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Live. Tell. Resist.

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Live. Tell. Resist.

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VOL. 7

THESE ARE OUR ALTERNATE STORIES.

Loyola Marymount University

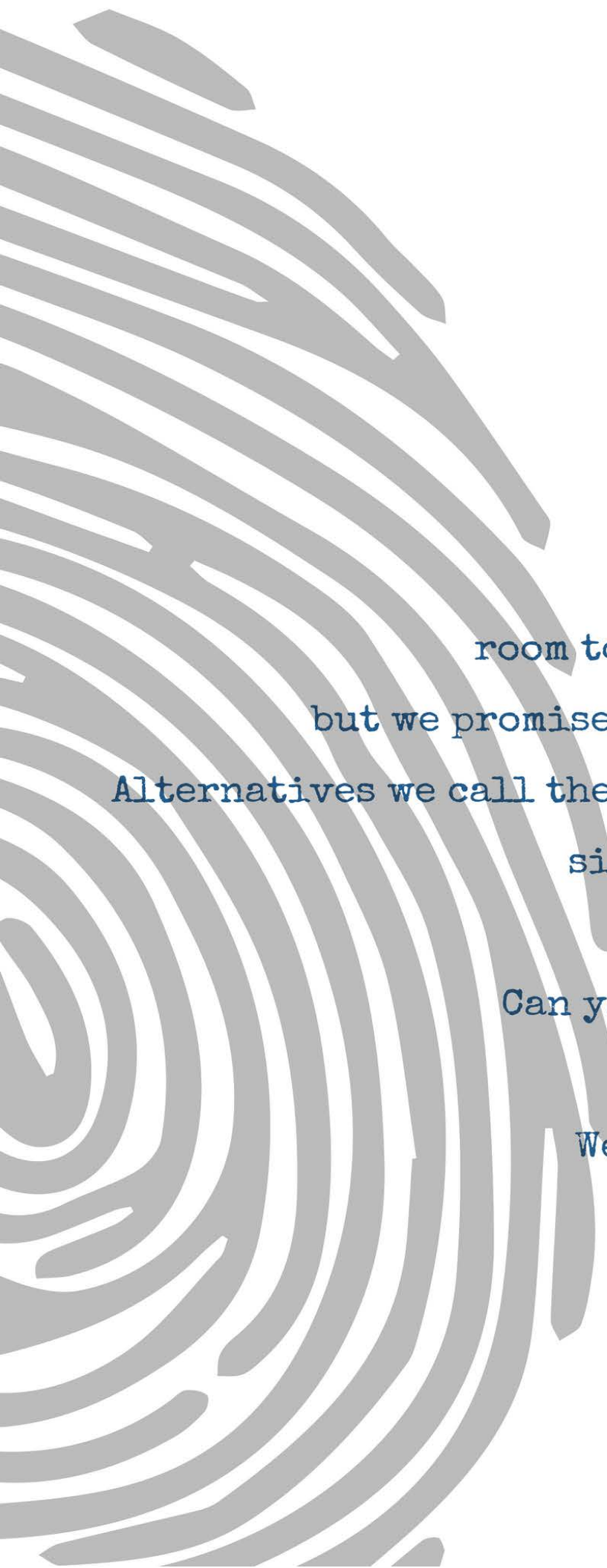
LIVE. TELL. RESIST.



2017

first-gen voices: creative and critical narratives on the first-generation college experience

loyola marymount university



Feel us through these pages
and take what you need.

Give it space,
room to feel completeness so new...

but we promise none of this is unfamiliar.

Alternatives we call them, counters to internalized
silence—whispers often lost.

Can you hear it?

Can you hear us tearing at seams?

Willingly.

Welcome to the tellings of us.



Our tellings are
sacred
not silent.

Content:

Poetry

Narratives

Photo-Narratives

I am compassionate and reserved
 I wonder if I will ever be successful
 I hear the applause for when I succeed
 I see a long road ahead of me
 I want to live a life worth living
 I am compassionate and reserved
 I pretend to be strong
 I feel the support of family
 I touch the hearts of others
 I worry that I will die without expressing myself
 I cry when others don't believe in me
 I am compassionate and reserved
 I understand that this journey is long
 I say that I can make it
 I dream of walking an airport on its own
 I try to be a good person
 I hope that I will be loved
 I am compassionate and reserved

I am
 I am resilient, living my dream
 I wonder what my purpose is
 I hear my mother's silent sobs
 I see visions of my hopeful future
 I want happiness, that is all
 I am resilient, living my dream
 I pretend to put a smile on my face
 I feel tears filling my heart
 I touch my heart to hide it away
 I worry that my path is wrong
 I cry for family, struggle, unable to help
 I am resilient, living my dream
 I understand my lack of privilege
 I say, "keep moving, break it off"
 I dream of a happy family, successful me
 I try to pave the road for others & follow
 I hope my siblings would have it easier
 I am resilient, living my dream

I AM ...
 I am quiet when I shouldn't be.
 I wonder why quality is so hard to achieve.
 I hear the sound of the ocean.
 I see an unmade future.
 I want to be important.
 I am quiet when I shouldn't be.
 I pretend to not be dead at the same time.
 I feel a hunger.
 I touch my dreams.
 I worry about the future.
 I cry when I'm stressed.
 I am quiet when I shouldn't be.
 I understand what nothing is worth.
 I say, "live it with it."
 I dream of a better tomorrow.
 I try to do better.
 I hope I will be better.
 I AM QUIET WHEN I SHOULDN'T BE.

I wonder if I can do this.
 I hear nothing but my own heartbeat in competition with my thoughts.
 I see nothing but the clouds drift away, traveling so freely & effortlessly above the walls.
 I want to believe, I want to succeed & rid my doubt.
 I am more imaginative & sensitive than you'll ever know.
 I pretend I skipped the journey & am at the end result; peace.
 I feel as if I am suffering from the unknown.
 I touch the failure in my throat.
 I worry that it will never end.
 I cry due to my inadequacy.
 I am more imaginative & sensitive than you'll ever know.
 I understand that I will always be at a disadvantage.
 I say that it's not that bad.
 I dream about Strenia.
 I try to survive & tell my tale.
 I hope I can be of use & help others stay afloat you'll ever know.

I am a loyal & honest friend
 I wonder what my future holds
 I see my childhood home
 I want to make my family proud
I am a loyal & honest friend
 I pretend that I know what I'm doing
 I feel my parent's support
 I worry I'm not smart enough
I am a loyal & honest friend
 I understand my parents love me
 I dream about my future family
 I try to work as hard as I can
 I hope to live up to my full potential
I am a loyal & honest friend

I am what they don't want me to be
 I wonder how my world will look in five years
 I hear the doubts they have about me
 I see the best in others before I see the worst
 I want to be one of the greatest of all time
 I am what they don't want me to be
 I pretend to have no problems
 I feel the chip on my shoulder that pushes me
 I touch the sweat dripping off my chest
 I worry about the path my younger siblings will take
 I cry over my lost loved ones
 I am what they don't want me to be
 I understand that I am blessed beyond imagine
 I say that a positive mindset leads a positive lifestyle
 I dream of alternate futures that could have occurred
 I try to avoid the restless nights I am accustomed to
 I hope I will have inspired many by the end of my journey
 I am what they don't want me to be

I am a civilized chimpanzee.
 I wonder who ~~the~~ created me.
 I hear the noise
 I see other eunuchs' hogs, lilies
 I want love &...
 I am a civilized chimpanzee
 I pretend to walk upright.
 I feel the grunts putting my forehead
 I touch the feel
 I worry about my hidden tail
 I cry lonely
 I am a civilized chimpanzee
 I understand her overtones
 I say 'hangsang'
 I dream of being in love
 I try all of the above
 I hope she doesn't judge
 I am a civilized chimpanzee.

I am bubbly and hard working.
 I wonder who will I be.
 I hear my future calling me.
 I see a full life ahead of me.
 I want to have no regrets.
 I am bubbly and hard working.
 I pretend to have it all together.
 I see the math & anxiety gnawing through my mind.
 I touch the heart and mind's connection.
 I worry about the future with love for.
 I cry when one is my family or friend in pain.
 I am bubbly and hard working.
 I understand that my existing can be perfect.
 I say I never have to stop trying for someone.
 I dream of finding that someone.
 I try to be the person.
 I hope to live a fulfilling life.
 I am bubbly and hard working.

I am radiant and beautiful
 I wonder where life will take me
 I hear music in different languages.
 I see people thriving and suffering
 I want to explore different places
 I am radiant and beautiful
 I pretend to be happy
 I feel that everything happens for a reason
 I touch my source of sadness when I am alone
 I worry about not being good enough.
 I cry when I think of those who I have hurt
 I am radiant and beautiful
 I understand I can never be perfect
 I say "it is what it is..."
 I dream of being accepted
 I try to be there for others
 I hope I am important
 I am beautiful and radiant

I am warm and cold...
 - wondering where I want to be in life
 - hearing the sound of life drifting along
 - feeling the warmth of my friends
 - feeling the courage to walk alongside them
I am warm and cold...
 - pretending I know what I want to do in life
 - feeling the warmth of my friends
 - feeling those that push me in the streets
 - feeling the love of my family
 - crying for those who are lost and in need
YES.
I am warm and cold!
 - understanding I am not perfect
 - saying I can achieve all of my dreams
 - dreaming about a world where all dreams can be reality
 - saying I will push me beyond my comfort zone
 - saying that I can give back the help I received on the way
 This is who I am... and I love it!

I am Hispanic and First Gen
 I wonder what my future holds
 I hear my inner doubts
 I see myself moving forward
 I want to be happy
 I am Hispanic and First Gen
 I pretend that I can carry the weight of the world
 I feel like the gray dot in the bottom left corner
 I touch my heart and remember what lies in it
 I worry that I won't live up to expectations
 I cry, and that's okay.
 I am Hispanic and First Gen
 I understand that I have to branch out on my own
 I say that family is all I have
 I dream that I will succeed
 I try to do my best
 I hope I do
 I am Hispanic and First Gen

i am first but i am not last
 i wonder how heteronormativity affects brown children
 i hear about spring break in Cancun
 i see seas of golden heads
 i pretend to study
 i worry about my brother, in a city that is not his home
 i cry about my parents' broken english
 i understand they don't want you to be brown
 i teach elementary schoolers about chicanx art
 i dream of the day recognizes us in their curriculum
I AM FIRST BUT I AM NOT LAST

I am sarcastic but loving
 I wonder if I'll fail
 I hear the sound of support
 I see you smile
 I want to be strong
I am sarcastic but loving
 I pretend to be okay
 I feel the pain
 I touch his face
 I worry for much
 I cry because I feel alone
I am sarcastic but loving
 I understand that life will be rough
 I say I love you in so many ways
 I dream about the flashing lights
 I try to believe the past
 I hope to grow
 I am sarcastic but loving, who loves me is 1130

I AM resilient and aware
 I wonder why things happen the way they do
 I hear my parents being proud
 I see all the opportunities before me
 I want to give them wrong
 I AM resilient and aware
I pretend to be okay at times
 I feel the push to strive
 I touch the lives of others as they do mine
 I worry it may not be enough
 I cry knowing there are others unsupported
 I AM resilient and aware
I understand we are all deserving
 I say we can all accomplish anything
 I dream of being happy
 I try to make my family and myself proud
 I hope to stay grounded
I AM
Resilient and aware
 By: Camila

I Am Jasmine Vega
 I am emotional and reserved
 I wonder why life is the way it is
 I hear the voices of my family
 I see the pain in others eyes
 I want respect and peace in the world
 I am emotional and reserved
 I pretend to always be ok
 I feel tired
 I touch the souls around me
 I worry I won't be successful
 I cry because my dad doesn't know I miss him
 I am emotional and reserved
 I understand what goes up must come down
 I say things will get better
 I dream of being happy and a better person
 I try to help everyone around me
 I hope to make my mother proud
 I am emotional and reserved

I Am first gen...
 I wonder about the future & who I will be.
 I hear the voices in my head talking to me.
 I see the faces depending on my success.
 I want to do the most.
 I pretend that I know what I'm doing.
 I feel the guilt inside of me.
 I touch the hands of my mother as
 I worry with her about how we will pay.
 I cry when I don't know about next year.
 I understand that no one one really does.
 I say to look on the brightside and
 I dream that one day I will.
 I try my hardest to make everyone proud.
 I hope one day I'll be great and accomplish my dreams.

I am doubtful but insightful
 I wonder about my beauty
 I hear birds flying high
 I see the sun set in a distance
 I want the sunlight to glow bright
 I am doubtful but insightful
 I pretend things will get better
 I feel the waves of the ocean crashing in
 I touch my love but not
 I worry about being out looked and not valued.
 I cry because I can't catch the love
 I am doubtful but insightful
 I understand I will feel more than once
 I say things happen for a reason
 I dream I can believe what I say
 I try to believe what I say is true.
 I hope I can enjoy the beauty of life.
 I am doubtful but insightful

I am determined yet guilty
 I wonder if I will make it
 I hear Compton screaming, "Be someone, that's your goal"
 I see the bodies falling back at home and the flashing lights at LAD
 I want a better for my community
 I am determined yet guilty
 I pretend to have no emotions
 I feel tired
 I touch the sky
 I worry about drowning
 I cry when I look back at home
 I am determined yet guilty
 I understand that I've worked hard
 I say I am going to blossom to my full potential
 I dream of change
 I try to live up to my expectations
 I hope to be the bridge
 I am determined yet guilty
 - Angel Nguyen

Love
 consists in sharing what one has and what one is with those one loves
 Love ought to show itself in deeds more than in words
 St. Ignatius of Loyola

palabras.
words.

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"Tradition"

Kyle Liang

This poem explores the discovery I made upon revisiting the village in Taiwan that my ancestors were relocated to during the Chinese civil war. This village once filled with fishermen is now home to the elderly and young children, but few young adults. The traditional trade of fishing has become too laborious for the income it produces, especially because the oceans hold less fish due to over fishing, so young parents are now seeking work in the nearby cities, leaving their children in the hands of their retired parents while they spend their days making money working white-collar professions. The result is a village where fishing boats remain docked except for the ambitious few from outside the area who go out at night when the sun is less harsh, former fish markets becoming empty lots, and a population that consists of a very young generation being cared for by a much older generation while the generation in between appears to be absent.

TRADITION

I.

Instead, the year begins

chasing away the stillness

that silenced pedaled legs.

Watch it pour over the village like humidity

sloughed off from summer's late dusk

returning as the morning comes

to wake the old men who spent

the entire night getting drunk

during endless games of mah jong

& left their empty beer bottles

sitting in the street to sweat

beneath the rising sun

like the early grass that anticipates

the footsteps of backpacks bouncing

on the eager backs of half-orphaned children

while their grandmothers sit silently

in plastic chairs mounted outside

their front doors waiting

to gossip with all the other elders

about the days before the evacuation.

Once a place for fish auctions, parking lots slowly fill with stray dogs.

The sun is too strong to fish under—

so they blanket their bodies

hardened with tradition

in the shadow of their homes.

II.

May these months return
the generation that drifted into light

-polluted waters on their electric scooters
after having broken their father's fishing poles
to dig for money that can never be held.

May the water reflect more than
just the image of steel chimneys
spilling expired paths to riches
on a face that's hiding secrets.

May is the rainy season.
Drops shatter the shimmering surface.
No longer will grandmothers sit outside
waiting for their children,
for their children

sit in plastic chairs with wheels,
unbothered by the drops of water
racing down their tenth story windows
because neither the new year beginning
nor the sun's growing unrest
matter in an air-conditioned office.



Poetry Collections

Harman Brah

Each of these three poems reflects my journey in being a first-generation student throughout high school and college and discusses my dreams to make something of my life because my single-mother was unable to attend a four year college in the U.S. The three poems are all written by me, for me, but I do think they could do some benefit to other first-generation students.

Dreams

We all dream our dreams between
sundown and the first sunlight
But only a few of us realize
Believe a dream will come true
And it just might

Champion

Though your best might not be the best
You will be so much more than you can guess
So rise my champion from the contest
And remember why your grandma calls you
He who is blessed

Michael Jordan

Walk with your face down
You been defeated
No more trace now
The conceits all depleted
But remember how
Even MJ wasn't undefeated



"Lo Que Deseas"

MariaCarolina Gomez

This poem represents one aspect of my experience as a first-generation college student because it speaks to my self-imposed guilt and anxiety that I often feel when presented with amazing opportunities, such as studying abroad or staying in LA to do research for the summer. It is a blessing and a responsibility to be a first-generation college student, and with that comes a certain amount of pressure. There is always pressure of not accomplishing what you promised yourself and family, the pressure of fulfilling the wrong dream and the fear of dreaming too much. This poem is more about the heaviness first-generation college students, like myself, feel everywhere we go. However, it is important to note that this is one aspect out of many, that remain positive throughout the first-gen experience.

Lo Que Deseas

¿Que deseas?

¿Quieres beber uñas?

You walk on a path of peaches
Your feet make contact with skin
That is tougher than yours,
Harder to break.

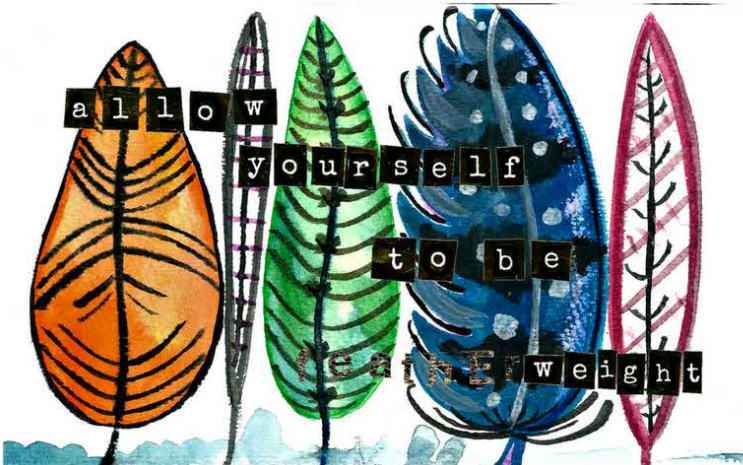
You live pretending they won't
Take the sea
While you're up scaling mountains
That never promise to ground you.
Whisper to me of veins

Veins so wide that blood surges through
Gather your dreams and
Force them through my mouth
Until I am gagging
Intangible, formless lies

And tears like slivers of onion, slip out my navel.



This is a photo taken on my 2016 Spring Break trip to Valparaiso, Chile. I traveled there on my own and met up with friends who were studying abroad at the same university in Córdoba, Argentina, but who were not part of the CASA program. Later, I met up with my CASA mates. This experience was really important to me because traveling by myself and then reuniting with friends challenged me to meet new people and allowed me to further grow within myself.



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My Bus Stops Have Diplomas on Them

Rosie Mejia

When I was a child, my mother would take me everywhere on the bus, explaining that one day it would be an important skill to learn. Today, I am grateful because it has become my only method of getting to UCLA every day. When I was first noticed that I would not receive any financial aid to cover housing, I knew my only option would be to commute. By exploring the MyUCLA website, I found a tab for transportation, locating a discounted bus pass for each quarter. Afterwards, I searched for the most convenient route possible by using google maps. None of the possible options provided suited my needs, but there was a Rapid bus that had caught my interest. My father and I debated if every morning he should drive me to the bus stop or not. Coincidentally, one day I took a metro bus to LAX where I found one of the stops for the Rapid I needed at the same bus station. Once I googled both of their departure times, we planned accordingly.

Unfortunately, commuting has limited my opportunity from getting more involved on campus, joining clubs, organizations, or any sports. Review sessions, late office hours, or extra tutoring are never an option. Doing homework or studying is also constrained; without internet access and with constant distractions, only so much can be done. Even though I attend a large school, I began to feel alone; no friends, no study group, nor anyone to contact if I needed help.

Commuting is like a sport, the more you practice, the better you become: such as being able to wake up a few hours before the sun rises, or having everything prepared the night before. Even waiting for buses that are late or simply being stuck in traffic supplements patience. The body adapts to the vibration of the bus, the cluster of people, and the constant announcements of the upcoming stops. The restriction of time on campus trains you to be efficient, to attend every office hour and lecture possible before it's late. Cold rainy days begin to seem normal, when buses are late and traffic is slow.

Once, the Rapid bus I usually take to school never arrived, so I took a local bus instead. When we were near Slauson, there was a Rapid on the same stop. I hesitated at first but then I ran out, hoping to reach it. The bus left when I was near its tail. When I turned back around, the bus driver from the local pulled up to where I stood and opened its doors. My homework was in my hands and wet from my short run, but I continued to write without allowing it to tear. That's when the bus stopped on a red light with the Rapid again. A young man next to me said, "You can probably catch it now." The bus driver heard and opened the doors for me. I thanked him as I walked off and headed to the bus. Thankfully, its driver saw me and waited. When we arrived at UCLA, I ran to my class. That day I left home half an hour early to be in class on time, instead I arrived exactly at eight and drenched from the rain.

