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The Stories We Tell

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The Stories We Tell

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THE
STORIES
WE TELL

FIRST GEN VOICES



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welcome

Follow this path
and see where we are from.
Maybe you, too, will find a place
in which you can roam and run
and grow.

Lean into us, our work,
and feel our heart and soul.

We are all more than
anyone expects.

FOUR

the possibilities.



LIFE IS ABOUT FIRSTS

By Daniella Cornejo

Life is about firsts. First steps as a baby, the first day of school, first to go to college, first job, first home, and so many other firsts. Trying something for the first time can be scary. You don't know what to expect or what may happen. We live life always wanting to know everything and the unknown or unfamiliar is often shied away from. But not knowing is often the best part and being open to new experiences can help open your mind to new possibilities and ideas.

This past May I experienced a first when I traveled to the Dominican Republic. It was also my first time traveling without my family. In the days before my flight I felt quite relaxed and hadn't fully processed exactly what I was feeling, but on the day of the flight when it was time to say goodbye I felt a bit shaken at the thought of leaving my family. I had never felt a feeling like that before because my family had always been a constant in my life. I live at home and commute to school, so there is never a day where I don't see my family. I am very close to my family and we do practically everything together. We go to church together on Saturdays, have dinner together Sundays, and always attend family events like birthday parties together. So the idea of them not being there with me for 10 days

was a pretty daunting feeling, but life is about stepping out of your comfort zone. Taking this trip and discovering parts of myself that I didn't know I had was an opportunity that I'm glad I didn't pass up.

Arriving in the Dominican Republic the sights and noises were all

new and welcoming. There was so much going on from people selling things on the street to the loud noise of car horns being used. The weather was warm as a bit of light rain poured down when we arrived. Our bus or "guagua", as the Dominicans call it, dropped us off at our host family's houses, as my excitement only heightened for what was to come in the following days.

The emotion that most profoundly stuck out to me throughout the trip was the feeling of gratitude for what I had back home. In terms of what is considered "wealthy" in the United States, I am most definitely not, but that doesn't mean I am not privileged in other ways. I have a house with my own room, more food than I need, clothes, a phone, my own car, and an opportunity to go to college which not many can say they have. Although this does not mean that there will be a time in my life where I will feel I am not privileged either because of my race or gender, it is

important that I recognize what privileges I do have to have a better understanding of why these privileges exist.

I think many people in the United States live in their own personal bubble, where only their problems are important. They are so focused on helping themselves that the problems of other people are not even worth their time. Acknowledging your privilege is not wrong it is about understanding why certain people are privileged and others are not; whether it is because of race, economic status, or education level. Returning to the topic about life being about firsts; there is so much to know and explore in the world, but it involves taking that first step to discovering it.

It makes me upset to think about how corrupt people are in the world where their own desires out-way the desires of those who they feel are less than they are. Power and money are literally the tools of corruption. It makes me feel powerless about what I can do to help a situation that

I feel is impossible to resolve. On the day we visited the Batey in the Dominican Republic, I had no words to describe what I saw. The small, colorfully painted houses, the tiny dirt paths, the trash littered on the ground, but most of all the smiling faces of everyone who lived there. Although, the people who we spoke to and met endured many hardships we ourselves could never imagine they still felt thankful and blessed to be alive with the ones they love. The minor differences we see our minuscule compared to the things we share in common. If people would only learn to set those differences aside I truly believe the world would be a better place. As Pope Francis said, “the world tells us to seek success, power, and money; God tells us to seek humility, service, and love.” I learned a lot about myself on this trip and can only that by sharing what I experienced I can inspire people to step out of their comfort zone and choose to take the first step in discovering what the world has to offer.

Citations

Pope Francis (Pontifex). “The world tells us to seek success, power, and money; God tells us to seek humility, service, and love.” 2 June 2013, 3:12 a.m. Tweet.

GAINING A NEW PERSPECTIVE

By Daniel Penuela

In our lifetime, we experience “first times” all the time. From our first steps, to our first day of school, to our first car. The list goes on and on. Out of all the things there are to experience, I would say I am fortunate to have been able to do the things I have done with the resources accessible to me. One thing that I never thought I would be able to accomplish, was to go out of the country, let alone travel to the beautiful Dominican Republic. My family does not usually travel, and when we do, it is to visit family a couple hours away or to go on vacation every once in a blue moon. Before this trip, the farthest east I have ever traveled was to Nevada from my home in California, and I thought that was exciting, so imagine my pure enjoyment of being able to go to the Dominican Republic.

