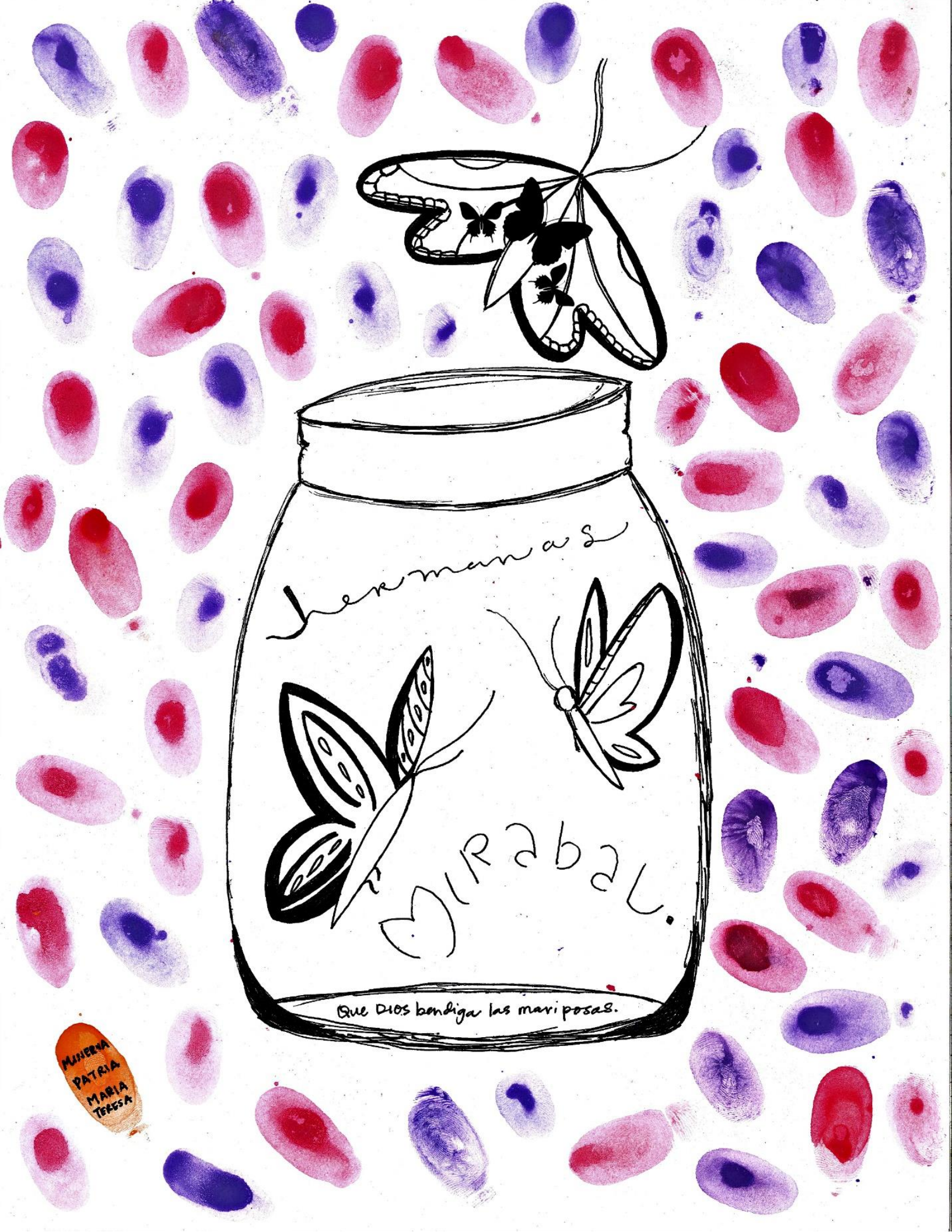
rebirth

acceptance

Ancestors
speak.



We
listen.



Hermanas



Mirabal.

Que Dios bendiga las mariposas.

MINERIA
PATRIA
MARIA
TERESA

On behalf of the First To Go Program at LMU, we dedicate
this issue to the resisters, those who gave their lives for "la
lucha," the fight.



its our responsibility to question everything.