By the third day of my first week attending UCLA, I told my parents I wouldn't go back to school unless I stayed near campus. I felt like I was falling behind, I was confused, and ultimately frustrated; I had no one to help me at home with my classes and staying late would dangerously cause me to arrive home in the dark. The only comment I received that day was from my father of how disappointed he was that some measly evening traffic and two- hour trips would stop me from earning a degree. This only angered me because I knew that he did not understand how difficult it was to be in my first year in college, trying to adjust, figuring out how things work on campus, but yet, still have to commute everyday. I wanted to give up. However, that night I realized that being one of the very few freshman commuters had to be some kind of blessing. Not everyone went to college because it is hard, but commuting through transit was even a more difficult challenge. So the next day, I was the first one awake and ready to leave.



Still Figuring it Out

Victoria Arevalo

“So this is my life, and I want you to know that I am both happy and sad and I’m still trying to figure out how that could be”—Charlie Kelmeckis (**The Perks of Being a Wallflower**)

Move-in day, I remember it like it was yesterday. Excited doesn’t even begin to explain how I was feeling. This was my moment. This was what I had worked so hard for all these years. The thought of a higher education was no longer a dream, but a reality. My future was just beginning. It was as if I was handed a plane in which I was the pilot, and for once, every decision from then on was on me. Little did I know, the ride of my life would have a lot more turbulence than what I expected.

As I look back on my first year as an undergraduate student, it is difficult for me to choose a single word to describe my experience. Like everything in life, this journey has encompassed both highs and lows, but they have all shaped me into the person I am today.

It was late August when a fresh new face full of dreams and a future brighter than the stars was eager to embark on this new journey. With expectations higher than the Empire State Building, I stepped into the future with full force, fearless and determined. I had everything I could possibly need. I had a supportive family as well as amazing friendships and relationships back home. What else could one possibly want? I had it all—or at least it felt like I did. Everything was perfect, until it wasn’t.

I was never really a 4.0 GPA student, but throughout all my years of schooling, my grades had never dropped below a 3.5 GPA. Ever. I never had trouble making friends. I’ve always considered myself to be an outgoing person, and “shyness” was never a problem for me. For as long as I can remember, I’ve always had a plan, and the goals I set for my future were always clear. I always put myself and my future first. I’ve always seen myself as a strong, independent woman. Not once did I doubt myself, but once I got to college, the tables turned.

College was not at all what I expected. I had no friends, and I felt lonely all the time. I wasn’t excelling in my academics like I thought I would. I experienced heartbreak. I lost old friends. I lost my grandfather. I got homesick—A LOT. I no longer knew what career I wanted to pursue. I felt guilty for being at such an amazing institution while my friends weren’t, and even questioned my ability to succeed at LMU. College had me downright exhausted, both physically and mentally. The journey I was

so eager to embark on, had taken a toll on me. It felt like my entire life was falling apart right in front of my face, and there was nothing I could do. I was no longer the captain of my own plane, and all I wanted to do was to get off.

It wasn't until later that I realized that the reasons I was feeling so distraught weren't uncommon at all. Turns out, I'm not the only one who has these feelings, and it's actually a very common trend amongst first-generation college students. According to the article *Predictors of Imposter Phenomenon among Talented Ethnic Minority Undergraduate Students*, published in the Journal of Negro Education, imposter syndrome "refers to an internal feeling of intellectual phoniness that is often experienced by high achievers [...and] can interfere with the academic development of high-achieving URMs [Underrepresented Racial Minorities]" (Peteet et al., 176). This is most commonly seen in first-generation students, who tend to have "constant feelings of inadequacy" (Peteet et al., 176) because they often have to prove their worth in collegiate institutions—which was exactly how I felt.

The journal article *Finding Purpose in Pain: Using Logotherapy as a Method for Addressing Survivor Guilt in First-Generation College Students*, exposes yet another challenge that targets first-generation students. In the article, the authors conclude that "First-generation college students face a variety of academic and personal challenges, including survivor guilt [which] involves negative emotions related to leaving family and friends 'behind' " (Tate et al., 79). Similar to imposter syndrome, survivor guilt is a common attribute found in first-generation students and it can hamper their ability to reach their full potential—which explained why I felt so guilty over my accomplishments.

If I knew then what I know now, maybe my college experience would have been a whole lot smoother than it was. But it wasn't all bad. Though I did not have as many friends as I had in high school, the few that I did make became really dear to my heart. I learned to play the guitar. I had a great roommate and lived in one of the best first year residence halls. I went on my very first religious retreat and had the opportunity to see the Pope. I became an Assistant Sports Editor for the Los Angeles Loyolan. I traveled to places I had never been to before, including Mexico and Italy. I joined the executive board of the First-Gen Voices journal and I am still at one of the best private universities in California.

My point is that life is a rollercoaster. There will be good moments and there will be bad ones too. Horrible things happen all the time, and while great things may come along the way, that doesn't necessarily mean things cancel each other out. Just like going to Italy didn't fix my broken heart, neither did seeing the Pope bring my grandfather back to life. The friendships I gained did not replace the ones I lost, and all the A's in my report card did not void the class I failed. I used to believe everything had a happy ending, but as I grew older I realized that wasn't always the case, and that's okay.

So, I failed a class. So, I got my heart broken. So, I lost a friendship that meant the world to me. So, I suffered from survivor guilt and impostor syndrome. I won't pretend things have been easy, but these are all life lessons that I will learn from, and though it may not have seemed like it back then—or even now—these events do not define me. Does it suck? Yeah, it fucking sucks, but that's life and you live and you learn.

I'm a true believer that everything happens for a reason, even when we often don't know what that reason may be. See, the thing about life is that it's unpredictable. It always has something in store for all of us, sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, but there's always something coming, and we have absolutely no control over it.

So yes, life can be hard, and unfair, and unpredictable but I've learned that sometimes it's okay not to be okay. After all, I'm still learning, I'm still growing, and I'm still trying to figure it out.

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Dream State

Tyra Cecilio

It's Aug. 23rd, 2016, the sky is blue with not a single cloud. The chatter of my mother and boyfriend fill my ears as the car finally pulls up to the school. Stepping out I feel the lingering heat of summer hit my skin, and for just a second, I sit there soaking in the atmosphere. At this moment, I feel no worries. A hand entangles itself with mine as we all start walking over to grab my keycard for my room, I blink.

In my room the heat feels as though we are in a sauna. The first thing my mom instructs me to do is unpack the fan and turn it on, but instead my boyfriend takes over this task as I begin the challenge of making my lofted bed. The tension is high as we all scramble around the packed room trying to put clothes away, hang decorations, or even just clean up all the wrappings off the floor, I blink.

While holding back tears, my mother hugs me tightly before saying her final goodbyes. With a small kiss on my cheek, she reminds me of how proud she is of everything that I have accomplished. Without trying to make me cry, she gets back in the crystal white car and I look over to my boyfriend. A giant smile is displayed across his face as he, as well, tries to hold back the tears forming in his eyes. While giving me a hug, he whispers, "You got this." I feel a tear begin to form, I blink.

Everyone around me is moving. The chatter and laughter of a million-different voices immerse me as I look to my schedule trying to find my class. I look up at the building and then around me to make sure I am in the correct spot. Quickly, I begin to fix the plaid shirt I have tied around my waist and proceed up the stairs to my First-Year Seminar class. As I walk in the room I see that the chairs set up in a U-shape and the sun shining brightly through the large windows. The layout created a sense of calmness where I could feel comfortable and speak freely. As I feel my first-day nerves leave my body, I wave and say hello to the girls I met during my First To Go Summer Retreat. I sit next to them, 5 seats back from the door, I blink.

My pencil dances across the notebook as I write about how my day went for one of my classes. The palm trees rustle softly as the wind blows through them. I pick up my drink, a Double Chocolate Chip Frappuccino from Starbucks, and look around. LMU is perfect, everything feels as though it is falling into place. I am taking the advice given to me from my First To Go class and it's really helping the

transitioning process; I am talking to professors and getting their input on how I should approach certain situations. The weather is beautiful; the summer heat is beginning to move into the coolness of fall. I feel no regrets, I smile, I blink.

Lights flash around me as the music blares throughout the darkened house. Everyone inside was dancing, as people on the outside sit by the pool talking about who knows what. The feeling was insane; it feels as though I was placed in a movie—I'd never thought that I would actually be going to a college party. With only a few feet inside the house, I run into different people from my classes and dorm floor. With bright smiles and high cheers, we run up to each other and give tight hugs. I feel a hand take hold of my wrist as I see one of my friends pull me into the crowd of people. "C'mon, let's dance," I blink.

The pressures of college start to land heavily on me. College culture shock—a term that is defined by The College Bound Network as a state of anxiety and frustration that people often feel in a new environment—begins to engulf me as I sit at my desk at 12:30 in the morning. Being completely alone in my room, I lean on my rocking chair and look around. It is completely silent and dark, the only source of light coming from my strung Christmas lights and my desk lamp. I was left only with my thoughts: Is this going to be on the test? How do I solve this?? Why did I wait this long to start on this essay??? When was this even assigned???? As I sit confused and anxious in front of my work, I begin to think about an article that was described to me in one of my classes, "U.S. college students' lay theories of culture shock" by Susan Goldstein et. al. Throughout the article she discusses the reasons why students in college tend to experience culture shock. Goldstein explains that, "participants tended to attribute intercultural adjustment difficulties to external, salient differences in the cultural environment rather than internal, less visible intrapersonal phenomena or individual differences" (26). With panic rising, I quickly look over my work before pushing away from my desk and going on my phone. I need a distraction, this is too overwhelming. The phone rings as I try to call for support. Once, twice, "Hello?" I blink.

Staring at my computer, I tap my fingers indecisively as I go over a list of slogans I should use for my Residence Hall Association campaign poster. "Maybe try something with 'Young T' in it," my

boyfriend says through the speaker on my phone. I laugh at the absurd idea of even using a fake nickname my high school friends gave me. "It might be funny, 'A Vote for Young T is all that you need.'" I couldn't lie, the rhyme was quite catchy and thought it captured my fun side in a way that could make me more relatable to my peers. With slight preparation, I begin to strategically place the words across my edited photo and smiled. It was the perfect piece, I blink.

The lights of the night pass me by as I sit in a fast paced car with my roommate. "I can't believe we decided to go get donuts and 10 o'clock at night," I say with slight glee in my voice. I always knew that college allowed a person to have more freedom due to being away from their guardians and having to learn to grow up in life. These little moments though, made the hard part of growing up a bit worthwhile. As we turn down the last street, a giant donut comes into view as we begin to emerge into the parking lot. "Do you think this is the place?", my roommate asks with a slight chuckle. "How excessive." I blink.

Fighting, we've been fighting a lot. I no longer feel as though I can turn to him as a way to relieve my stress. He doesn't care. The tears begin to swell as I try to text him, asking for us to talk. He responds quickly with a yes. I cry to him, I get angry and I yell at him, but he just stays quiet on the other line. The long distance is no longer working, the communication is no longer there. Then, he says it, "I'm no longer in love with you." I feel weak. No words come to my mind as I sit on the rough-carpeted floor, breathless. My stomach is in a pit and my heart never felt so much pain. The love of my life, my best friend, the one that I knew was always going to be there, didn't want to be anymore. Tears pour freely from my eyes, and while taking a deep breath, I blink.

Essays, why do I have to write so many essays? Why are these essays so obnoxiously long?? Why is there so much to do??? I look up at my computer screen that displays three Microsoft Word Documents opened as well as the LMU library tab displaying millions of scholarly journals. What am I even doing here? Frantically, I click around and reread my work, making sure that the evidence I use fits with the overall prompt of the assignment. My mental state no longer feels as though it is in the right place. The work from finals overwhelms me, the stress of not being able to turn to someone for support

was insufferable. I break down; my hands over my face, I try to breathe, I try to reassure myself that it's almost over and that things will get better, but the tears don't stop. I feel mentally exhausted; the only thing I want is to do well in school and get good grades. Why is everything becoming so hard? As a way to calm myself down, I look back towards my work that I wrote, as reference, in my First-Year Seminar class. I reread my essay that was based on mental health, because at this moment I felt completely out of it. Cassandra Holinka, a Clinical Psychology Postdoctoral Associate at Yale School of Medicine, in the article "Stress, Emotional Intelligence, and Life Satisfaction in College Students", explains that "the most frequently reported academic stressors specifically were grades and competition, career and future success, too many demands and meeting deadlines, interpersonal issues in school, and issues related to taking classes and selecting majors," (3). Now realizing that I wasn't the only one going through this struggle, I rub the tears from my eyes and look towards my computer. Slowly, I begin my work again. Feeling a little bit better, I blink.

The rain sprinkles down as I walk quickly away from University Hall. I smile, proud that I was able to finish my last final!!! It was over, I successfully completed my first semester! The problems that I was facing in the last couple of months no longer felt significant. They didn't matter to me, because even through it all, I was still able to push on. I laugh to myself as I think about all I did and how quickly it went by. I text my mom that I am done with tests for the day and that I was on my way to my car to drive back to San Diego. I look around me, the trees once again dance as the wind blows on them. The sky, even though grey, holds a sense of beauty and wonder that things will get better. I smile, I can't help but do it. In the beginning, I really doubted how difficult college was going to be, but as I walk back, I begin to reflect on how much I grew as a person. Curve balls, whether good or bad, were thrown at me, but I was able to hit them out of the park. Excitement grew inside me as I realize that I was finally going to get a break! As rain trickles over my umbrella, I blink.

My eyes flutter rapidly open as I try to focus on all the light pouring into my pastel blue room. I look around confused as to why I'm back home, in San Diego, in my actual bed, when I was just walking back from my last final. I sit up quickly, trying to comprehend what the hell was going on. I instantly

grab my phone that is plugged in next to me and turn it on to see the time and date: 9:30 AM, Aug 23rd, 2016, I blink

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with

these

touch

with these

I write



A Home Away From Home

Dion Dang

From the moment I stepped foot into middle school, I heard the never ending story of, “You are gonna go to college and graduate.” Going to college was never a choice that I had to make. My parents had already mapped out my future for the next few years of my life. They wanted to provide me with the opportunity that they never had when they were my age. As a result, the words “college” and “graduating” have been engrained in my brain, and from that moment on, have always been the goal. Every year, I strived to do better than before, and made sure that I stayed on top of my work in order to be one step closer to achieving a higher education.

I was immersed in a very academically competitive environment where the majority of the Asian Tiger parents pushed their kids to go above and beyond just the “average student.” Fortunately, my parents were not the stereotypical Asian parents that would get upset at me if I brought home a B+. Although my parents have always told me to go to college, they never pressured me to get straight A’s, or play the piano and badminton like the other kids. Instead they offered their encouragement and support in any way they could. However, with external pressures from my friends and teachers, I became my toughest critic, and decided that if my parents were not going to push me, I would push myself to climb towards the top.

What really motivated me to perform well academically was that my older sister excelled in all of her rigorous, challenging courses in high school, which ultimately led to her acceptance to a four year private university. I wanted to follow in my sister’s footsteps and perform just as well as she did. Little did I know that that was going to be a challenging path for me.

My sister and I are nine years apart. As a result, I was never really overshadowed by her, but at the same time I felt as if I needed to fulfill the precedent she had set for me. She got all A’s in her classes, got into a private institution, and had a job waiting for her upon graduation. Those were large shoes to fill, and being exactly like her was a difficult task to accomplish. As high school came around, I knew that this point that this is where everything begins to count for college admissions. Therefore, I tried to be really involved on my high school campus and pushed myself to study for hours and hours until I was able to achieve the grades that I wanted. Within my freshman year of high school, I already joined the

school's field hockey team, four other clubs, and helped my parents at their work. However, I soon discovered that it was challenging for me to balance out my social life with my academics. Time management became the key to success, but at this point I had not mastered that skill.

By the time junior year rolled around, I reached my breaking point. That was the year I began to take my first AP and honors courses, as well as stepping up in a leadership role in my field hockey team. My participation in the other clubs dwindled down as I dealt with a lot of stress from experiencing a new academic course load and taking charge of my field hockey team. As the pressure continued to build up, I came to a point where I cracked. I mean literally, I balled my eyes out and confessed to my mother that I had been very unhappy. School and social life was not as glamorous as everyone else made it to be. My hopes of becoming like my sister began to diminish and I felt defeated. That was until my mom gave me words of encouragement that I will forever carry with me: "Just be you and don't let the pressure get to you. You are not like your sister and your sister is nothing like you. You are your own person and that's all that matters." With these words in mind, my mentality towards life has changed.

I no longer felt the need to compare my success with my sister's. I no longer need to set her goals as mine.

I no longer need be her. I can just be me.

I had a whole different outlook and realized that I do not need to compare myself to others in order to feel validated or successful. I just needed to focus on me and what I wanted. With this new perspective, I was able to go into my senior year of high school with excitement and a fresh new state of mind.

It was time to apply to colleges and I thought I had learned my lesson. I applied to various institutions and was so nervous to hear the results. For all of them I anticipated the word, "rejected." I felt intellectually inferior to my peers, and that was one of my biggest fears-not being accepted by anyone. I wanted to feel accomplished, and the high pressure from my school environment to get into a UC or private institution really got to me. However, once I held my acceptance letter to Loyola Marymount University, all those feelings went away. I could finally see that a school wanted me for me and that I actually did something right. My mom's words of encouragement finally reconnected with me,

and this was the time where I actually loved myself. I felt validated on my own terms and I did not define myself based on what other people said or did.

When I first stepped foot on LMU's campus, I was soaking in all of the radiance from not only the sun, but people's smiles. The people on campus were so friendly, and for the first time, I felt like I had found my calling. I can picture myself strolling down the Palm Walk with my pink backpack ready to tackle the new college lifestyle. As I walked around campus, I felt this sense of belonging that I did not find anywhere else. I knew that I was able to find a community here that I would not have been able to find anywhere else. This was the school for me and I would not want to have it another way.

However, within the first few months of being at LMU, I did experience something known as impostor syndrome. By definition, individuals who go through impostor syndrome undergo "intense feelings that their achievements are underserved and worry that they are likely to be exposed as a fraud" (Sakulku 73). Typically, students who experience impostor syndrome "suffer from anxiety, fear of failure, and dissatisfaction with life" (Sakulku 73) and "the feeling of placelessness make students more self-conscious" (Palmer 43). Unfortunately, this was I what I faced during my first few months of college. I could feel myself slowly going back to that mentality I had in high school. I feared of failure and worried that I would not be able to reach the expectations I set for myself. I felt intellectually inferior compared to my classmates and felt at times that I shouldn't belong here.

To be honest, I never really gave myself enough credit for all the work I did to get into LMU. However, slowly but surely, I gained enough confidence to be proud of the work that I have accomplished. Once I immersed myself in the Asian Pacific Islander community on campus and found people that I click with, I began to crawl my way out of that negative mindset. I have met some of my bestest friends here on campus and I honestly would not know what I would do without them. They continue to offer me encouragement and gave me the reassurance that I do belong at a four year private university. My friends have given me the gift of light and I truly appreciate everything that they have done for me.

I still struggle with the idea of imposter syndrome, and at times I am insecure and don't have enough confidence to boost myself up. However, LMU gave me the greatest experience I could ever ask for. I found my home away from home, and met amazing people who have altered my life for the better. They are my light. They are my saviors. They are my family.

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What if?

Fright

Overwhelmed

I can't

BUT

I will

Prove it



Unjustifiable Difficulties

Noemi Fernandez Luna

When I was ten years old, my tía shared a story with me, a story that is at the foundation of so much of what I feel these days as I walk around the LMU campus. She tells the story of when she arrived in Tijuana, Mexico. She had spent the past few days traveling north from my family's home town in Puebla to the border town. She used all her saved up money to get herself and my cousin, who was three at the time, across the United States-Mexico border. They were both undocumented and they had to cross with the help of a coyote. My cousin managed to make it across before her in a car and was safe with his tías. Now it was her turn to cross. She was alone; she only brought what she could carry from home. In a sense, she had it easy. Before her, three of her sisters, including my own mom, had already made their way across and sent money to help her pay for her own journey. It was right before she was supposed to meet with the coyote who would guide her across the desert, it was late at night and without excess money, all she could do was wait. She said as she waited on the street, she heard a group of men walking by. My tía quickly ran to a telephone booth that happened to be there and squeezed in the small side opening of it, made herself as small as possible, and prayed they would not see her. They did not and she managed to make it across the border, where her sister picked her up to start a new life in Los Angeles.