Being a first-generation college student and part of the amazing First to Go program at Loyola Marymount University, I am lucky to be the first in my immediate family to have these kinds of opportunities. In addition to being the first to attend a four year university, I am the first to go through the process of applying for a passport and the first to travel overseas to a different country. I am glad I was able to accomplish this, but the idea was nerve-racking to me because I had no idea what to expect and there is no one in my family I could ask for

advice as they have never done anything close to this before.

Imagine living in an environment completely different than the one you are used to for ten whole days. I have never been away from my family for that long, or even as far away. To add to this, I had not been on a plane for about twelve years and never for that many hours on a plane. All these things made me a nervous wreck. Leading up to the trip, I kept thinking about the intimidating things I have never done, but I also tried to keep in mind the exciting new experiences I would be able to have. New sights, meeting new people, learning about and experiencing the community. It was all a reward for stepping out of my comfort zone and taking those first steps into unknown territory, quite literally.

Luckily, I was able to overcome the fears I had to go on this new adventure. The trip was unlike anything I have ever done before. Some of my favorite moments were when we explored the different areas of Santiago, went on the cable car in Puerto Plata, and even the bus rides to places where everyone would be singing as loud as they could be. It was just incredible to see new landscapes and to experience the community forming from being together in a foreign land. My favorite day was the beach day. Growing up, one of my favorite activities to do was to swim in any body of

water I had access to, and this still holds true to this day. The beaches over there were beautiful and I could walk for what seemed like forever and the water would still only reach my stomach. The soothing waves of the ocean mixed with the fact that everyone was relaxing, talking together, and there was delicious food for lunch made the experience ten times better. It was the best way to end this trip we had traveled together on.

The trip was not perfect, and I still had to overcome my share of challenges, but I learned from each of these. Some challenges that I had to face were the language barrier and access to water. I have some knowledge of Spanish, but I am not as fluent as I would like to be. As a result, being in a country where they only spoke Spanish was difficult for me. I could understand basic conversation, but anything more was too complicated. For this, I want to shout out to my roommate who stuck with me through the whole trip and helped translate for me. If it was not for him, I would have been lost for most of that trip. As for the access to water, I never truly appreciated the act of having running water at home until I was on this trip. At my host family's house, they had a tank that they would fill up to provide running water for the house, and on random days it would just stop working. This meant that my

roommate and I would have to shower with the water from a bucket that was left next to the shower. The water was freezing cold and it was difficult to manage everything while our host mom sternly told us not to get soap in the water bucket, but somehow, we managed. When I got home, I had never been so grateful for running water, and my first shower at home was refreshing. I practically kissed my shower in appreciation.

The trip to the Dominican Republic was an incredible adventure that I never thought I would have the opportunity to experience. The trip had its ups and downs but ultimately it was an amazing journey that I will remember for the rest of my life. Being the first in my family to go to the Dominican Republic and being the oldest sibling, I want to show my little brother that it is possible to go out of the country and experience new things. I hope he has dreams of following in my footsteps and taking advantage of all the opportunities he will be given. I also hope to encourage any other First-generation college student to go on this trip or any study abroad trip and not let fear of the unknown hold them back. Stepping out of my comfort zone has proven to be a challenge, but at the same time rewarding as I feel I am maturing and growing as a person.



You're a revolutionary thinker in love with alchemy, authentic
 the wild's adventure. So, yes, you bring out, kindness, the
 'cause your brilliance is waiting for you. You bring out, kindness, the
 in those around you. You move the scripted to the felt, overw, to
 with your visions so sweet. Kinship is remedy to a self-forgo, then spirit
 You are power and promise. You have lives to help raise, so stand in
 Your truth. You are witnessing the "beyond" nature of you.
 Behold all that you have become. Stuff falls into place
 simply because your existence is awe. The universe couldn't
 bear to see you go unseen. You are a quiet creator
 in awe of a world that has forgotten how to love
 what a gift it is to cut legacies. There's a reason
 why it hurts. You carry an arsenal of ancestors,
 hope. You're an enigma, a firecracker, w
 heart so deeply in love. Trust
 that you are on your way, and it
 beautiful. The universe is
 full of words, a blooming
 eers to

NO PERSON IS THE SAME

By Stacey Leon

No person is the same. A lot of people seem to assume that. We all have different stories, experiences, and ideas that shape who we are and set us apart from the rest. Unfortunately, many still hold prejudices against certain groups. One of the groups that stands out is first-generation families. The story I am about to tell shows the first time I experienced this prejudice and how these stereotypes take place in the real world.