This story stayed with me because it is rare that my family shares their stories of being undocumented and coming to the United States, whether it is because they do not want to re-live that or because I am too scared to ask them about it. I did not know why it was so significant at the time, but very recently I have thought about it a lot. It pains me to think that the reason why she feared these men was out of the great possibility that they would commit an act of sexual violence against her. Per a 2010 study by Amnesty International, an estimated 60% of migrant women experience sexual violence on their journey to the United States. In a more recent report by Fusion, that number has gone up to 80%. My mother comes from a family of seven, six of which are women, and five of which came to the United States as undocumented immigrants alone. My heart breaks when I think about the high possibility that someone I love had to endure an act of violence. It hurts me even more, knowing that they did this for me, so I could have the opportunity of a better life.

I have no doubt in my mind that my mother is the strongest woman I know. She came to this country alone, faced the threat of violence as she crossed twice (she was unsuccessful at her first attempt), and made a life for herself in a country with extraordinary anti-immigrant sentiment, which now seems to be on the rise once again. My father's story is like my mother's, he too overcame incredible hardships. He tells me stories about his past, not for me to sympathize, but for me to know. One story in particular stands out to me, my dad was driving to work one morning and he got pulled over by police. At the time, he did not have a valid license, but was driving because he had to work. The police stopped him and asked him to step out of his car. They proceeded to hit him. My dad did not resist, he accepted the blows. He was not in a position to speak about it to any authority figure, because of his citizenship status. He went to work with bruised ribs.

They both dedicated their entire lives for my brother and me. In comparison to what my mother personally had to face as an immigrant woman, college does not begin to compare in the degree of difficulty. I feel like I am not entitled to complain about how hard of a time I am having at Loyola Marymount University. No matter how many times my peers, friends, advisors, and professors tell me that the way I feel is completely valid, I still find it hard to believe. And yet, there is something about the difficulties I am having that makes these difficulties different than that of my parents. They endured the threat of physical violence. Here at the university I encounter something else. Is it a different sort of violence? Is it something in the university, or is it in me, in my psyche; and yet, when I ask if it is in me, it once again feels like something I cannot complain about.

Being accepted into Loyola Marymount University was an incredible accomplishment not only myself but my family as well. I knew that this was the school where I wanted to continue my education, however I was hesitant because of how much it costs. Of course, my parents said they would be happy to help me pay for my education. After years of fully dedicating herself to raising my older brother and me, my mom went back to work so she could help pay for LMU. I took out loans under my name and work

ten hours a week to help alleviate the monthly payments, but I still feel incredibly guilty on the twentieth of every month when my tuition payment is due. Part of that guilt comes from the fact that I had the option to attend a public school as my brother did, which would have been easier on our bank accounts, but I chose LMU anyways. Because I know how much my parents have and currently are sacrificing for me, I do not know how to communicate to them that I did poorly in my classes during my first semester and continue to struggle. In complete honesty, this current academic school year is without a doubt one of the most difficult things I have had to face. Every day, I am scared that I will be unable to keep up with the rigorous academics and every time I step into a classroom and see that I am the only woman of color there, I feel out of place. I continuously carry with me a sense of not properly belonging to LMU and feel unworthy to be here. This feeling is not uncommon amongst first generation college students and it even has a name: impostor syndrome. Impostor syndrome described it as a feeling of unworthiness in people who believe they are not intelligent, capable, or creative despite evidence of high achievement (Clance). Learning about impostor syndrome has shaped my experience as a first-generation college student and I only hope that other students that are in my situation know that they have earned their place and are worthy of pursuing their education. Is this a new form of violence? It cannot compare to what my parents faced, but for me it is still extremely difficult. Because of my parents' stories, however, I do not even feel like I have the right to say anything. So I remain here, continuing to feel isolated and alone, even while I study material like "impostor syndrome" that shows me it is not just about me and that I am not alone.

I wish I could say that learning about the very valid experiences of being a first- generation college students has validated my own worries and that now I feel like a member of LMU's community. However, that is not the case; every day is still a constant struggle for me. It takes a lot for me to speak up in class and it takes weeks to grow the courage for me to step into my professor's office hours to tell them I need help. The financial and academic pressure has undoubtedly gnawed away at my physical and mental health; however, it is something that I decided I do not need to worry my parents with. Despite this, I believe that learning about what

is to be a first-generation college student has alleviated some of my concerns. Being at Loyola Marymount University is still a challenge, however as I continue my journey, I find beauty in my struggle.

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In Between
Universes

Germany



Unfamiliar Familiar Faces

Camila De Pierola

It's funny going into college and thinking that I had it all figured out. At that point, the people in my life before college were ones I planned on keeping around. I felt that I had been blessed with outside support and with encouragement from people I would meet during my time at LMU. I went into LMU with family and friends that would support me from back home, while also having friends from my high school with me at LMU, and my new friends that I appreciated having by my side. I had my boyfriend, my best friends, my roommate, and all the other people I had met through various events and activities, but little did I know about how transformative the college experience really was. As a first generation college student, I faced a challenge in distinguishing the different people in my life and balancing the opposing cultures that each group embodied.

Coming from a low income family of immigrants, I understood the concept of privilege from an early age. I was lucky enough to have attended a private high school because of its financial assistance based on my academic excellence and my parents' income. Through attending such a prestigious institution, I was aware of the different students that attended - varying from sons/daughters of wealthy CEOs to struggling students on scholarships. However, having gone through my first year of college, I faced a new level of difficulty in dealing with these identities that surrounded me. I felt that I had gained too many perspectives and began to view everyone in my life through a different lens—analyzing and feeling as if I weren't able to completely relate to anyone. Gloria Alberta and Jeanett Castellanos best describe this sense of culture shock in their journal article "Desafíos Y Bendiciones" by stating, "As Latina students 'juggle' home and school cultures and/or experience marginalization by these two cultures, the need for balance can result in a modifying cultural values or assimilating to institutional values" (Gloria et al., 2012). I felt that the familiar faces I had known before college were slowly becoming unfamiliar, while at the same time the new unfamiliar faces in college were one's I was familiarizing myself with but not fully understanding.

When visiting home, everything felt different. Through the people and interactions I had observed within my time in college, I became more open and accepting of all people, ideas, and practices than I was before. I made an effort to be politically correct and share my insight with my family.

However, there was tension in that my ideas did not coincide with the culture I was raised in, and the culture my parents were raised in, which resulted in an unfamiliarity. This led to emotions of confusion, anger, and disappointment, especially when being told that they were proud of me for involving myself in heavy discussion at school, but telling me I “had changed” when the discussion was criticized at home. I felt apologetic for taking the knowledge I had obtained from my college culture and sharing it with my home culture because it went against certain ideas my Catholic parents had tried to instill in me. My parents couldn’t fully grasp what I was experiencing at school, while I couldn’t understand their opinions and mindset on varying issues. These people that I loved so much were challenging my view on certain aspects of my upbringing and my perspective on my home culture.

In terms of old friendships and relationships, I came upon many obstacles that led me to abandon a chunk of them. My experience with culture shock had transitioned into a division between the groups of people in my life. I was border living. I was in between two worlds and felt that I had to either distribute myself or choose one over the other. Catherine Marshall et al., explains in their book, *Widening Participation, Higher Education and Non-traditional Students: Supporting Transitions through Foundation Programmes*, that “the identity that an individual develops depends on upbringing and the cultural context of that upbringing; this will affect the individual’s attitude towards education, their language and their conceptual organization” (Marshall et al., 2016). Through my upbringing and high school experience, I related with these old friends that were back home, and shared a commonality within the community we had grown up in. After my exposure to various identities I had never witnessed before, I came to the realization as to who I wanted to be as a person and the virtues I wanted to strengthen. I realized that some of these old friends were people I had spent my time with only because it was nice to be part of a group that shared the same social concepts, but I didn’t consider our similarities in terms of mindsets on issues I cared about. For those reasons, we have grown apart.

At the same time I was dealing with analyzing my home culture, I was continually being surprised by the college culture and its students. I enjoyed being able to handpick my friends and choose people that I wanted to surround myself with, rather than be forced to associate with. Yet, due to the

many backgrounds and upbringings, I found myself struggling to accept all these new people that were part of my community. Coming into LMU, I assumed that all these students were like minded and cared about most of the things I cared about, which coincided with LMU's ideals. I came to realize that this wasn't the case at all.

My misconception of the college community shocked me, but also encouraged me to learn about others. I felt that my concepts of justice, equality, compassion, and education were challenged by others in both negative and positive ways. I was stuck between what I knew was right from my home culture and new college culture ideas that I agreed with, but didn't agree with my upbringing. I saw the ways in which students spent their free time, and what they deemed as fun or normal for them. A day out in Beverly Hills shopping and eating at places I considered expensive, was routine for some, while others rarely went off campus due to a shortage of 'spending money'. These were people I barely knew, but would see day and night. As I struggled with these ideas, I did what I could to observe and share my own opinions whether they differed or agreed.

In the end, I was able to grow. I was able to learn about this whole other world I had never experienced before. I was able to question myself and others. My first year in college definitely consisted of experiences and challenges I did not expect, but I continued my way through it. I jumped into a school I was in love with, and fell even more in love with its positive aspects along with its flaws. I found myself lucky to be a part of two diverse worlds that I loved so much and considered home. Most importantly, I was able to understand that these were different worlds, but it was my job to connect them.

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The Guilt When Getting Out

Isabelle Marin

“The problem with surviving was that you ended up with the ghosts of everyone you’d ever left behind riding on your shoulders.” – **Paolo Bacigalupi, The Drowned Cities**

My life has been a combination of good and bad. I truly cannot argue that I have had a terrible life, but I do believe that I’ve had some terrible experiences while growing up, which, in a way, took away my childhood. Because of these experiences, I have always had the urge to move out of my house and create a new home somewhere else. I’ve always wanted to be free from the past, and have the opportunity to move on from it. Though my family will always be my home, my house will not be.

Night. It was the time that created my anxiety. It was the time I feared and dreaded in the place that I was supposed to be able to find comfort and relief from the outside world. It turns out, the inside world was very similar to the outside one. It was always very predictable, but unpredictable at the same time. The drunken’ slurs and arguments on random nights were something that I had to become immune to. Hearing the crying and screaming of my little siblings that had no perception of what was going on broke me inside. Sad to say, it was something that I also became immune to throughout the many years of my youth. It was something that we would wake up to the next morning and act as if it had never happened. Something that went on for 9 years is something that is still traumatic up to this day. I knew that the life that I was living was not for me and that I had to build a place of relief and comfort somewhere else, because that place was definitely not my house.

Because of my hope of creating a new home, I started striving to go to college from a very young age, around nine years of age or so. I thought that going to college was the only way that I was going to be able to get out. When the time to apply to colleges actually came, it was one of the most stressful experiences of my life because I had no one guiding me in the direction that I was supposed to go. It brought along with it a similar feeling of anxiety, something that I was very used to, but was very different. The anxiety was due to the constant wondering if I had the capability to get out from the place that I had always wanted to. Questions I often asked myself were: How am I supposed to do this? Will I be able to do this? I want to get out, I need to get out. No one in my entire family had ever strived to go to a four year institution themselves, so I had no idea how to do so either. Though I will forever consider

it one of the most stressful times of my life, it was one of the most rewarding as well. The day I was finally accepted to LMU was one of the happiest days of my life, but it is also the day that began my questioning on whether or not I would go through with it.

The thought of leaving home was the only thing on my mind throughout the summer before my freshman year of college. It seemed as if all I was ever talking about was how uncertain I was about going to college. I felt this way because I was leaving home. It wasn't because I was going to be homesick; I was ready to get out and had worked so hard to do so. The reason why I was constantly feeling uncertain of coming to LMU was because I would soon be leaving everything in my small town behind, the good and the bad. I felt as if my moving away to college meant that I was granted the ability to get out of my love/hate relationship with San Pedro, without the ability of bringing the family who I loved along with me.

Being the oldest, I felt as if by going to college I was leaving my siblings behind as they grew up figuring out the world alone. At different points in my life, I have had to take on the role of being a parent for my siblings, which is why I constantly felt guilty up to the time that I would be leaving them to come to college. I often think back to their cries during that nine year period of my life. I think of how I was there to comfort them and, all of a sudden, upon moving to college, I wouldn't be anymore. I would be getting out, escaping everything and leaving them to continue on enduring our home life. Growing up I had no escape, instead I would figure it out. I would do all my homework, essays and projects alone, because my parents often did not know how to assist me. As for my siblings, they grew up and my parents had me assist them with those things. Even though I had grown up figuring out my world alone, I did not feel like it was okay to make my siblings do the same.

As for leaving my friends behind, I was lead to believe that going to college was a selfish decision. I had no way to take them with me, and this caused me to re-evaluate my life. I thought about all the time we spent together, and how I was one of few individuals to put enough effort forth to motivate myself to make college obtainable. As for the other individuals that were just as motivated as

me, they still didn't get the chance to go to college. Why was I the lucky one? Why was I the only one who could finally get out? Get out and escape all the problems, all the mistakes?

The feeling that I was experiencing, and still experience to this day, was and is called survivor's guilt, which is a common experience witnessed within first-generation college students. According to Rebecca Covarrubias and Stephanie A. Fryberg, survivor's guilt can be defined as, "[The] experience of being the lone person to surpass the achievements of family members" (420). Even while attending LMU, I still feel these emotions every day, despite it almost being the end of my freshman year of college. Throughout this time, I have dealt with depression and anxiety, combinations that keep me questioning whether or not attending LMU was a good choice. I think back to living in San Pedro very often and compare it to my place of living today. This is when the guilt builds up and eats me alive. I left San Pedro and all of the worries that come along with it for LMU, but even then, I still cannot escape the memories and emotions.

The aspect of my life that has helped my survivor's guilt manifest into depression is the knowledge that my family is struggling back at home. Though I am out here struggling as well, it is not to the same degree that they are. Leaving my parents was hard, but having to hear how they are struggling to this day is worse; having to hear how my tuition burdens them more than their ordinary lives makes dealing with being away harder. It is something that makes me contemplate whether or not to continue on with my higher education. My education is something that is allowing me to continue my upward mobility, but by creating that upward mobility, I feel as though I'm leaving my parents to continue in a state of downward mobility because I am not there to support them or work in order to help them provide for the household.

Upward mobility, as defined by Emily Kruger Woollum, is a "primary motive for [first-generation college student] enrollment...[because it is a method of] obtain[ing] a higher standard of living and to provide financially and emotionally for future children and sibling's children" (32). As this definition states, I am constantly striving to make a better life for my family and my siblings, but in order to do that, I have to move away from my typical life with my family and friends and be on my own. I

came to LMU with the idea of being able to alleviate their problems in addition to my own, but that isn't the case. I can't go forth and do that without slightly burdening them as well.

Though I hate the feeling that my family is struggling without me, I also see it as my motivation to get out of bed in the morning and go to class when I have high periods of anxiety and depression. In the beginning, there was a period of time that I would not want to get out of bed because of my heavy guilt, but then, I realized that the only way to make my college experience worth it was by going to class and doing everything I am supposed to.

Today, I am happy with my achievements and am happy to call LMU the real home I have always wanted, but my guilty of leaving my family and friends behind still remains. Even though this is the case, I have created a family here at my new home. I have a support system who will help me reach my ultimate goals, which, in the end, will help me bring those who I have once left behind along with me in the future.

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Feeling Guilty

Mackenzie Mead

Many first-generation college students experience feelings of guilt, like survivor's guilt, "the experience of being the lone person to surpass the achievements of family members," (Covarrubias and Fryberg) or family achievement guilt, "the feelings of guilt that arise when students have more educational success than their parents or siblings" (Covarrubias). I often experience these feelings of guilt, and knowing that it is because I am a first-generation college student helps me to understand why I feel this way.

My parents both grew up in Massachusetts, in small towns next to each other, but they didn't meet until college. They both went to the University of Massachusetts, however, neither of them finished. My dad ended up moving to Northern California for work and my mom shortly followed. They got married, moved to Georgia and had my sister, then moved to San Diego and had me, and then moved back to Georgia where I went to high school. When we were in San Diego, my dad took a few more college classes here and there for work purposes, and my mom took some online classes so she could become a kindergarten aid, but neither of them have a degree.

I, on the other hand, have attended private Catholic schools since kindergarten. My dad told me that when he was in middle school and high school, he always wanted to go to the private school down the street, but was never able to. He did not like the public school system, so when my parents got married and had me and my sister, they decided that they wanted to send us both to private schools. That being said, they gave us a private elementary, middle, and high school education, which I know was not the cheapest option. They knew how expensive it would be and how much they would have to sacrifice in order to put us through school, but from the beginning, they wanted us to get a receive a better education.

It probably wasn't until high school, when I got a better understanding of money, that I realized just how much our education cost my parents. My dad likes to refer to us as "financial burdens," which is why my parents didn't have a third child. It was in high school that I started feeling guilty, mainly for spending so much of my parent's money. As I experienced this guilt, they continued telling me that this was their decision and that they wouldn't have done it any other way, but still, I felt guilty. I've seen how

much my dad works and how stressed he gets because of his job. He has switched companies too many times for me to count, and I know that all he wants to do is retire already, but can't because I have to get through college first. Even though I know they wanted this for me, I still can't help but feel guilty for everything they have sacrificed for me. I know we could have had a bigger house or taken more family vacations but that was just something my parents were willing to sacrifice.

Because of my parents' countless sacrifices, I am here today. I get to go to a school I have fallen in love with, and can't see myself anywhere else. I worked my butt off throughout high school to get my grades and G.P.A. as high as possible to aid me in getting into college, and get as many scholarships as possible. Despite everything, however, I still can't help but feel guilty for being here. I know my parents didn't get to have a complete college experience and have the chance to finish college and earn a degree. They certainly didn't get to go to a nice and fancy private university either. I feel bad that I get to go to college in paradise with the full support of my parents, when they didn't get the same opportunity. I feel like I can't even compare my experience to my sister's, who just graduated college. We are basically the complete opposite: she went to the University of Alabama, a huge public school, and got her degree in early childhood education, whereas I am studying mechanical engineering.

I feel the guilt of being able to attend a fancy university in Southern California while my parents are still in Georgia. None of us really wanted to move to Georgia because, truly, who wants to leave San Diego? Neither my parents nor I liked Georgia that much while I was in high school, and we all just wanted to move back to San Diego A.S.A.P. For me, I knew that college would be the perfect excuse for me to go back to Southern California. Ever since the first day of high school, the one thing on my mind all four years was knowing that I would be able to come back. The reason I feel so guilty being here now is that my parents are still in Georgia when I know they just want to be back out here too.

Even though my parents didn't go college, I think it was just always assumed that my sister and I would graduate high school and go to college. I don't think it was ever explicitly expressed that we had to go or that we had the option not to go. I guess putting us in private school gave us the mindset that that's just what you do, after middle school you go to high school, and after you graduate high school you

go to college. Growing up it didn't seem weird that my parents didn't religiously watch college football, or follow their college's sports teams, because they didn't really have a team to follow. But they always supported me and my sister and it was with their support that I made it to where I am today.

My parents gave up so much so my sister and I could have access to the best education. They have always supported me in everything that I do, and I know they always will. I don't think I will ever be able to express how grateful I am for all they have sacrificed for me to be where I am today. I might always feel guilty for everything they gave up for me so that I could have better opportunities than they ever had, but I hope that one day I will be able to repay them for everything they have ever done for me.

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The Silent Factor

Daniel Penuela

Imagine going through life never being noticed. It is hard for you to start a conversation, meet new people, and even order something from a restaurant. This was me growing up. I have always been a shy, reserved kid. I have never been good at anything that has to do with speaking to anyone. I do not know why I am like this. It could be genetic, which my mom explains that she was kind of shy, but never as bad as I was. Also, my brother is the complete opposite of me, so I find it hard to believe that I am reserved because of genetics alone. It could possibly be the way I was raised, but I have had a mostly happy life, and I don't remember any traumatizing experiences that had to do with speaking. It could even be some other variable I don't even know about, like a combination of both genetics and the way I was raised. I may not know why I am so quiet, but the fact remains that I have always had a constant internal struggle when it comes to talking to people.

All throughout my educational years, I would have one, maybe two good friends that would stick by me throughout my time at a certain school. Then, I would transition to a different school, I would lose touch with my friends, and we would practically become strangers again. However, it was always difficult for me to start talking to them, they would always have to make the first move. Otherwise, I would act and feel immensely awkward. Imagine how I felt when I started to be interested in and trying to talk to girls. The only good friend I had in kindergarten was introduced to me because our parents were friends. Otherwise, I am not sure if I would have had any friends and/or would have been more of a "loner." I made other friends in school, but usually because they would sit right next to me and needed someone to talk to. However, it would always take more effort than it should have to talk to them. Luckily, I got somewhat better at interacting as I transitioned from elementary to high school, but when I got to Loyola Marymount University, I feel as if I made a leap in progress.

By no means am I a "social butterfly," but I feel like I can be more open with my friends that I have now than I could ever be with any friends I had before my time at LMU. Before LMU, I would even have trouble "fitting in" to my baseball team. The one place where I should have been comfortable being myself because we were a team. We should have been able to make a strong "team bond." Instead, I would always be excluded because no one knew how to talk to me, and I

did not know how to express myself. Whenever I was on a team, I would just do what I had to, and would go home. I never felt a strong “team bond” on any team that I was on. If anything, I felt more excluded because it was always easy for my other teammates to bond with each other, and I was always left doing my own thing during practice. There would be a few people that would try to talk to me, but it would never amount to anything because I lacked skills in continuing a conversation.

Going to LMU has opened my eyes to the real connections one can make if they put themselves out there just a bit. I feel closer to my friends now than I ever did with my friends growing up, and I have been with my friends now for less than a year. They are like family to me. We can be ourselves with each other, and never worry about real judgement because we understand each other enough to never let anything come between us. While I was writing this essay with my friends, that I am blessed to have, we started talking about our own experiences before and during our time at LMU. I thought about if I never joined the First To Go Scholars Program, where would I be now. I feel like I would definitely have a harder time at college in general. I do not think I would have any friends, I would be struggling with all my classes, and I would hate everything having to do with college. By far, my friends have been the best part of college. They have been there during the best times and during the worst times, and I hope that we will all be friends even after we graduate from LMU.

It is hard for me to remember my past and feel like I was missing out on everything that made me a “normal child.” Even while writing this essay, I skipped to the best parts, so I did not have to relive the thought of missing out on the social aspect of being a kid. I always felt alone when I was out of my comfort zone. According to an article, Quiet Time, in HRMagazine, there was a study done on the types of personalities that people had. The results explain that “fifty percent” of the sample studies were introverted. It later explains that introverts and extroverts need each other to coincide in this world. They balance each other like “yin and yang.” This statistic was surprising to me because I always felt as if I was alone in this constant struggle of talking to people, I did not realize how many other people had to face similar situations to me. I am glad that I am not the only one that has to go through this, but I hope other cases are not as severe as mine was.

I still have a lot to learn about socializing before I can consider myself anywhere near a “social butterfly,” but I feel that through more of my time here at LMU, I will be able to “break out of my shell” so I can be able to continue on a conversation without feeling completely awkward. One of the hardest parts of being introverted in college is establishing my social capital. Social capital is the connections one makes with people to get themselves ahead of the game of life. According to The effect of social capital on the first -year persistence of first generation college students, by Michael Barry Duggan, the effect of social capital on not only first generation students, but all students, is very important. A strong social capital can possibly help them start off their journey on the “road to success” or even assist someone to get their dream job. One of my goals, while I am here at LMU is to establish a good social capital, so it could help me in the future to get me the job of my dreams.

In conclusion, I have been through a long, difficult journey where I have always felt alone. However, coming to college and being able to just be myself has immensely helped me create stronger bonds that I would not trade for anything in the world. If I could give some advice to any introverts that feel exactly like I did, I would say that they should try to put themselves out there because they never know what it could amount to. Being an introvert myself, I have heard this plenty of times, and I know this is easier said than done. However, putting yourself out there could be the first step to finding a group of people that you have no problem with being yourself, because that is the person you should always be when you are with others. Advice I would give to extroverts is, to give any introverts you know a chance because they may be a whole lot cooler than you initially think. Take the time to go out of your way to ask them questions or just show them you care. It might not be a speedy process, but eventually you can “pick away at their shell,” and find the real them that has been hiding there the whole time. This is what one of my best friends did to help me become more “out there,” and I am ecstatic that she never gave up on trying to talk to me or I would have a completely different college experience than the one that I am blessed to have now.

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We're Just, Like, Realizing Things

Jordyn Wedell

I distinctly remember the last day of 8th grade. It was May in Texas, 2012. It hadn't gotten too hot yet. It was strange that, after 9 years, I was about to end one of the most influential points of my life (at the time). I remember the good-bye mass, academic awards, and the loving look on my teacher's faces—some who I had known practically my whole life. My life was at St. Mary's Catholic School (SMS) in Sherman, TX. I had known nothing more. When graduation arrived, I wasn't sad. I was ready. SMS had given me all that it could, and so had I. It was time to move on, and moving on doesn't require tears or sadness. I was excited. I established myself here, but now it was time to establish myself somewhere else. And I was more than happy about where I was going.

Out of my middle school graduating class, I was the only one continuing my education at a Catholic high school. Most of my friends were going to the local public high school. I didn't think much of it at the time. I simply applied to Ursuline Academy, an all-girl's school, and got in. But, I didn't realize how much my life would change. SMS was in Sherman, where I'd spent my whole life. Ursuline was in Dallas, an hour away. I was planning on joining the rowing team, which had practices at 6 AM four days a week. I wanted to be involved, to do well, and to make good friends. As one of the promo videos for Ursuline said, "Ursuline isn't where you find your groom, it's where you find your bridesmaids." Of course I wanted to find my bridesmaids! So, I needed to take full-advantage of my opportunity, but I didn't realize how much my parents were willing to give up to make sure I could do that.

In August of 2012, I moved into an apartment in Dallas with my dad. He works in Dallas, so at the time, it never seemed like a big deal. In fact, it was extremely practical. My dad and I would live in Dallas during the week, my mom and brother stayed back in Sherman, and on the weekend, we would come home to be together. It never seemed unnecessary or out of place, but there were signs:

"You're getting a place in Dallas? Just so she can go to school?"

This was the usual response from people after my mom explained my plans for high school. One day, after another similar response, my mom expressed her frustration with this reaction:

"I'm sick of people questioning us moving you down there. I wouldn't be sending you there if I thought you were going to be a fuck up!"

I was oddly pleased at this statement, but a part of me never fully believed her. Or perhaps, now, I just don't believe it with the same gusto.

After a few years at Ursuline, I realized it wasn't just a place for leaders, but a place to ensure leaders, to ensure that you'd get into a good college. To ensure that 10 years from now, you're in the right room with the right people. I now have a word for that, specifically involving my status as a first-generation college student. While at Harvard, Anthony Abraham Jack conducted research on first-generation students and put them into two groups: the "privileged poor" and the "doubly disadvantaged." According to Jack, "The privileged poor attend private high schools or pre-college programs like Prep for Prep and A Better Chance, which help ready first-gen students for the culture shock of a wealthy campus and give them practice interacting with adults." He continues, "The doubly disadvantaged stay in local, typically distressed and segregated high schools" (Pappano). However, I wouldn't consider my family poor, but other than that, I fit the bill of the "privileged poor." SMS was a very poor, small private school. I had no knowledge of class inequality or my privilege compared to someone else's. All I knew was rusty swings and trailer-park classrooms. It was normal. At Ursuline, it was the opposite.

Everyone went to nice private middle schools, lived in the nice part of Dallas, and had a nice sister or mom who also went to Ursuline and/or a nice brother or dad who went to our brother school. It was a new world of Range Rovers and legacies, but even then, I still didn't understand where I was. I didn't realize the new people I was around, my new friends, and how our childhoods were spent so differently. I just didn't know any better.

I didn't have much of a problem fitting in. I had friends, was doing fine in my classes, and I always made sure to go back to Sherman on the weekends. But as the years went on, I saw a growing distance between myself and my old friends back home. Essentially, I was becoming "more Dallas" and "less Sherman." I came home less, saw them less. I had solid friends at school that wanted to hang out on the weekends. I had more homework and college apps. Hopefully, I was going to college somewhere out of state, maybe even outside the U.S. But the farthest my friends back home would even consider for

college was in Lubbock, TX, about 6 hours from Sherman. In their eyes, I just wasn't Sherman enough anymore. I was "border living" (Quintero). It's when you're living in the spheres of two separate identities, but never fully in one or the other. Sometimes these borders are physical, but sometimes they're as abstract as black versus white. For me, I felt like I belonged in Dallas, despite slight reminders of my small-town status, but when I came back home, I just felt ostracized. It was made pertinent to me that I wasn't the same as them, even though I'd spent 14 years of my life there.

The same divergence was happening with my family. Just like I saw my Sherman friends less and less on the weekends, the less I saw my mom and brother as well. And after I got my car and started driving myself everywhere, I hardly ever saw my dad. The first two years of high school, he drove me to rowing, picked me up from school, and we had dinner practically every night. Now, I hardly saw him for even five minutes. I would certainly say this situation helped me grow up quickly and have an easier transition to college, but honestly, the repercussions are still being played out.

Was this situation the best for my family? Perhaps for me, education-wise, it was...I really didn't think much of it as it was happening. It was just how life was progressing and I didn't question it. It didn't seem necessary to question it. Again, I was ready to move on to the next thing, and perhaps I should've slowed down a bit.

Now that I am going to college in Los Angeles, I regret not spending more time with them. I regret not being around more. Because, you see, my life is full-speed ahead at this point (and maybe, since high school, it always has been). At LMU, I'm going, going, going. I may not come back home this summer, or any other summer. After graduation, who knows where I'm headed. But I know my parents won't tell me to come back. They never would. Even if they wanted me to. Because, the thing is, they don't want me to stick around. In high school, they wanted me to go to Ursuline and run with the "rich kid" crowd. They wanted me to run around Dallas with my friends and experience the world. And now, they want me to stay at LMU, a few states away, so I can continue that independence. This is so that I can be my own person and do better than they did. They want me to be independent, strong, and confident.

All because they love me. All because they claim they know I'm not going to be a fuck up. I just never realized that that process started in 9th grade, while for many others it began last fall.

I'm only now appreciating what they did for me. I can only now imagine how hard it was for them to split up like that—Sherman versus Dallas. For them to put me in the right schools while simultaneously forcing us to change our life...it is a lot. Sure, I had my own challenges as well. It's not like the transition was effortless. I just didn't know any better. I didn't have words for my experience, for my feelings, for my situation. But, adding "first-gen" to my vocabulary is a step in the right direction.

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A Work in Progress

Andrei Pineda

I was born in the city of West Hollywood. We lived in an apartment, and I think it was pink as far as I know. I don't remember anything about our time there, as we had only lived there until I was about two. My first memories are from when we moved into our new home in Hawthorne, but even that is just hazy spots about a moving truck at night. Looking back now, I find it ironic that the place I call my second home now was only 8 miles away, and I had no idea it existed, let alone that I'd end up returning. By the time we left Hawthorne for the San Fernando Valley when I was 7, my family had already established that I was "the one that's going to be really smart." Those expectations have followed me ever since.

In hindsight, and luckily, school has never been hard for me. I didn't receive my first "B" until 7th grade, and now, I laugh now at how much of a failure I thought I was at the time. I've always known, probably as much as everyone else in my family does, that I can make it if I really set myself on the right path. My real problem was, and continues to be, becoming my own person. When people would ask me where I wanted to go for college, my response was always the same: Somewhere far enough where I would have to live there, but not too far so that I could go home whenever I wanted. It gave off the vibe that I wanted to leave home but at the same time didn't. That was a contradiction, and only one of them was ever really true. I never really wanted to leave home. In my mind, my definition of a "normal" circumstance was, go to school 15 minutes from my house and stay at home a few more years. But, I couldn't do that. That was too "easy." Everyone had embedded the idea into my head that it'd be a very bad thing if I went to my home university. And, ultimately, I agreed with them. According to what I grew up hearing, college is all about branching away from the safety of home and finding yourself. If that's really what it's about, then this is certainly a work in progress for me.

What I'm trying to get across here is that I feel as though my life has amounted to a revolving door of me trying to prove to myself that I'm going to do college the "right" way. The only problem is that I'm not making the greatest effort to actually do that, and I don't understand why. I know what I "should" do. I "should" get more involved, I "should" get an on-campus job and start providing for myself, and I "should" stop going home. That last one really gets me. I feel like I could never do that, and

in my world, and the way I was raised, I shouldn't do that. My parents raised me and have provided for me my whole life. I miss them dearly, and I know they miss me too. That's why I talk to my mom three times a day, and make sure to go visit them as often as I can. They've done so much for me, so how am I supposed to just leave them out in the cold like that? I know that I could go about my day just fine only talking to my parents once. But I know that once I do that, the first thing my mom is going to say when she answers the phone is, "You haven't called me all day, did you forget about your mother?" She may be joking, but I can sense the underlying hurt in her voice. Because of the privilege and opportunities they've provided for me, talking and seeing them as much as I can is the least I can do.

It all connects back to the way I was raised. I have an extremely strict moral code that I follow on a daily basis. I don't do drugs, I don't drink, I don't party—I don't do anything that would potentially disappoint my parents if they found out. The funny part is that they joke and assume I do some of those things anyways. To me it's just never been worth it, or even appealing. I don't know if I'm doing something wrong though, and I always get the vibe from others that I'm missing something. This is where being first-gen comes into play because I don't have anybody to fall back on to tell me if these feelings I'm experiencing are expected or unusual. A feeling that constantly follows me is my survivor's guilt. Survivor's guilt is when you feel as though you do not deserve something over someone else. You'd typically see it in the survivors of a natural disaster, for obvious reasons. In a Psychiatry Research journal, it's noted that the feeling of survivor's guilt can cause maladaptive behavior in a person. Maladaptive behavior is "one's preventative urge to adapt to a new environment that inhibits their ability to adjust to a situation" (Carmassi). That's exactly what I was faced the first day of living at LMU. I felt like I just didn't belong. Everyone around me was so ready and excited, and not to mention, clearly so much more intelligent than I am. I'd never been around so many advanced minds before, and I couldn't help but feel that I wasn't advanced or ready enough. I'm just a kid from the too hot, too humid, too boring valley. I didn't deserve to be living this uberly privileged life while my family stayed back at home. I felt like they needed me. My sister would always ask for help on her math homework, and I really never minded helping around the house when asked. My parents missed me, and I felt like I had

betrayed my family. I felt like I left them. I knew I had to live with this new reality, though, but I wanted to convince myself that I was only here to do what I had to do, and I wouldn't do anything that suggested I came here for a better life. On the contrary, I'm here to make the lives of those who have got me to this point better. So, I just shut myself in. If I wasn't in class or eating food, I was in my room with no interest in participating in anything, no matter how many times I was asked.

Those weren't the only issues however, and I was shocked to learn soon enough that I wasn't the only one who experienced these feelings. According to the College Student Journal, social integration and homesickness are only some of the obstacles that new college students come across, particularly those being the first in their family to attend (Woosley). Academic integration and preparation were struggles I also faced. I didn't know what college classes would be like besides what I saw in the movies, and all that told me was that they were in big lecture halls. I wasn't prepared for the workload that would be coming my way, nor was I ready for the implied knowledge that I was apparently supposed to know. Never had I heard of office hours or been expected to know that there was homework without being told. I didn't know how the class selection process worked or that I could rent textbooks that I need from the school library. I still wouldn't know much about those things now if it wasn't for First To Go (FTG).

FTG has provided me with a plethora of resources that have helped me survive my first semester of college, and now that I'm nearing the end of my second semester, I don't know what I would have done without it. The program has taught me so much about how to handle various situations that I've already found myself in. Most importantly, though, I have learned that I am not alone. I have peers all around me who have experienced and are still experiencing the same feelings as me, and I've learned from them as well. Now I'm able to use everything I've learned to help others who are in need of the same help. I'd like to help people realize just as I did that they worked hard and belong wherever they end up, and that nobody can take that from them. I know I'm far from the end, and I definitely haven't mastered anything. There's still plenty for me to learn about the world around me, what I'm doing, and who I am. But, for a work in progress from the little 'ole valley, I'd say I'm doing pretty well for myself.

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Who Am I?

Patrick Pozon

My story is quite different than those usually credited with the label of “first-generation.” I did not grow up in a violent neighborhood with nights riddled with sirens and gunshots. I did not have to translate for my parents due to a language barrier. I did not go hungry at times because there was no food in the house. However, I am still considered “first-generation.” This is a story about a person who discovers and develops himself into one who stands in solidarity with and as a first-generation college student.

I was born on March 26, 1998 to my two loving parents who decided to settle in a little, quiet suburban area on the west side of Los Angeles. We lived comfortably enough. There was enough money to have food in the house, give their two sons a private education, and even have a few vacations now and then. However, I would have not have used “privilege” to describe myself. My mother, a Chinese immigrant, and my father, a Filipino immigrant, were not able to finish their college education, as setting up a family became their priority. They understood the struggle of not having money, so all of their hard work was spent trying to give my brother and me a better life than they had.

As the years went by, the issue of money started to be more prevalent in my parents’ conversations. It did not help that my brother developed a hobby that cost a lot of money and was seemingly useless in relation to the future. It was during this time that I adopted my role as the “good” child, the one who focused on doing the things that would make his parents happy. This was the persona I would keep throughout my time in middle school all the way to high school. Getting into my top choice for high school was priority, so the majority of my activities were mostly preparation for the future. Fortunately, my brother had paved the path for me, so my parents pushed me along this predetermined path, understanding that this was the way to success. High school was quite similar in that I knew the path to the next major goal in my life, which would be to go to college, and I participated in things I knew would help me stand out in the competition. Whether it was taking AP courses, joining different clubs, or participating on the robotics team, these activities were done to boost my resume and appeal to colleges.

Now at this point, you might be thinking, “Wow, this kid had his life together.” That is precisely my point. I had so many resources available to me that made every major transition in my life very smooth and comprehensible. I did not question whether I would go to high school, nor whether I would go to college. I knew what I had to do to every step of the way to be successful for the future. Yet, it would not be until I joined the First-To-Go community this year that I learned...how much privilege I had throughout my life...on the flip side, how certain experiences still allowed me to stand beside my peers as a first-generation college student.

What I failed to realize early on was that I had a plethora of what they call “cultural and social capital.” Cultural capital is defined as having assets that give us social mobility, while social capital is attributed as the network of groups or people that helps us receive such assets. According to the Journal of Adolescent Research, Laura Nichols describes how “students with parents with SC [some college] also had access to ‘on hand’ social capital” while first-generation college students talked about getting the same experiences without the benefit of social capital. In relation to my own life, my brother acted as the social capital that gave me the cultural capital needed to be successful at school since he paved the way before me. All of my aunts went to top notch colleges and universities so they were able to give my parents, and in turn me, various tips about what to plan for in the time between now and graduation, such as finding internships. Lastly, by being given a private school education, I was able to take college level courses that prepared me for the courses I am taking now.

Taking into account all of the social and cultural capital I had received throughout my life, I honestly felt a bit removed from the FTG community at first. Hearing about the lives and experiences of some of my peers led me at times to feel that I did not belong there, almost in a sense that I felt like I should not be allowed to stand alongside them because I had led an easier life. One could almost call it an inverse imposter syndrome, where my sense of fraud was not from my achievements but from a lack of not having experienced what I felt was inherently “first-generation.” However, throughout my studies, I realized that I still hold some attributes of

a “first-generation” student and have some experiences in my life that helps me resonate with the ideology and mission of our community.

One such attribute that continues to drive me forward to this day is the trust and belief that my parents have in me that I will do my best while also doing what makes me happy. I believe what makes the parents of first-generation students unique is that they support us indirectly, always making sure that we know that they’ll always support us, but keeping a hands-off approach at the same time. I cannot help but think about all the sacrifices my parents have made to give me a college education, so I try my best every day to make my dreams come true, and in turn, fulfill my parents’ dreams for them. This way, I can give back to them for all those years of love and dedication. However, there were also others. Others that were loyal to me and, in hindsight, opened my eyes to my own privilege and to the struggles of those around me. There is specifically one I wish to talk about. He would be one of my first and closest high school friends. What he gave me was friendship in a time of loneliness, but what is more important is that he gave me a cleansing, a cleansing from the stereotypes of the world and the vision to see what is really there. He was even lower than me in terms of the socioeconomic spectrum but still had the same mental aptitude and drive as myself. What I learned was that ability and drive is not limited by social class but by the individual. Such is the fact that there are many students who fall under the label of first-generation that share similar backgrounds to my friend, but, like him, continue to push forward no matter what is in their way.

With the culmination of all of these ideas, I hope to continue acting in support of the First-To-Go community as one who shares similar experiences, but also one who can use his privilege to create more awareness not only throughout the LMU campus, but also to other universities. There have been too many instances where I have stated “FTG” to the blank stare of another and even stating “First-To-Go” produces the same look. There are also first-generation students on campus who do not know of the amazing resources that wait for them there. It is also quite fulfilling to explain the program to someone with a better-off background

and not receive a snub but instead a genuine remark of interest. As an individual who just adopted this brand this school year, I can easily say that joining this group was one of the best decisions of my life. Not only did I find an amazing group of people who I can learn and grow with, but I also found life-long connections and friends. I would not change this experience for the world.

So who am I? My name is Patrick Pozon: freshman Mechanical Engineering major, Class of 2020, First To Go Scholar...a proud first-generation college student.