My mom and I love shopping. It is one of our favorite activities to do together. What is the harm in shopping? Up until that day, I thought it was only the hit our wallets take. However, that was not the only threat I experienced five years ago. Up until the moment when I experienced how the real world is, and the people who keep this negative connotation of it.

We were in my mom's favorite store at the mall. It was closing down for good, so my mom wanted to stock up on clothes. We spent hours attempting to find all of the dresses and shirts that would be the last to carry that brand's name forever. With her pile of dozens of clothes and her credit card ready, my mom went up to the cashier to take home her goodies.

Everything was fine at first. But once my mother started speaking to me in

English with her thick Mexican accent, the cashier became increasingly interested in learning more about my mom. She started becoming hostile with her questions. *How are you paying for all of this? You know this is final sale right? Where are you from? What do you do for a living? Where is your husband from? What does your husband do for a living? Are sure you want to take all of it? Maybe you want to take some clothes back since it is a lot.*

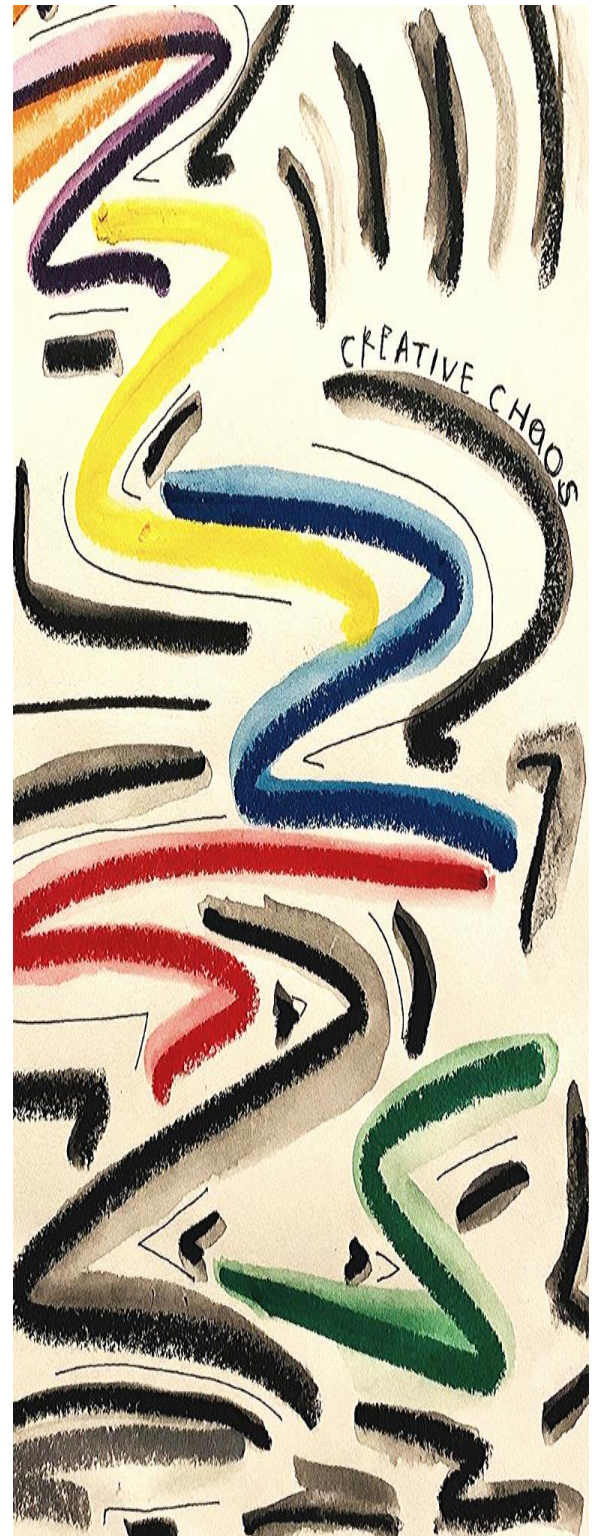
My mother's patience was wearing thin as the cashier continued to bombard her with questions. With each question, my mom hesitantly gave her answers. However, my mom's attitude changed once the total appeared on the screen and she swiped her card. A smile appeared on her face as we grabbed the bags and headed for the door.