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Life as an Imposter

Jazmin Quezada

Writing this paper caused me difficulties, not because I was unsure of writing this, but because there was so much I want to say, and no way of phrasing it. Maybe because I do not want to disappoint anyone who might read this, or maybe because I am not yet willing to open-up the thoughts and feeling that are still vulnerable inside me. I spent many nights and days trying to figure out how to explain something I still have no control over.

Walking into a new campus and beginning a new life has been difficult and a struggle. Well, my whole life has been. I have something called imposter syndrome that even just thinking about it makes me cry uncontrollably. My first semester in college broke me down and grinded me into so many little pieces. I felt like I didn't belong within this society and I sadly inform that is how I feel any place I go. Growing up in a family of nine I never felt like I was a part of them.

I was always quiet, timid, and shy. I always ran to my room in search of my rag doll because I needed someone to hug me. I needed to feel like I belonged, and hugging my rag doll in a red and green dress was the only place I felt okay. Daily, I question my worth and self being. Daily, I fight those inner thoughts of mine that tear and rotten my soul. Walking with my family or my friends, I always felt ignored and looked down upon. I remember crying to my mom telling her: "Why am I not tall like everyone else? Why am I the shortest of seven children?" I used to believe that being 4'11" made people see me like a joke. Well I shouldn't say I used to, because sadly, I still say that sometimes. I feel inferior to everyone around me.

I hate feeling the way I do. I hate having to rethink my life. I hate looking at the mirror and asking: "What is wrong with me?" I hate running into my bed and hiding under the sheets or underneath the bed. That uncomfortable feeling and those thoughts that kill me day after day force me into a 24/7 work mode machine. I push those negative thoughts and lock them deep inside me, burning the key away.

Years to come, I dedicated myself to my education and studies. I forced myself to get A's in all my classes, graduate as the valedictorian, and everything from there soared high and above. From my hard work and dedication, I was placed in all honors courses and was recommended to take AP courses in many areas of studies. Year after year, I was able to maintain a high GPA and stay within the top 20 percent of my class. I formed part of UCLA's writing foundation program, Charles Drew University

Partnership for Progress, where I won second place for a project I made on self-esteem. I was also a part of many clubs and activities on campus; one of them being a particular pride of mine: the moment my high school robotics team won first place in Raytheon's math challenge and ranked in the top 20 for the First Robotics Completion in Long Beach. I was able to compete in the LAUSD science fair and during my junior and senior year, I conducted Biomedical research at the Children's Hospital Los Angeles, where I focused on identifying transgenes in CXCR4A Mutant Zebrafish. During my senior year, I was awarded many prestigious scholarships such as the Kaiser Permanente Bill Coggins Leadership Award where I was presented with a City of Los Angeles Award for my dedication and involvement in my community. I remember that day clearly, during the scholarship ceremony the main coordinator brought along with her one of those huge scholarship checks as shown on TV after one has won the lottery. Before that day, I always thought, "I will never have one of those," but here I was, proving that mentality wrong. Up to this day, my mom hangs that scholarship check in her room. As I kept pushing forward, I was also titled as a Hispanic Scholarship Fund Leadership Scholar, and because of this organization, I am glad to form a part of a very amazing community. However, there is one particular award I was scared and afraid of applying to: The Gates Millennium Scholarship. I remember that particular December when I mentioned the scholarship to my mom:

"Tu nunca sabes si te la vas a ganar"

"Pero son 8 ensayos," I said looking down at the floor.

"8 ensayos que valen la pena," she said.

So I wrote them. I did those 8 essays all while having my older sister revise them. I remember being around a group of friends who proudly mentioned having a mentor revise their essays and so forth, and with each resource I didn't have access to, I plagued myself by thinking, "Why did I even apply?" Dreadful weeks passed until I received an email from the Gates Scholarship saying to open a new portal while everyone else who applied received a different email. And, again, I asked myself, "Why is everyone else receiving an email that is different than mine?"

I was confused and scared. I asked everyone who applied if they have received the same email as I, but no one did. Nothing, no one, answered those questions until I read the white envelope with my name on it. I was named a finalist and I was shocked. All I could say was, "They made a mistake, there is no possibility of me being a finalist." Those thoughts I locked up deep inside years ago resurrected in that moment, drowning my brain in acid. And as my brain drowned, I was faced with the honor of being selected as a Gates Millennium Scholar. A scholar whose sister, on the same day I received my acceptance, endured a theft experience, and whose mom received a letter saying that we were denied the financial support for two surgeries my younger sister had that same year. So, as you can assume, I never gave myself time to realize I just won a full ride scholarship to any institution of my choice. Instead, I let the acid dissolve deeper inside of me. My presumed happiness transformed into that same familiar pattern of questioning, "How can I, a short little girl from Gardena, full of doubt, be a Gates Millennium Scholar?"

According to Mary Gardner, imposter syndrome is the feeling of phoniness in oneself who doubts their abilities by believing they are not "intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement" because they feel their success is a mistake (Gardner, 2016). I have to admit my family does not know I have imposter syndrome because I am afraid of them not feeling proud of their little girl. I was afraid of going back to my high school because they have high expectations that I feel I will never achieve in my life. I feel like an imposter who has lied to them, and being in college has made it twice as hard because it is difficult to believe and hear individuals say that I am good enough and that I can do it. To my dissolving mind, that is not true. I have days where I feel like a failure and just wrap myself in bed.

"I am just not good enough," I tell myself.

(I am sad to inform you that imposter syndrome is something that never goes away and the only way to control it is to just talk about it.)

Imposter syndrome is predominant in first-generation minority students who are from a low socioeconomic status. This 'syndrome' "tends to endorse lower self-esteem, lower academic self-

efficacy greater anxiety and fear of academic failure” (McGregor et al., 1991). As first-generation college students, we are pressured to succeed in an environment where we are expected to fail. Being first-generation college students, we often do not have that support nor guidance from our own parents or family members because they lack that specific college experience. According to Bridgette J. Peteet, author of “Predictors of Imposter Phenomenon Among Talented Ethnic Minority Undergraduate Students,” we tend to feel pressured, lost, unsure, and constantly trying to reach everyone’s expectations, while, in contrast, students who do not experience a sense of culture shock tend to have “higher grades, academic self- concepts, and psychological functioning.”

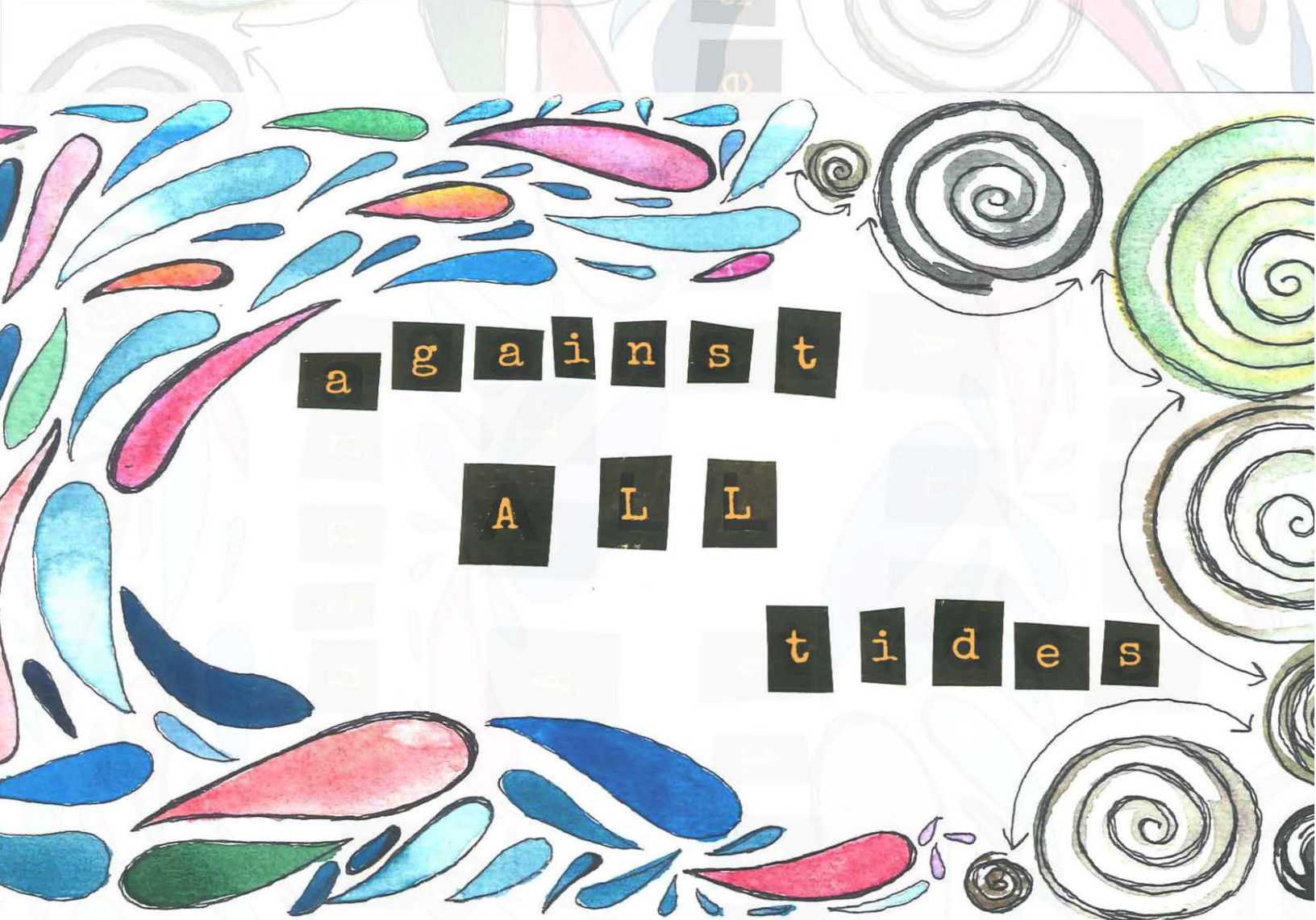
Sometimes, I feel that I do not deserve anything I have achieved because my older siblings never had the opportunities I have now. My older sister, who I see as my second mom, was awarded an athletic scholarship to the University of Arizona, but did not attend due to a lack of college information. My grandparents even expect me to fail because, out of my three eldest siblings, no one has graduated from college. I remember the day before I moved in to college, a relative of mine said, “You better finish.” So, it continues. While to myself I am that imposter, that little one travesing alone in life, to others I am Nobel Prize worthy. Even if I will never see it that way, I guess it is up to me to figure out what they see in me.

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Being Heard

Jason Muñoz

My mother, Maribel, and my father, Pedro, are from a small town in Mexico called Aguililla. Aguililla was, and still is, the kind of town where everyone knows each other. It's the kind of town where parents have many children because they need more hands to work; it's the kind of town where children look forward to school because it serves as a break from their part in their family's *negocio*. It's the kind of town where most people are stuck in a cycle; they live and die working and their children go on to do as their parents did. Few people make it out of there.

My parents met when my mom was thirteen and my dad was nineteen, not exactly normal by today's standards, but hardly odd where they came from. They assure me, too, that they waited until my mom was 18 to get married and have sex. When I was younger, I would often beg my parents to tell me stories *de cuando eran chiquitos*. There are plenty of good stories, despite the bleak prospects many people from Aguililla faced, they had joy in their lives alongside their hard work. Everyone in town had family, and that's what was most important to them.

That's why when my parents decided to start a family, they started it in the United States of America. They didn't do it legally though, they didn't have time for that. To some, this might come as inexcusable, but I see why they did it, they had to. They wanted a family, but it wasn't enough just to have someone carry on their name. They wanted better for their children, and who doesn't? They wanted opportunity, they wanted education, they wanted to give their children better lives. It was too late for my parents, for they weren't exactly born with odds in their favor. Their children wouldn't have all the advantages in the world, but they would have more than they did. This was the best they could do, and they felt obligated to do so. They came here illegally, but I don't fault them for what they did.

So, the same year my parents were married, they came to the United States with tourist visas. Only, they weren't here to see the sights, they were here to lay down roots. They didn't have more than five-thousand dollars saved up when they came over. They did not speak English and didn't have much of a plan, either. They were leaving their entire lives behind them, but they did it because they had to. It wasn't external pressure that spurred this desire; it was a motivation that came from within. Motivation

to do better by their children, and a deep belief that they could do better than spending their lives in Aguililla and continuing the cycle of stagnation.

They settled in Redwood City, California. The two of them and soon, my eldest sister Keiry, would start their new lives in a studio apartment. It wasn't nice, and times weren't easy, but it was a start. Luckily, they weren't entirely alone. My tía, Rosa, had immigrated legally through a loophole several years earlier. She and her husband, Gerónimo, taught them what little they knew about America; they guided my parents to join them in Redwood City. Consequently, Rosa and my mother worked together to raise their children, and my tíos introduced my parents to pizza.

My father's first job was at a co-op market in Redwood City. My father is a brilliant man. He went through a year of higher education in Mexico, but had to drop out because he could not afford tuition. Still, I maintain that he can fix anything; he has a natural talent of figuring out machines and solving problems. Despite his sharp mind, and the potential he held within, he worked as a bag boy. He did this because it was the work that was available; he never considered himself too good to accept a job he needed. He's much too talented a man for a job like that, but his willingness to take the work he could get is a testament to his recognition of the importance of taking the opportunities he could. More than that, it shows humility and resilience. For a while, my father's job as a bag boy was the only financial support my fledgling family had.

Eventually, he would make more. His diligent work ethic would lead to his promotion to assistant manager, quite a feat for someone that had only just begun to learn English.

My mother, though, is the hardest working person I've ever known. She did not work at first, but when she realized that my father's salary would not be enough to put our family where she wanted us to be, so began to do so. Job prospects, however, are not great for an undocumented woman of color who does not speak English. But that didn't stop my mother. She found work as a housecleaner, self-employed and paid under the table. She started off doing only one house a day, working slowly. But she wasn't making enough money; so, she innovated. She began doing more houses a day, working harder and more quickly. Her fantastic work ethic and personable qualities earned her recommendations and her

business grew. However, unlike many small business owners, she could never afford to take herself out of the work place. To this day, she continues to work on her hands and knees, often for 12 hours a day, in order to make the money she needs to support her family.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. My parents worked hard, harder than I've ever had to work, but that wasn't enough for them to attain their goals. So, they saved and they sacrificed too. When my mother was still pregnant with Keiry she had to walk to a free clinic to receive health care. As her stomach swelled, so did her feet, but she continued to walk miles to ensure that my sister would be born healthy. During my childhood, she would often tell me stories about a Burger King she would walk by on her way to the clinic; my mother loved burgers, but she never once stopped to buy one. Back then, a Whopper was only a dollar, but she couldn't even spare that much. She would often tell me about how after paying the rent, only twenty dollars remained of my father's pay check. That was twenty dollars for an entire month's worth of food, never mind things like toiletries, clothes, or the slightest luxury. Still, my parents stretched that money as wide as it would go. Most nights were rice and beans for dinner; Whoppers were reserved for dreams.

When my mother began working, things got a little bit better. My mother would also often tell me the story of what she spent her first pay check she ever received as a house cleaner on: a dress for Keiry from Kids R Us. To this day, she still remembers the price, only \$24.99. But she'll never forget the feeling of pride she felt being able to use her hard work to do right by her daughter, and since, hasn't stopped working hard to ensure that she can continue to do so.

They started to make progress. They never stopped saving, they never splurged, they never gave up. Three years after Keiry was born, my second sister, Daisy, was born. My mother's business continued to grow and my father received the promotion I mentioned earlier. Things were slowly getting better. Money was a little more flexible, so they moved into a two-bedroom apartment. Six years passed. Six years of even harder work, and yes, six more years of saving. In those six years, though, my parents were deported. Being who they are, though, they promptly crossed back across the border to reunite with their children, hardly missing a day of their lives. I'll never feel the need to justify this violation of the

law: Splitting up families is inhumane. And despite their experiences, they were tenacious. In those six years, they spared themselves every expense they could, they were strong and they were selfless. In those six years, Keiry and Daisy would receive an education already of much higher quality than their parents had received. In those six years, the Muñoz family was beginning to escape the cycle.

Finally, six years after Daisy was born, I was born. Our family had finally outgrown Redwood City. Nine years of saving had paid off, and we could afford the down payment on a three-bedroom apartment in Sunnyvale. Five years later, we would outgrow that house too, and move to a new house in Cupertino—just in time for me to start school at one of the best public school districts in California.

I'm in college now. At the time I'm writing this, I'm only a freshman, but, since you're reading this, that also means I'm a published author. I might sound proud, and that's because I am. I'm proud of myself, but even more so, I'm proud of my parents. And part of the reason I'm telling you this story is because I want you to be proud of my parents too. But more than that, I'm telling you this story because I want to bring awareness to voice and silence, and the humanity that voice and representation are tied to.

In the field of communication studies, we talk a lot about voice—who has a voice, and who doesn't. In Phillip Wander's (2009) article, "The third persona: An ideological turn in rhetorical theory," Wander describes the third persona. The third persona is the party that does not have a voice, the third persona is the party that does not have the power to join the discourse, the third persona is talked about, but not talked to; the third persona is "negated."

My parents, and really, most immigrants in America, are negated. The mainstream media talks about people like my parents, calling them "illegal." That's the dominant discourse in our country, and I believe that's because that's the only discourse concerning undocumented immigrants in the country. Stories from real people serve to humanize them and their struggles; the problem for undocumented immigrants, and so many others, is that they aren't given a platform to tell their stories. Voice is tied to status and education, two things that immigrants are not likely to attain.

But, I do have a platform and I do have a voice. Kreitler defines survivor's guilt as, "the mental condition resulting from the appraisal that a person is guilty by the mere fact of having survived a traumatic event whereas others did not" (79). Although originally coined to refer to people who outlive their parents, the term's usage has been adapted to more situations. In the context of first-generation college students, many of us feel that we are unworthy of the opportunities given to us when our parents did not have the same access to the education that we have. In many cases, specifically my own, my guilt stemmed from a feeling that I was no more entitled to the education and upbringing that I was given than my parents were. In truth, I'm not. But it's not that I'm not entitled to the opportunities I've been given, it's that my parents should have been entitled to so much more.

I, however, have since realized that there is no need for this guilt. My parents always knew that they would not be able to completely escape the circumstances of their birth. But they had bigger dreams in mind; they dreamed of a better life for their children. They dreamed of being able to raise their children in an environment where they wouldn't be afraid to dream, and that's what they gave me and my siblings.

At times, my guilt does creep back in, but I don't let it take hold. Because I know that this is that my parents want, I know they could not be prouder and they could not be happier. I refuse to bemoan the injustices my parents were faced with, instead, I endeavor to make the most of the opportunity they have given me and use my privilege to make a difference. Whether that difference is giving voice to my parents and their story, or whether it's pursuing the career of my dreams, I know that my hard work is the best way to squash my guilt. Living my life to its fullest is the best way to honor their sacrifice.

This is only one story, but it takes only one story to challenge the dominant discourse. It only takes one story to raise the possibility that a group is not as simple as we tend to think it is. One story, one voice, challenges listeners to think, and every position is better informed when its owner has been forced to rationalize it. With that, I invite you to join the discourse, knowing one more side of the story.

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"Us Against the World"

Jasmine Segovia

“Us Against the World”-Coldplay

Cutting all ties with my father was not an easy task to do. When I was thirteen my parents separated, and moving 365 miles away from my father was not the most ideal situation to maintain a relationship. On June 30th 2011, I moved with my mom from Phoenix, Arizona to Los Angeles, California. On that day, the world I had loved was swept away. Going forward, I would have to solely rely on my mother, and she and I would become our own little family--together experiencing the worst aspects of life, but nevertheless, able to find glimpses of hope, faith, and love in our journey together.

Nobody said it was easy
It's such a shame for us to part
Nobody said it was easy
No one ever said it would be this hard
(The Scientist-Coldplay)

As we drove back to LA, in the midst of the desert, I began to think. I had no idea how my and my mother's life would play out--we had nowhere to stay but my grandma's house, my mother had no job, and I would be attending a new school. I thought about what happened between my parents. Did I ever notice a change in my parents relationship? Was anything my fault? I knew things would not be the same between my parents, but I had no clue how much my life would be affected by their decision. For the first time, I would have to experience the real world: a world that wasn't sheltered by my parents. I was forced to grow up at a young age, having to think about financial issues and my mother's job. I learned to live without small luxuries, like my ballet and piano lessons, in order for us to get by. The two of us had to start from scratch, having left everything and all of our possessions, moving only what we felt was a necessity.

Tears stream down your face
When you lose something you cannot replace
(Fix You-Coldplay)

After that, my father and I did not maintain a good relationship. Till this day we do not communicate, and the last time I saw him was two years ago. Despite having lost a parent in this process, I gained a best friend. My mother and I have developed the most beautiful, authentic, and respectful relationship. In developing a new life together, we experienced all kinds of hardships

that have just served to strengthen our bond. These hardships included the uncomfortable places we were forced to live in. We lived with my grandma, rented a room where we were eventually robbed, and lived in a garage. The place I grew up the most was in the garage—we lived there for 5 years. To paint a picture, this garage was just a room divided by a single wall. It created a kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and we did not have a laundry room. It was small. I shared a room with my mother, and never invited people over because I felt too ashamed of how we lived. We could have found better places, but between school tuition and rent, my mother prioritized putting me in a good school because of how much she values education. I would complain a lot about our situation, but I never stopped appreciating the fact that I at least had a roof over my head and somewhere I could call home.

Life goes on, it gets so heavy
(Paradise-Coldplay)

My mom worked long hours. The only times we saw each other were in the morning before she dropped me off at school, late at night, and on weekends. I had to learn to be okay with being alone for long hours and carpooling with friends for school events I had to do. Throughout my four years in high school, I would take the bus to soccer practice and carpool with a friend after to wait for my mom at her house until late at night. It was exhausting to always have to ask for favors because my mom could not pick me up, and saddening when my mom couldn't watch any of my soccer games. But in my heart I knew that we were both doing our best. After all, we were a team. She would work, and I would go to school, trying my best to succeed so that she would see her hard work pay off.

So how come things move on?
How come cars don't slow?
When it feels like the end of the world
When I should but I can't let you go
(Everglow-Coldplay)

Above all else, our greatest hardship was learning to adapt to a life with just the two of us. My mother was still processing her separation, and I was still learning to accept my dad's absence. I cannot explain how difficult, heartbreaking, and challenging it is to process that. I have cried countless times, and miss him everyday. It also did not help that losing my father was a constant reminder at school. At

honor assemblies, soccer games, father-daughter dances, and even graduation, I saw all my friends being hugged by their fathers.

I just got lost
Every river that I tried to cross
Every door I ever tried was locked
(Lost-Coldplay)

This change affected me greatly at school because I lost my motivation to keep studying. I had to leave my friends, and my personal problems were beginning to take over. I was depressed for a while and saw no point in studying for tests that would not solve my destroyed home. I was stuck in this dark hole, feeling suffocated by my own thoughts. But as days passed by, I began to adapt more to my new home, and things began to improve. Slowly but surely, I was able to find steps to climb out of that hole. I realized that by sulking over my parents separation, I was wasting what was left of my childhood. So, I began to improve myself and appreciate my mother, the only parent that cared. And that is where my hard work and determination began. I pulled myself together and began getting straight A's, I kept myself busy through community service, and joined other clubs. I began to grow closer to my mom, and through that, I learned more about her than I had known in my previous thirteen years of living with her.

Turn your magic on, to me she'd say
Everything you want's a dream away
Under this pressure, under this weight
We are diamonds taking shape
(Adventure for a Lifetime-Coldplay)

I saw my mom as my source of inspiration and love. She stayed with me through my hardest times and she has always helped me see the positive aspects of negative situations. She allowed me to see that because of her and my father's separation, I was able to appreciate the home that I have, the friendships, and above all else, her. I have memories over debating on whether it was laundry day or not, going to zumba classes, and singing to songs in the car. We have developed a beautiful relationship that is especially built on trust. We can talk to each other about everything and we are always open to each other. I honestly cannot express my love for her because she is one of the many reasons that I try so hard in my life and give 100% to all that I do. I pray everyday for her because she is the only parent I

have left and I do not know what I would do without her. My mother was the main person who motivated me to attend college. She wanted the best for me, and that was the next step towards achieving a better life.

So you don't know where you're going, and you wanna talk
(Talk-Coldplay)

During the college application process was the first time I had heard of the term "first-generation," which meant that I did not have parents who attended a four year university or received a bachelor's degree. This is not uncommon because "half of Latino undergraduates are also first-generation college-goers" (Nuñez and Sansone). I had no idea what college entailed or whether or not I would succeed. No one in my family had ever gone to college before, and I felt that I wouldn't belong there. I did not understand how I was able to make it in college despite my identity as first generation student. I felt survivor's guilt and kept asking myself "Why should I succeed when they have failed?" and "Why should I survive when I didn't help them enough so that they could succeed?" (Tate). Then I learned that students could live on campus and I thought that could be an amazing experience because I could really get the opportunity to branch out and really learn to become independent. Yet, I realized that I could not afford it, nor did I want leave my mom alone. I do not think I could possibly endure the pain of moving away and picture her arriving to a lonely house at night.

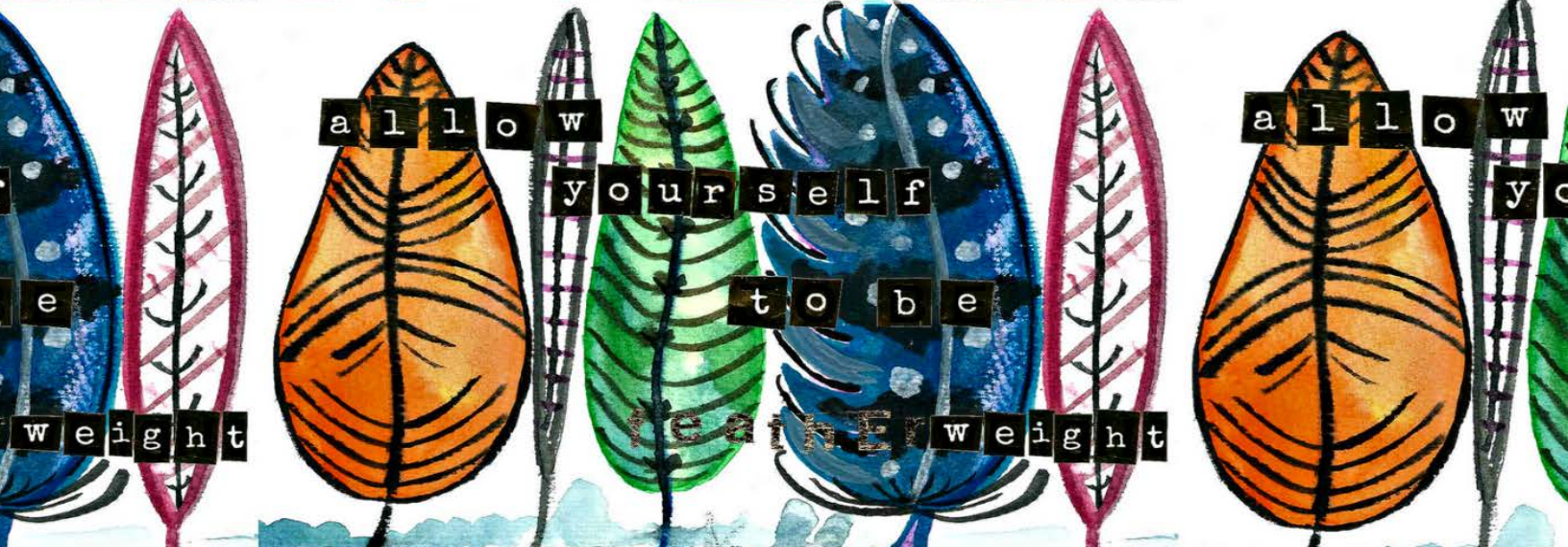
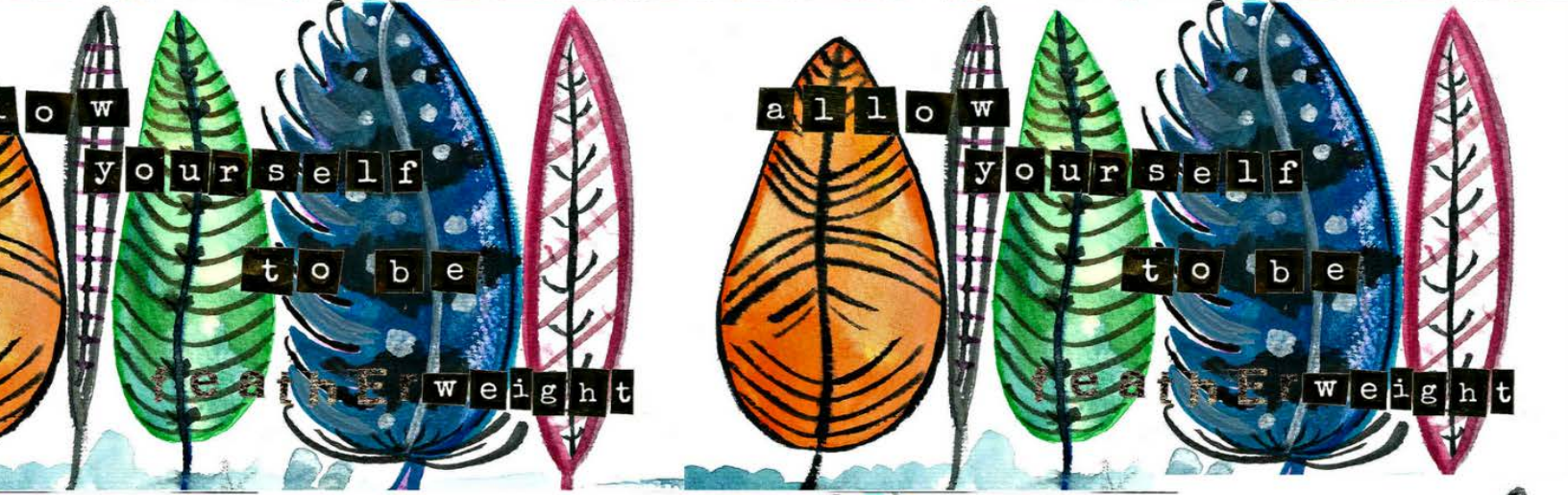
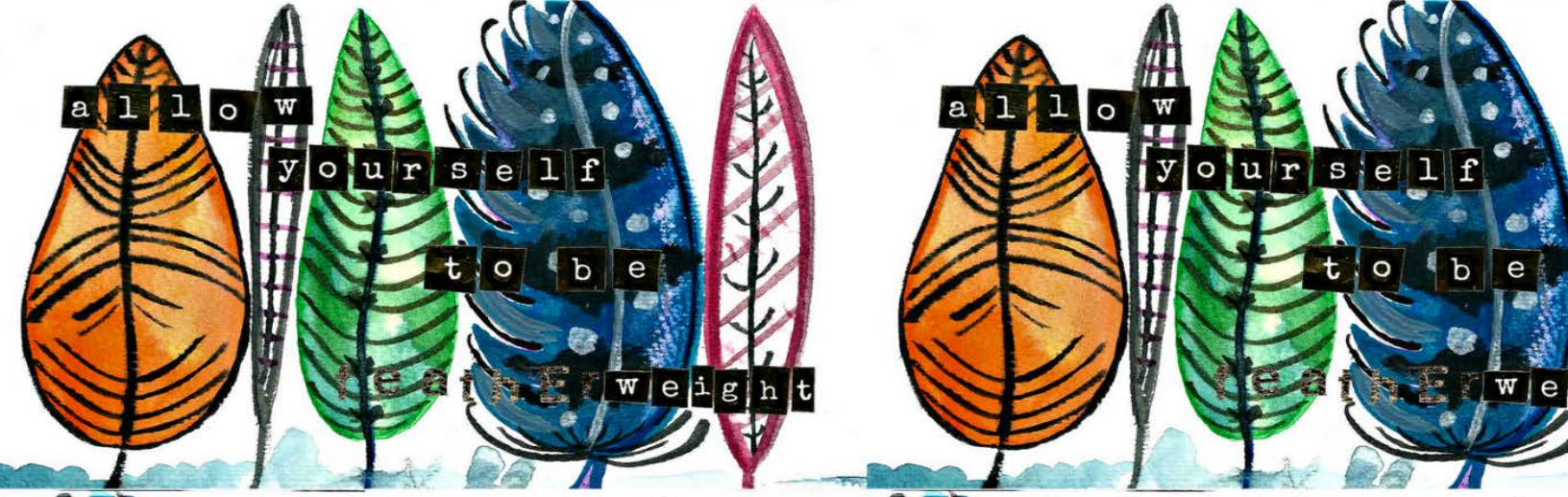
Home, Home where I wanted to go
(Clocks-Coldplay)

Now that I am currently at LMU, I can say that I feel privileged to live at home with my mom because now I don't only have a family off campus, but on campus as well. Since my parent's separation, I can finally say that I am in a good spot in my life. I no longer see my parent's separation as a completely bad event in my life, but a challenge that has only strengthened my character. I have learned to accept life the way it has presented itself to me and I feel privileged to be receiving an education at LMU. I never thought my mom and I would get this far in our journey because of how expensive it has been, but we are doing it. I have a job on campus that allows me to help out with the bills, we moved to a small

comfortable two bedroom apartment, and I have gained a family in the First To Go Program at LMU. Looking back, I can see that having one parent was not only a challenge but a blessing in disguise.

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"I Want So Much More Than This
Provincial Life"

Larissa Ramirez

“I Want So Much More Than This Provincial Life”- Belle, Beauty and the Beast

My house has never been my home, I've never felt comfortable there, and after 17 years of life, there are things that I have come to realize. I am an extremely compassionate person, I value honesty, I am dedicated, and I am in love with knowledge. I may be young but I know my personality makes this certain: Whatever I do, I want it to revolve around helping others, around the salvation of humanity through justice. Helping others and being involved is something that naturally comes to me. I have never been one to conform. So, here is just a little bit of background on my life. In order to understand who I am now, I believe it's imperative to know how I grew up.

When I was a little girl, my parents were still children themselves, they were 16 and 20. My mother had just finished high school and my dad went to college for a few days and decided it wasn't for him, so he found work. I remember vividly when my sister was born, I could tell you every single detail from the weather to my outfit, but I won't. All I'll say is I was waiting impatiently, I had never been so excited in my life to meet someone. My little sister was my best friend growing up, and she still is. My sister and I, who are 3 years apart, were always given everything even if we couldn't afford it; we went to Disneyland, had a stack of Christmas presents, and lots of adventures. But, we have lived with my grandparents my entire life and there was always too many people in that house; no room for growth, for prosperity.

My parents always worked too much to get paid so little. My dad had multiple jobs throughout his life but he was always laid off in the end, and my mom worked at a steady job until two years ago when she added a second. A college educated family member was always missing in my family, but the idea of college itself was a concept heavily instilled in me. “Go to college” they said, “you don't want to be struggling when you are older.”

I loved school, I was the teacher's pet and I know it all. I always did my homework and was happy to go to elementary school. Middle school is where I got my first, sad few C's. I had no one to help me, and I barely knew what I was doing, but I made sure to finish strong. I had always maintained a 3.3

GPA and above, but I never accomplished a 4.0. All the while, I constantly heard, “Go to college Larissa, you don’t want to live like us.”

I knew what they meant, I have always had this notion that things die in my house. It’s not that life was so bad. It wasn’t that bad, I survived. It was more that there was no room. There was nothing to be discovered . In order to truly live, I knew I had to branch off.

High school is where it all began, where I started to branch. My freshman year I went to Granada Hills Charter High. Growing up in the valley, GHCHS is the high school you want to go to, because it’s considered to be the most prestigious school. I was so happy to be accepted there because I knew it would prepare me for college. My freshman year I was so shy, there were about 4,000 students there! I had a small group of friends that seemed to get smaller and I was doing good in my classes, but I did not feel connected to my high school at the time. The first month of my sophomore year was unbearable and I needed to change high schools. The truth is GHCHS was an elitist school that favored only the dominant majority. It was ridiculously strict and highly impersonal. Many of the students at GHCHS were stuck up and unaware. This is not to say that it’s a bad school and had horrible teachers, it had a lot to offer academically. I enjoyed a few courses and teachers but it was definitely NOT for me, and I knew that; the issue was convincing my mother it wasn’t.

Finally after a month or two into the school year I transferred to Kennedy, which is about a 10 minute drive away from GHCHS. Kennedy was labeled the school for all the dumb people. However, going to Kennedy was probably one of the best things I did. I knew most of the people there and I tried so hard to make sure I was not detached from the school. I knew I had to be involved in a lot of extracurriculars in order to be accepted into a college. I tried out for the soccer team and made varsity, and I took AP’s and honors. I found I didn’t have to try to be apart of the school, Kennedy itself is very inclusive and felt like a family, unlike my previous high school. Kennedy turned out to be a far better choice than GHCHS.

My junior year I continued to play soccer and added Academic Decathlon (Acadeca) to my schedule while still taking two AP’s alongside my other courses. I never wanted to be home, so I filled

my life with everything and anything that would keep me occupied. There were too many people in my house, it was way too noisy and crowded. I went to school, had Acadeca first period, the rest of my classes and then ended the day with soccer practice until 5pm. After that, I would go to tutoring for Pre-Calculus (Pre-Cal) and then come home to eat and do my homework until late at night.

A month or two into my junior year I received a slip that allowed me to skip Pre-Cal class as long as I went to an assembly. I didn't care what the assembly was about, I just needed to miss class. It was an assembly for girls who had a 3.5 GPA or higher, girls who were eligible to apply for the Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Greater Los Angeles Women in Entertainment Program. The program took about 20 young girls and paired them with powerful, inspiring women who work in the entertainment industry. Girls met with their mentors twice a month for a year and had workshops, free SAT and ACT prep, a \$10,000 scholarship, and the chance of being one of two girls who would receive a full-ride scholarship to Loyola Marymount University (LMU). The night before the due date for the application, my little sister encouraged me to apply, and I did. I made it to the second round effortlessly in comparison to the many girls who prepared their essay for days, weeks even. I just wrote from the heart and was honest. I needed help, and I could not have emphasized that enough in my essay. I managed to maintain good grades and balanced sports and extracurriculars all in hopes of being good enough for a damn college education. I busted my ass, but deep down, I knew I could never attend college because of my lack of financial resources. However, the second round of the application process was an interview, and honestly, I thought I failed it, but apparently I didn't. I was chosen to be one of the mentees for the 2015-2016 year. My mentor is the Senior Vice President of A&E Studios, and as it turned out, she became a great friend in addition to being my mentor, I could not have accomplished as much as I have without her.

Flash forward to a year later, I am at The Hollywood Reporter Power 100 Breakfast again. This time around, the 2015-2016 group—my cohort—would find out who received the full ride scholarship to LMU out of those who applied. I was one of three winners and I was shocked, but extremely grateful. I had been chosen; me! I was going to receive a full-ride, four-year college education to an actual

prestigious university! All my life I had strived for that moment, to go to college, to get my Bachelor's degree, to have that experience, and *live*.

I was anxiously anticipating my arrival at LMU. The day I moved in I brought everything I had ever owned, because I have little, I didn't overdo it. I had my parents and my boyfriend help me, and I set up my room to my liking for once. I claimed it as my own and made it my home.

Almost instantly after my first two weeks at LMU I began to feel a sickening array of emotions. To begin with, at time of August 2016, I was pretty pissed to start school here because yes, even though I did receive a full-ride scholarship here, I was initially rejected. Yes, I got my rejection letter from LMU shortly after finding out I won the scholarship, but all of that was taken care of... except for my emotions about it anyway. So, here I was at this school that thought I was not good enough for surrounded by all these white people. Yes, I understand that *whiteness is not a race*, but I say this because when asked, these people mostly said they were white instead of identifying with their actual ethnic heritage. So, needless to say, the culture shock was definitely real, since I was used to being surrounded by Latinos with a low to middle socio-economic status.

Despite all of these differences and to my surprise, I was doing well in my classes. I had managed to get A's and B's on my quizzes, projects, exams etc. I had exceeded my own expectations in disbelief. I managed to find a few clubs that were appealing to me and found a job tutoring. However, the sad truth is that in spite of my academic success, I would still feel inadequate. Being a first-generation college student, it is easy to fall into the traps of imposter syndrome. According to the New York Times, imposter syndrome is "described as a feeling of 'phoniness in people who believe that they are not intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement'" (Richards). That is something I struggled with, and still do. I feel absolutely terrified that I have no say, I believe that sometimes I shouldn't have a say, that I shouldn't be here, and that I don't amount to everyone else. I mean, after all, I was rejected, so I really, I am a fraud.

I also struggle with survivor's guilt. Survivor's guilt is what gets to me the most. The University of Arizona News says survivor's guilt "refers to the negative feelings that can arise from having

succeeded and escaped adverse conditions [from] close others” (Everett-Haynes). I feel guilty for leaving behind my siblings, but mostly, I feel guilty for leaving behind—you guessed it—my sister. Although I love my little brother, he is still a young boy, my sister is not. She is a beautiful, stubborn, strong willed, intelligent 16 year old. I won’t lie, we’ve had it rough. We saw some things no child should have, but it could have always been worse. Perhaps the hardest things I’ve ever done was tell her goodbye when I left off to college. I remember that day so vividly, I could tell you everything from the weather to my outfit, but I won’t. But I will say we were in tears, and my heart was truly crushed, I had never been so terrified of saying goodbye to someone. I wanted to take her with me, I wanted to have her thrive with me and explore. I want her to succeed. I don’t want her to have to survive, I want her to live.

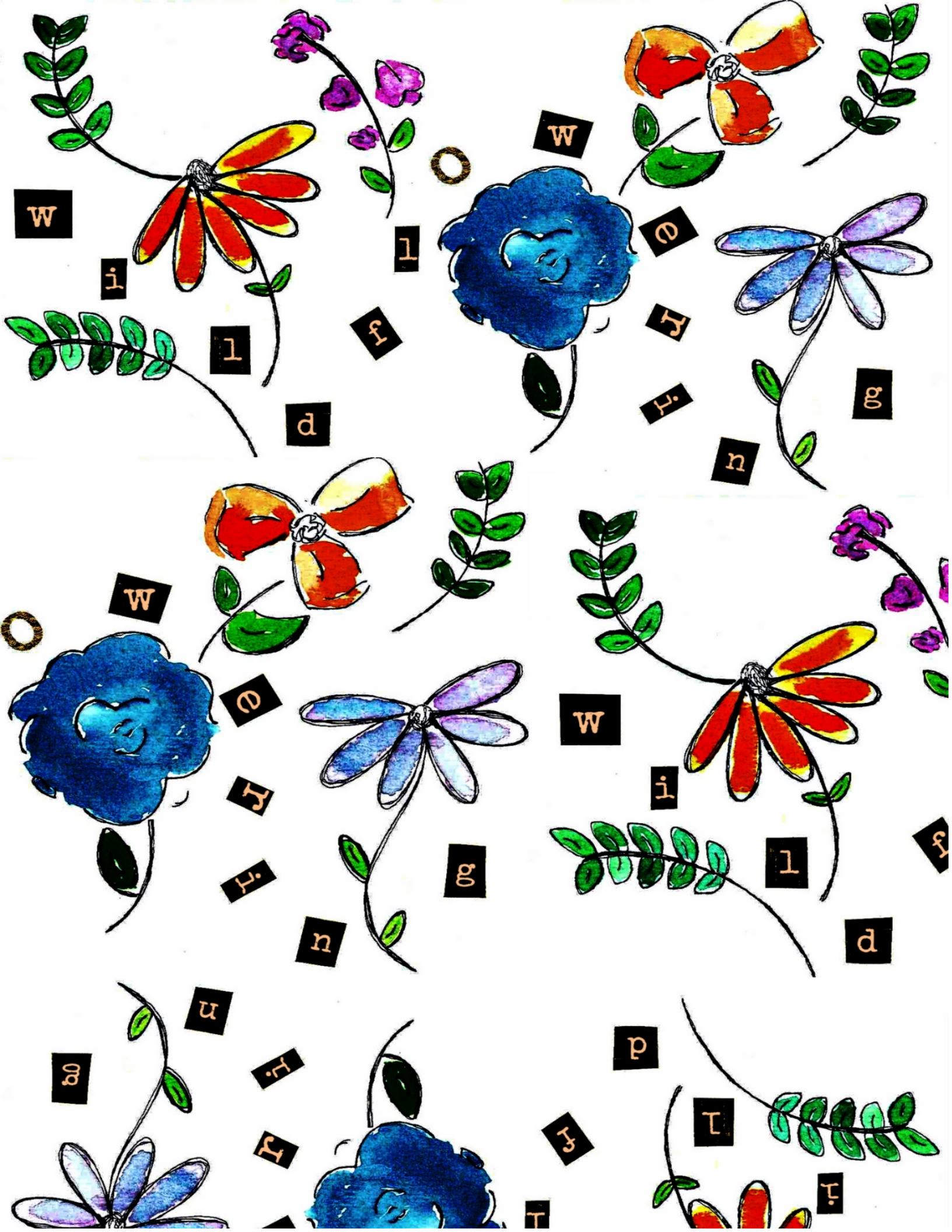
Throughout my first year as a first-generation college student I have come to find a few truths. I am proud of myself for accomplishing a lifelong goal. I am proud of my parents for raising me. I have so much respect for them, and I love them with all my heart despite the way things turned out. It is my goal to succeed not only for myself, but for everyone who invested in me and for everyone who made my dream a reality. Most importantly I want to succeed for my siblings. I want to show them that although the road may be difficult, it can be done. I am paving the way right now for them, and I will graduate with flying colors. Although LMU seemed to think that all of my hardship, pain, struggle, and hard work was not enough, I don’t care. Just because I am not wealthy or the dominant majority doesn’t mean I am incapable of competing. I am staying afloat and I can swim. I will not let my past 19 years be in vain. Being first-generation not only means that I have to work harder, but that I also deserve and appreciate my education more. No one, not even the Office of Admissions can take that away from me.

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Dear Future Child of Mine

Ariana Siordia

Dear future child of mine,

By now, you're probably getting ready for your first semester of college. You may be feeling a bit anxious, excited, or sad that you're finally leaving the house to your dream school. I can tell you for sure that it didn't hit me until *tu abuelito* and I were moving my things in my dorm for the school year. For the most part, I can say I was excited. I was not sad at all because it was something I had been waiting for ever since I got accepted to LMU. I knew it was the school for me, so there was no point in being nervous.

What I did not know, however, was that my life was going to be flipped around once I was left alone. And that is why I am writing you this letter. You may not take all my advice, but know that this is coming from the bottom of my heart, and that my wish is for you to succeed and follow your dreams.

Lesson 1

Spring Break was not what I expected it to be like. I spent most of the break sitting in *tu abuelito's* office running back and forth making copies for him and his clients. Then I would go on my phone to watch some Korean pop videos and dramas, which produced an angry scolding from your *tu abuelito* and an annoyed eye roll from yours truly. But that has nothing to do with what I have to teach you. One day, before I had to go to work, *tu abuelita* drove me to work. Usually, I would leave the car immediately once she parked the car, but something told me to stay. And so I did. And here's how our conversation went.

"You know what I would have liked to study if I ever had the chance to when I was younger?" "Que?"

"Planes. I would have loved to learn how planes worked."

"..."

It was an uneventful Spring break, for the most part, but that conversation was what stood out most to me. Not because I felt pity towards her, but because it was a moment she empowered me to do more. She reminded me why I dragged myself out of my bed every morning to go to class or work. She represented a larger population. The population that never got or gets the chance to pursue their dreams because it's not even an option for them due to their lack of resources.

So, I want you to remember my memory when you're pulling all-nighters in college and you're on the verge of giving up. Never forget your roots. I want you to remember to keep fighting for *tu abuelita* and those other souls who did not get to travel the road of their dreams. Make her proud. Make her dream a reality by continuing your education and following your dreams, no matter how impossible it may seem.

Lesson 2

You know how *Tita* Gia and I are practically sisters? It wasn't always like that from the beginning. We were super awkward with each other; it was really cringe-worthy. To be honest, the reason why I did not want to get close to her was because I was experiencing the effects of imposter syndrome when I would hang out with her. Imposter syndrome is "the private sense of being an imposter or a fraud" within the thoughts of many high-achieving individuals (Kolligian and Sternberg, 309). Gia was just so naturally open, friendly, and so perfect in my eyes, I felt so uncomfortable and felt like I didn't belong at LMU because I was not like her. I thought I could never fit in because everyone I was surrounded by were people who were welcoming and there was no competitive atmosphere or hostile faces. It was something so foreign to me, I panicked.

Though the event that triggered us to become closer was a unique one. I had just gotten off the phone with my ex-boyfriend after having an argument with him. I was used to hiding my emotions from her, but that moment triggered a complete breakdown.

"...Gia?...Gia?"

"Huh?"

"Gia, can I have a hug?"

"Oh my gosh Ariana! Are you okay? Why are you crying?"

"I'll tell you later, I just need someone to hold me..."

You know how comfortable and relaxing her hugs can be. It only took five seconds to completely let go and open myself up to her. It truly felt like a massive weight was lifted from my shoulders.

To overcome imposter syndrome, you “need to feel a sense of entitlement and belonging to help [yourself] develop a ‘student identity’” (Chapman). Gia gave me that feeling right then and there. I am glad she did because she was one of the major reasons why I did not transfer out of school or completely give up on everything.

What I want you to learn from this is that it’s okay to rely on someone. You are never alone. Even if it isn’t me, there will always be someone that cares about you and your wellbeing. Whether it is a professor, a classmate, the cross guard, or, really, anyone you see daily. The only way you will truly not feel like you belong is if you do not put yourself out there. It doesn’t mean you must do it with everyone. You could just express yourself with one person, and that would be enough. Do what is comfortable, but do not limit yourself.

Lesson 3

You may know by now that I am an emotional person. It isn’t a bad quality to have, but I often let it affect me in a negative way. To put it bluntly, I was bullied in middle school. For some reason, my “friends” would often comment on the “strange” things I did. There was nothing wrong with that. I knew I was different in terms of what I was interested in. It was hard for me to get involved in mainstream activities because I truly didn’t enjoy it. The issue was that these people would constantly point out how different I was and would go to the point where I wanted to cry. It wasn’t a joke at that point. Little comments about how I looked, what I was interested in, and what I said soon became something I was insecure about.

There was a point where I couldn’t handle it and I had to call *tu abuelita* to come and pick me up from school because I didn’t want to be around the people who constantly teased me. She didn’t ask questions. She didn’t ask why I was calling her two hours into school begging her to take me home. She didn’t say anything about it after that day. All it took was for her to hear my distressed voice, and she knew. After that, she would not keep silent about my “friends.” She would point out why these “friends” were not good for me, and I am glad I listened. It made my last year of middle school easier to bear with.

In my freshman year of high school, I met this girl in my fourth period English class. We became friends for a unique reason. I overheard a conversation between her and this other classmate and I decided to comment (my way of trying to socialize during my freshman year of high school).

"Oh my gosh do not get into fanfiction. Once you're in, there's no way out"

"It's too late for me. I'm already in too deep"

"No way! Which website do you use?"

"I think it's called Quotev...?"

"Oh my gosh! Same!"

I think the reason I became so invested in fanfiction was because it was my only escape from reality. It was nice finding someone else who was interested in it and who could understand me on another level.

There was a downside to it. This "friend" would often criticize me for everything I was invested in outside of what we had in common. I really enjoyed watching anime and eventually started getting invested in Korean culture, which was her culture. She really did not like it. She would always express her distaste for it. I had no problem with that, but she would always make me feel bad for being interested in it. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but when it comes to the point where they start criticizing you, it can become overwhelming, especially since I had confidence issues and a hard time standing up for myself.

Flash forward to college. I decided to ignore what she and others thought about me and started to proudly show my interests. I did not care about anyone's opinion and continued loving myself.

Then there was a group called SHINee who announced their first tour here in the United States. I showed interest in going on Facebook, and that friend who would always put me down for liking Korean pop music commented saying we should go together. In all honesty, it made me really angry. How could someone express their dislike for something and even look down upon others who were interested in it, only to suddenly express interest in going? To say that we should go together when she spent a lot of her time criticizing me for being interested in it? It just didn't sit right with me. So I told her the truth and said that I had already made plans to go with someone else, but that we could meet up if she ended up

going. I know I could have invited her to go with us, but the way I saw it, I did not want someone to bring negativity into the place where I felt like I could be myself.

Many of my friends in college are accepting of my likes. They do not look down upon me, but rather accept me for who I am. It took some time, but I found the people who accept me. Make sure to keep those people around for a long time. My lesson to you is never be ashamed in what you believe in or enjoy doing, no matter how strange it may be to others. You will meet people who are like you or just accept you for who you are.

Lesson 4

A year and one month. That's how long I spent with my high school sweetheart. But, for the last six months, most of the relationship was connected through text messages, occasional visits once or twice a month, and late night FaceTime calls.

"Hey Ariana, I want you to hear me out on this, okay?"

"Okay..."

"I'm breaking up with you."

I admit, I knew he was going to end our relationship, but I did not want to believe it. I wanted to believe there was some hope. That there was something from my life before college that I could keep intact. I was holding onto something that should have ended six months ago. The thing is, I do not think I would have ended up where I am today if he had done it six months before he officially ended the relationship. I let him have my life in his hands, so if he broke me, I would not have the strength to put myself back together again. To put it simply, the short amount of time I spent in college matured me for the better, making the recovery phase for me quicker and effective.

He and I were together for my first semester in college. As much as I hate to admit it, he was one of the few people that kept me sane my first semester of college, regardless of what may have happened between us in the end. I do not resent him because of the result of our relationship. He taught me a lot about myself and about other people. Most importantly, he taught me to never let yourself trust

someone so easily, even if their words may sound beautiful to you. Promises can be broken in the blink of an eye.

So when someone says they can give you the world, don't rely on that. Always put yourself before anyone. You continue doing what you want to do in college and stay focused. Do not slow yourself down for someone who will not give you the time you are giving them. There will be an individual who will eventually be able to keep up with your pace.

...

I could keep writing for a long time and tell you what to avoid while in college, but I cannot do that. I can't give you the easy way out. I want you to experience it for yourself. You should figure your way through the world, but that doesn't mean you can't ask for help along the way.

Just know that I'll always be here for you, and feel free to give me a call whenever you need to. It doesn't matter when or where. I'll be there for you because you're my baby.

With love,
Mom

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question

everything



Confused AF: An Autobiography of a
lost First-Gen College Student
from Compton

Angel Vazquez

“Long before we know ourselves, our paths are already set in stone. Some may never figure out their purpose in life and some will. There are a lot of us who are caught up in this hell we all live in. Content with being blinded by rules and judgment. We live in a world where it's more okay to follow than to lead In this world being a leader is trouble for the system we are all accustomed to Being a leader in this day and age is being a threat Not many people stood up against the system we all call life But toward the end of our first ten years into the millennium we heard a voice. A voice who was speaking to us from the underground for some time A voice who spoke of vulnerabilities and other human emotions and issues never before heard so vividly and honest This is the story of a young man who not only believed in himself, but his dreams too...” (Common)

Loyola Marymount University, the university that promotes the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, and the service of faith and the promotion of justice, has become my home and my safe-haven during my Freshman year as a first-generation college student; away from the harsh realities of my hometown, about 45 minutes away, Compton. LMU has been a place where I have developed a level of comfort where I can freely express myself and my emotions, something that I cannot freely and willingly do at home.

As I am in this oasis in the Los Angeles area, I have to bear with the issues going outside this bubble that I have called home for less than a year. When I go back to Compton I am constantly reminded of the violence, the misfortunes, and the injustices that coincide outside the borders of LMU. Compton shows me that the world is not a utopia where everything is well like the brochures of college campuses make it seem like. Whenever I go home, I see the problems of drug abuse, the harm that gang violence causes on the community, the education gap amongst the youth and feel this guilt for being the lucky one to have “made it out” (Covarrubias). I feel like I am the lucky one to have made it out the “hood,” the lucky one to have a well-structured household which granted me the privilege to attend private institutions since the age of 11. The guilt that I have lingers even stronger now that I am in college because I feel like I didn’t treat my education in a serious manner while I was in these private institutions. I know that I could have done a lot better in school because I never tried; I was always good

at it just to keep my parents off my back. This survivor's guilt eats at me every time I go back home on the weekends to do my laundry. Whenever I go back to the courts where I used to hoop, friends make small remarks as, "ooh, look at the LMU student" or "damn, you made it out; now you're better than us." Other people, people whom I went to school with, judge me, challenging my "hood cred" with statements such as, "damn boy, you're turning white at that white university; you not wearing shorts as often; you think you the shit cause you getting an education and have white friends." It saddens me to face this reality as I face the same criticism back at LMU. I find people saying that I'm too "hood" too "ghetto" for the college atmosphere and unfortunately, I begin to internalize these ideas and statements and take them as truth. Although I am aware of my capabilities and of my accomplishments through hard work, it is hard to cope with the idea that my own people, people who "made it out" as well call me "too ghetto," especially, when I notice the differences in the way we act, the way we dress, and the way we speak. It hurts because I know that I belong here at LMU. I have worked my ass off; however, I also understand that I do appear different than the people who I interact with. Culture shock has taken a grip on me. At times I feel like I am an outsider at both LMU and in Compton (Cushman). At home I am too white and at LMU I am too hood. Nevertheless, I embrace the struggle to prove to my fellow people of color not only from Compton that they too can achieve excellence.

These people are both my burden and my motivation. Without them, I would not have a reason to work so hard for other than myself. Now that I am at LMU, I would like to utilize my privilege in a positive manner, continuing to represent the people that I love and the community that I so dearly call home. I am still building my identity as a first-generation Latino college freshman from the city of Compton and have a long road ahead of me, but I am ready to embrace these challenges and make the best of them to make a statement that people of color are able to pursue their dreams of attending private institutions and reaching upper division levels of education.

I Am

I am determined to succeed yet I am guilty for my privileges

I wonder if I will make it

I hear Compton scream "Be someone; that's gangsta"

I see the dreams tumble back at home as the flashing lights blind me at LMU

I want a better future for my community

I am determined to succeed yet I am guilty for my privileges

I pretend to have no emotions

I feel exhausted

I'd love to touch the sky

I worry about drowning

I cry when I look back at home

I am determined to succeed yet I am guilty for my privileges

I understand that I've worked hard

I say I am going to blossom to my full potential

I dream of change

I try to live up to my expectations

I hope to be the bridge

I am determined to succeed yet I am guilty for my privileges

Shit I am LMU and I am Compton.

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The American Dream and My Identity

Aira Wada

March 2016 – Phone Call

“Hello? May I speak with Aira Wada?”

“Yes, speaking.”

“My name is Jessica Peña and I am an Admissions Counselor at Loyola Marymount University. Congratulations on your acceptance to LMU. Also, I want to let you know that you were selected as one of our Social Justice Scholars!”

It was around 6 P.M. and I was at a local community college that I attended for the Spring semester right after I graduated from high school in June 2015. Although it was better than not going to any college after graduating from high school with a high GPA, I hated going to the same college space. My high school was located on the college campus, so I was tired of staying there.

However, the phone call turned to a new chapter of my life; it was the start of my journey at Loyola Marymount University. This phone call was filled with joy and surprise. Despite my calm disposition, I wanted to scream and cry with happiness. Just a year ago, I faced the harsh reality of not being able to attend college because of my financial and immigration circumstances. I even fell into a minor depression and some of my hair fell out, creating a bald spot. And yet, here I was. I could not believe that I could finally attend a university. All that I thought about myself over the past year—about how worthless I was and how my dreams would never come true—was gone with that one phone call. It was a moment that I felt all the tension fade away from all over my body. I expected nothing negative about my bright future ahead.

In this moment of happiness, I was reminded of my mother’s words, “America is a country that rewards those who work the hardest” and, finally, I believed that this could be true.

September 2016 – Starting College

Student Ambassador, Ballet Folklorico, RESILIENCE, MEChA, Nikkei Student Union, Rotary Club, Black Student Union, Oxfam, Alternative Breaks...These (and more that I can’t remember) were some of the organizations I joined for at least one meeting.

As the first person in my family to attend college, I used a vast amount of my time and energy

trying to figure out my niche as the first semester of college started. I was an introvert so I felt tired after spending so much time with so many people, but I felt the immediate need to be active and to get involved. One reason was that no one was there to guide me through my college experience, so I attended meetings to gain information about different aspects of LMU. Kathleen Cushman, the author of *First in the Family: Advice About College From First-Generation Students*, supports my experience by noting, “parents of first-generation students can't draw on their own college experiences for advice and reassurance.”

Another reason was the thought that I would fall behind if I did not join something quickly and expanded my network. Fear overwhelmed me and distracted me from academic work. My calendar was filled with events and club meetings because I was always looking for the “right path” to live my college life. I greatly appreciated the scholarship I received from LMU, but I felt pressured that I only have four years to figure everything out and finish college strong. I was telling myself that I must make the best out of it and figure out a way to thrive in college as fast as I can because I do not have the option to mess up and redo it.

Logically, I knew that I was putting unnecessary pressure on myself, but emotionally, I could not help it. It might be because I was so traumatized a year ago by not being able to attend college right after high school despite my dedication to academics.

“America is a country that rewards those who work the hardest” but the clock is ticking.

December 2016 - Winter Break

A semester of college had past and I was not happy with my results. I felt too ashamed to tell my parents, my mentors, and my friends about my grades. “I thought I was a straight A student.” “What happened?” “Am I capable to succeed in college, or in life?” Such thoughts kept on repeating in my head. After my mother looked at my younger brother and sister’s report cards, she asked me,

“Has your report card been mailed yet?”

“No mom, colleges don’t send report cards to student’s home. Plus, I don’t have to show my grades to you anymore because I am a college student.”

That is how I avoided answering her question. I could not let her down because I thought that she expected me to do as well as I had done in my previous years. What I did not know was that she did not expect perfection from me. I found this later when I had the courage to let her know about my grade and my feelings about it. Even though she has no idea about attending college or guiding me through college, it was enough that she provided a space for me to open up and be accepted regardless of my mistakes. This experience taught me that my mother is always there to support me emotionally and that I am allowed to make mistakes once in a while.

Mistakes are allowed in my house, but “America is a country that rewards those who work the hardest” and there is no forgiveness when making mistakes.

March 2017 – Second Semester

As second semester started, I decided to focus more on academics and decided to reduce my participation in school events. I was still struggling even with the help of my academic counselor from Academic Resource Center. I cannot help but feel as if I am falling behind. Everyone else seems to know more and looks more prepared. Ever since I received my final grades from last semester, I became unsure about my right to belong in school. I was not sure if I was well-deserving of my scholarship either.

In addition, I often think to myself, “I don’t feel like I fit in.” I joined so many clubs and organizations. I am part of many groups. But I always feel like an outsider, an odd one out. In my scholarship group, I felt odd because the group uses a lot of Spanish words to bring everyone together while I don’t speak Spanish. In my Alternative Breaks trip, I felt different from everyone else because I was too immature and misinformed. In Oxfam, I can’t feel like I belong because I still do not understand what the club does in a detailed way. I could not explain why I felt that way I did. Maybe I am just a very pessimistic thinker. I couldn’t stop feeling rushed, it felt like the beginning of first semester all over again. I wanted to do well in my academics, but I also had the urge to explore and find people who I could truly feel close to because nothing felt right. The reality of college life was filled with turns and blockades.

Later in the first semester, I found out that what I was feeling was called culture shock. Culture shock is “a consequence of class marginality, [which] captures ‘the strangeness and discomfort [that marginalized students] feel when they matriculate’” (Torres, 885). This is exactly what I felt and I was somewhat relieved that I was not the only one feeling it. It is very common for first generation-college students. I learned over time that such feelings are difficult to resolve because it stems deeper than just making friends. I think this feeling will slowly disappear as I keep going.

For now, I just need to make the best of today and hope that “America is a country that rewards those who work hard.

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Mixture of Two



Jesse Yu

She gave me room and time to explore the world on my own while trying hard to let go of her worry. He gave me his trust to live independently while cleaning up after every mess I made.

Mom grew up in a traditional, Chinese military family. After returning from the Sino- Vietnamese War, Grandpa settled the family down in Grandma's hometown the moment he was hired to be a policeman there. In this small town, Mom finished her technical secondary schooling and started to work in a medicine company where she learnt about medicine and treatment. As you may expect, by the type of education provided to her by her military father—rules and disciplines—my Mom never argued with people and/or violated any laws, she barely even got a traffic ticket.

Dad grew up in a rather different environment. He is son of a fisherman and a village school teacher. When the late-20th century hit and Chinese radio was found in every household, a particular broadcast callout called to my father, "The motherland needs your professional specialty to speed up industrialization. Bright future awaits!" It was then that he chose to attend a professional junior college and majored in gasoline, which would later become his biggest regret. A few years later, when that Chinese radio broadcasted yet again it said, "People are now living happily in the spring breeze of open reform!" This was my dad's ticket to starting his business of selling gasoline to private firms; and even though this first business venture didn't pan out, it gave my father an opportunity. This opportunity became the first bucket of gold that allowed him to open the first karaoke joint in town, then a seafood restaurant, and then a club... Nothing could stop him, for as a young hot-blooded man, Dad was a rebellious character. He was the type of individual who would "teach" drivers a lesson (sometimes these lessons involved fists) when cars blocked his way.

So, when the city girl met the country boy, you could only imagine what occurred: sparkles, sparkles, firecrackers, fireworks, new house, new cars, new jobs, new business, and finally, a son—I was born.

I consider myself a mixture of the two, including one single-eyelid eye from my father and one double-eyelid eye from my mother (Yes, Chinese people care about their eyelids.). This mixture, in turn, brought me psychological conflicts throughout my growth. Due to the different ways they grew up, my

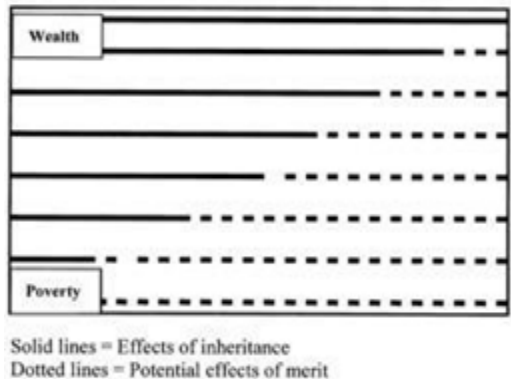
parents educated me differently. Mom always imagined the worst case scenarios that could occur to me. She wanted me under her watch every second. If I missed two phone calls from her, twenty plus calls from her would follow. Dad, on the other hand, allowed me to live on my own in another nearby city and drive a car when I turned eighteen. Despite the differences, these experiences made me very considerate and quite sensitive to other people's feelings, all while cultivating my independence.

When it comes to other people, Mom always focused on the privileged peers around me: "Lee's father is the mayor of that city. So he's got a chance to enter that national competition." She believed that Lee's social position became the decisive factors that led friends, like Lee, into good universities. Often times I remembering her saying, "I am sorry that I am unable to do that. But as long as you work hard, you can be just as good as or even better than Lee." This mentality rivaled Dad's for he showed me just how privileged I truly was. He always gave me more than enough pocket money and barely asked where I spent it. He always knew who to contact to get things done a little bit faster and easier. Because of this, I was constantly told by my relatives in China that I was born with "golden keys," which in English has the same meaning as being born with "silver spoons."

From chasing a girl to getting a Resident Advisor position, Mom's philosophy has allowed me to achieve a lot, and because of her, I've never doubted my ability to achieve anything. Meanwhile, Dad's philosophy gave me an early realization that meritocracy is not the sole principle this society follows; this society does not operate purely according to ability. In realizing my privileges—like my opportunity to study in the United States—I have come to deeply understand that if I am not standing on my parents' shoulders—despite my personal capabilities—I would have no way to afford the expenses here in Los Angeles, where my parents pay seven times in Chinese currency for every dollar I spend here.

To explain this notion of meritocracy, Stephen McNamee suggested a model in his book *The Meritocracy Myth* (see fig. 1). McNamee posited that people like Jennifer, Rory and Phoebe Gates, who are sons and daughters of Bill Gates, are starting life like the solid line at the top of Figure 1. What that solid line indicates is that the Gates children may be at the same level of merit as other people by being as just as capable, but due to their upbringing, their end result will be drastically different because of

their resources. This thought upset me. It upset me because parents want the best for their children—this want is probably embedded in their genes—and yet, the conclusion is not friendly: “Despite the ideology of meritocracy, the reality in America as elsewhere is: inheritance first and merit second”



(McNamee, 51). I didn't think much about the theory until I related to it. It happened one evening when I was at a school event at the IMAX headquarters. While there, a presenter said something that struck a chord, “There is not one place that depends on the “who you know” more than the film industry.” That, in essence, was a direct denial of

the notions of meritocracy. Without knowing the correct people, it is really difficult to succeed in the film industry. This concept was further supported by the book *On the Track*: There is something about being in the town every day, being visible, seeing people at lunch, just being in the conversations of the people in town. If you're not, you are losing out. If you are not living in L.A, as a film composer, you are not going to be successful (Karlín, 460).

Although I still believe these myths of meritocracy may not be a 100% true, it expressed the cruelty about my majoring in my field. What about people who cannot live in L.A.? What about other talented directors, actors, photographers who are not U.S. citizens? Are they destined not to succeed because of the country they were born in?

Despite not knowing the answers to these questions, I will keep living my life with the mixture of the two to answer them. And with these beliefs in mind, I won't deny meritocracy completely, but neither will I believe into it too much. And as I do, I'll keep asking questions.

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Sometimes

I forget I

have

wings





Spring Admit

Anthony Umanzor

This paper is about the experience and journey that I encountered during my first semester at USC (University of Southern California). I come from a nontraditional background that is defined by my being a 23 year-old, low-income, Salvadoran-American, first-generation transfer student. There were many barriers and challenges that I dealt with as a spring admit and my background, which was discouraging, yet I strived to optimize on my educational opportunity.

This paper is about the experience and journey that I encountered during my first semester at USC (University of Southern California). I come from a nontraditional background that is defined by my being a 23 year-old, low-income, Salvadoran-American, first-generation transfer student. I am from the Bay Area and it is where I have grown as an individual along with my loved ones. I had no intentions of ever leaving the Bay Area due to my fear of not helping out my mother, who is single and monolingual. College changed that decision for me, as I got the best offers to attend school in Southern California. There were many barriers and challenges that I dealt with as a spring admit, and due to my background, there were times that were discouraging yet I strived to optimize my educational opportunities. I took advantage of volunteering options and built relationships with faculty members—being as active as possible prevented my emotions from getting the best of me. Through time, I managed to learn about myself and the education system, making the adjustment possible, but not without difficulty.

I remain in California, but Los Angeles is a long way from home in the Bay Area (East Bay). I have lived all my life in the Bay, beginning in San Francisco (my hometown), then several other cities in the East Bay: Concord, San Pablo and Oakland (all lower income communities). Throughout my life, all of my plans and life decisions have revolved around the Bay Area. I told myself that I would never move out of there. My reasoning was connected to the contribution and support that I have provided my migrant single mother (a Salvadoran refugee) with, an individual who has always struggled financially and who has always had limited opportunities. When I attended the City College of San Francisco, I planned to transfer to SF state, USF, Holy Names, SJ state, or CAL, making it possible to stay local. Once the application processes began, I was very optimistic about these schools, especially CAL. Quite honestly, I was not sure about what I was doing. It took my former advisor to convince me that I should also apply to prestigious universities outside of the CSU and UC system. I did not believe that I was an exceptional candidate due to my lack of knowledge of how the system functioned.

Despite not wanting to apply elsewhere outside of the Bay Area, I did anyways. My counselor encouraged me to do so, as my EOPS (Extended Opportunity Programs and Services) would cover the application fees. Out of the ten schools that I applied to, 9 accepted me. My acceptances were huge

accomplishments of mine, yet the only school that did not take me was the one that I wanted to attend the most, CAL Berkeley. With all of this, I had to take a step back and analyze the financial aid packages offered and the schools overall. It was then that I had realized that Los Angeles would be my new home; a place that I had not been to in over 15 years. Seeing that UCLA had sent me an excellent offer, I accepted it. It was a difficult moment knowing that I would be starting a new life elsewhere. I was happy, but at the same time apprehensive, scared, and skeptical about this new change. Things, however, changed around three weeks later when I received a decision from USC alongside a phenomenal financial-aid deal. The only difference was that the offer was for Spring 2015, rather than Fall 2014. I quickly agreed, not only because of USC's prestigious academic rankings, but also because it gave me a bit more time to stay home. I was frightened to move, and during those last six months, I took a few more classes at the City College of San Francisco and worked overtime at my job at the time, Whole Foods Grocery.

During my last month in the Bay Area, I remember wishing that the day of my move to L.A. would never come. Finally, January 2015 came around and it was time to move. And so I did. I remember arriving alone at orientation feeling so out of place, alienated, and nervous. I had never felt so lonely, concerned, and skeptical in my life. I almost felt like I was in survival mode, dwelling in this entirely new environment both inside USC and outside of it in South Central. Moving to Los Angeles was honestly one of the toughest things I have ever had to do.

I was very concerned since I was not the traditional college transfer student: 23 years of age; raised by a monolingual, immigrant single mother, who is a refugee of El Salvador; from a low-income community; and not to mention, the first member of my family to go to college. I almost felt like us transfer students were neglected and left to solve our problems. I felt like there was an urgency for me to make moves and do everything I could to not only succeed, but also survive at USC. I had to take the initiative to make this happen.

Following the first few weeks, I did everything in my power to stay on top of my workload and familiarize myself with USC. I did so by connecting with all of my professors and advisors, seeking out

their advice and getting to know them on a personal level. I must admit, I was quite depressed during this period, and I felt so vulnerable to failure, which was my biggest fear. Every day, I thought about grabbing my things and heading back up north. I missed home more and more every day. I completely avoided my social life and devoted myself full time to studying as much as I could, and so I did. Studying all day kept my mind off of things, yet, it burned me out as I felt overwhelmed and still missed home.

To help me through this process, I started volunteering with JEP (Joint Educational Project) at CARECEN (Central American Resource Center) and Berendo Middle School, which was an amazing experience. Volunteering helped me realize that new experiences weren't as harmful as I thought they were. I kept reminding myself that there was an objective to all of this. It kept me motivated to keep striving and optimizing on this once in a lifetime opportunity. Every day, I sat in the front of each of my classes and tried my best to be as engaged as possible. I continuously pursued to visit my professors at least once a week, or once every two weeks. These new changes were difficult, and despite it not being easy at all, I remembered what my cousin Carol, a USF alumni, told me, "nothing is easy in life." And it wasn't; I was putting a smile on all the time, while dying on inside. I felt like my external world was completely contradicting, harming, and covering my inner world. It was as if my heart was deteriorating due to a cardio vascular disease and my brain self-destructing piece by piece, like the neurons that fade away due to Alzheimer's. I thought I would not be able to make it, and constantly thought about running away from all of this; not facing it. But I was able to turn these feelings around over time, becoming more comfortable and well adjusted.

In spite of the adversities and challenges that I encountered, good emerged from it. This path has not been easy at all, yet I have managed to face personal growth. Not only would I say that I became a better student, but I became a stronger individual who acknowledged that he could survive outside of his comfort zone and in the unknown. People always tell me, "you should study abroad," yet I already feel like I am by being embedded in this new social environment which is so unfamiliar to me. Although I cannot speak for others, I must say, my journey to this point was quite challenging. I went from believing that I would always dwell in my lower income communities of the Bay Area, to attending a

prestige institute that has introduced and changed my concept of Babylon, the outside world. Now I stand, at this point, reflecting at this whole transition and my current standing. I am so glad that I took the risk and made the change to attend USC. Due to these taken chances, I am currently in the Psychology Honors Program (where I am conducting research and will begin my thesis soon), the Psychology Honor Society, the McNair/Gateway Program, and was awarded the Summer 2016 Provost's Research Fellowship. So, considering this, for those who may be in similar situations and are afraid to leave home, it is okay to be scared.

We fear the unknown, yet, if we don't experience the unknown, we can't ever truly learn about ourselves. As humans, we are required to explore what is unfamiliar to become accustomed to it and learn from it. It's almost like when we figure out how to walk, at first it's new, and we may even be discouraged after falling a few times. But the more we do it, the better we become at it. It almost seems to be the case with becoming independent and learning how to leave home to be on my own. As time goes on, you learn to adapt; one becomes accustomed to the changes and next thing you know, you do not feel the necessity to go home frequently. One becomes adjusted gradually. And as new experiences and challenges emerge, I will be ready to take them on. Throw me anywhere; for I now know I can survive like a lion in the jungle.



Heart, Mind, Soul

Patricia Gutierrez



Traveling as a first-generation American and first-generation college student, places me at the crossroads of multiple cultures with the common denominator of my faith. Knowing that I am fortunate to be receiving the education my parents never received and that I am traveling to the places they have only visited in dreams, allows for me to

be lifted through positivity and gratefulness for the opportunities, I believe, have been



granted to me by The Man upstairs. The merging of cultures I experience with every traveling opportunity enriches my learning by opening up my mindset and heightening my adaptability to each travel destination.



Being the "First To Go" to both college and traveling, truly has given me perspective in finding beauty in any situation, and has proved to be an asset in my character



building by helping me develop unison in my heart, mind, and soul.



Being Able to Travel

Melissa Martinez



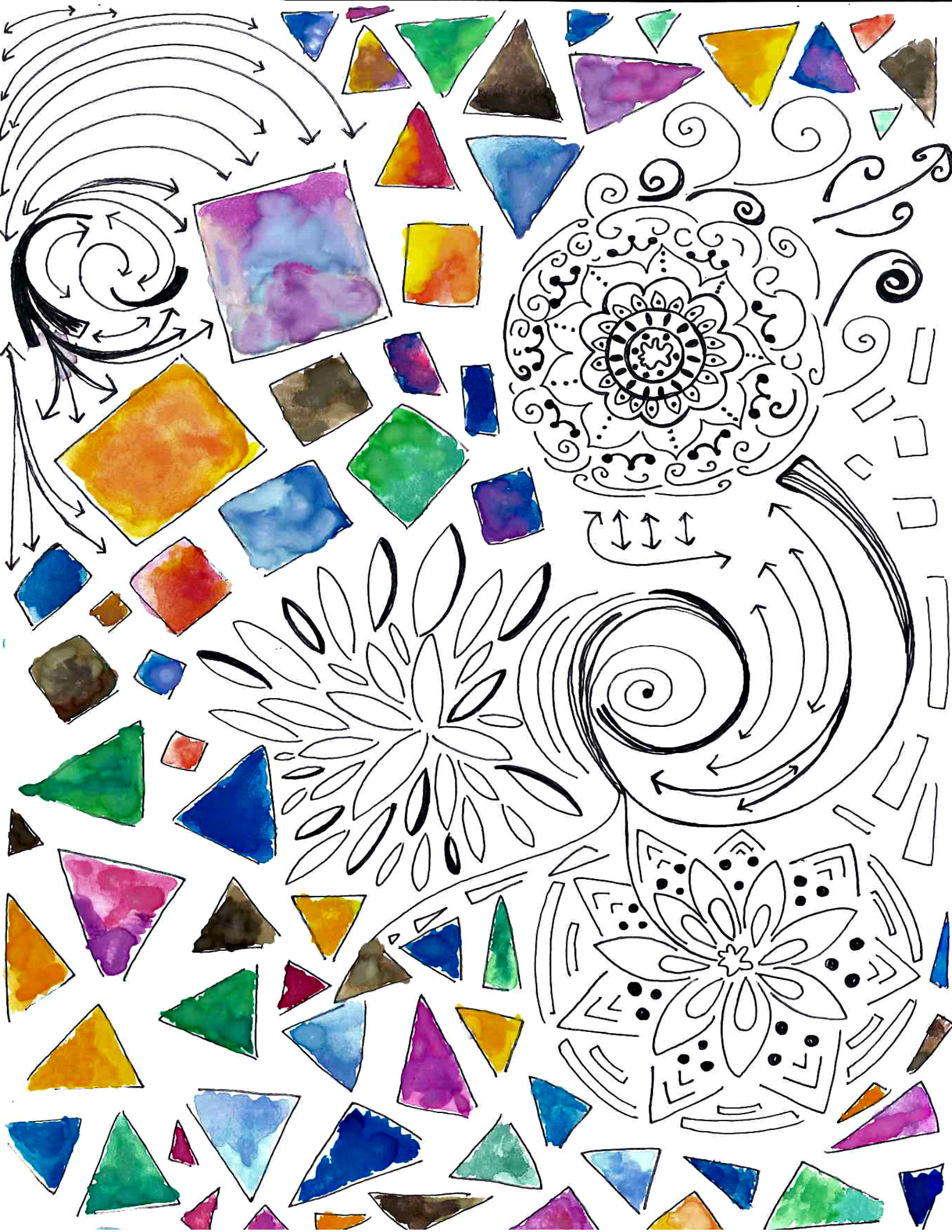
Brussels was the first place I traveled to after the program started. I really wanted to go to try the waffles and the chocolate because I had heard that Belgium was best known for these foods. However, when I saw this big Smurf structure, I thought about my mom because I knew how much she loved the Smurfs (it was her favorite show to watch back in Mexico when she was a little girl). Seeing this reminded me of my privilege of being able to travel.

When I first told friends and family about going to study abroad in Germany, two of the things I often heard was: "Germans are not kind people" or "Don't become a Nazi!," followed by a small laugh. Though the Holocaust/World War II are a significant part of Germany's history, this trip to Berlin opened my eyes to another part of history: the reality of a divided Germany when the Berlin Wall was up. Learning about how these two events helped me appreciate how resilient and compassionate German people are.



As a first generation U.S citizen, I lived a very sheltered life because my parents were too afraid of traveling far. I think my sheltered life made me want to travel, and one of my top places to go was Switzerland because I used to see images of it in random channels about traveling and I thought it was beautiful. It wasn't until I was on a train, already near Interlaken, Switzerland that I realized how much I really wanted to be there. I was in awe most of the time because I truly couldn't believe I was in such a beautiful place that the scenery looked fake (too perfect to be real). For some reason, I always thought Interlaken would be the most

impossible place for be to visit because it just seemed to good to be true. However, not only did I get to visit, but I got to paraglide and appreciate Interlaken in a whole new way.





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This 7th edition of First-Gen Voices is dedicated to those who recognize the value of community. These are our stories. *Go on and tell yours.* We want to hear it.



WE CALL THESE ALTERNATE STORIES.