I was extremely confused. I was still upset from all of these questions, but my mom seemed to be fine when we exited. I asked her, "Why do you seem so normal after what just happened?" Her answer? "It means I did something right." That line has changed my entire perspective on this situation. I now understood what my mom had realized. Although the cashier believed my mom fit into a certain category in her mind, she did not. Both of my parents worked hard to get to where they are now, and that cashier does not know that story.

My mother was proud to show that she could pay for the clothes. She was proud to be Mexican and be able to take out her credit card. She was proud that through her hard work, she was able to this.

To this day, I still think of this incident as a turning point in my life. Instead of being offended by certain questions or comments that have to do with my ethnicity, I take pride in it. I am proud to not fit into the box that many people have tried to put my family in. First generation families have gotten to where they are through different paths, decisions, experiences, and battles. The only thing we have in common, is being first-gen. Although we are sometimes put into this box, we all stand out in various ways.

No person is the same. A lot of people seem to assume that. No person fits into a box, nor should they. Boxes are good for packages, not for generalizing humans. Boxes limit those who should not be limited. If someone attempts to put you in a box similar to my mom, remember to take pride in the fact that you do not fit into that box because no one is meant to. It is important to recognize that everyone has their own story. All of these different stories help shape humanity.



WHY 4C?

By Audrey Ashami Hammond

Hair like wool that won't be tamed

Why must it be stubborn and not obedient?

You cry from the heat

Why does it have to hurt?

Simmering smoke flows from your scalp

Why must it grow up and not down?

What was once alive, now fried and vulnerable

To the hands of the tamer

"Shhh...calm down, I didn't burn you,"

She says with love

But it doesn't feel like love

Why couldn't it just grow silky and smooth?

She roughly rakes through your locks of hair,

Aiming to straighten out the kinks

Why isn't it pretty enough?

You suffocate from the burnt smell,

Choking on the tears streaming down your face

Why won't this end?

She places the comb on the sizzling rusted stove

Quickly tapping it to see if it is hot

"Are you ready?", she says

And there you sit, frozen in fear and disgust of yourself

~

Abstract

This piece reflects a memory of mine from when I was in elementary school. My mom was getting me ready and pressed my hair for culmination. I remember crying and screaming so loud I think our neighbors were worried. My mom was telling me to calm down, but I was so intimidated by the heat and scared of getting burned. I haven't had my hair pressed for years. However, I am glad that I have slowly, but surely come to a stage in my life where I love myself and my natural hair which is a key difference from then and now. In addition, in the past I was very insecure and did not find beauty in my curls. I have always found it to be a burden and wished that I had silky hair for its simplicity. I have a newfound appreciation for my hair, although it is very delicate and can take time to style, I love what God gave me

UNENTITLED

By Anonymous

Why can't I rely on you?

I am tired of being estranged from the happiness I am owed

The childhood I was robbed of

The youth I have been stalled of.

Why don't you care?

Is my life not important to you?

Would you rather I drudge around, head hanging down with no hope of a bright future?

I see you, eagerly hiding your intent to discourage

Knowing that I've been grinding and striving to get out of this hell that you call home

And so I go abroad to appease the piece of myself that has been sheltered, to explore:

A history that has been neglected

A land that I was preempted

And a home that was excepted of my truth, curiosity, and love

I travel, only to find myself rejected by blood

"You don't belong here. Go back to California," it says slyly

Hoping to extinguish the excitement in my eyes fade and mirror despair

I have grown claustrophobic of the box that is your viewpoint

You fear change, even when it's good

I have learned.

The absence of your presence has taught me what not to become, and that to merely exist is not
a life at all



HOPE YOU GOT THE MEMO

By Guillermo Gonzalez

I can't believe we made it. This applies to so much in my life. Especially being a first-generation college student. I'm the first in my family for many things. Going to college is the largest and most impactful so far. The whole process of college is completely foreign to my family and me, things such as applying for financial aid and registering for classes. Thankfully, I had many resources to help me be prepared for what is to come. Applying to college was the first checkpoint, the next one being actually attending college and adapting to the new lifestyle. On top of this, I am a commuter since I did not receive enough financial aid to cover living on campus and I live about 25 minutes away, but I do not have my driver's license yet, so I depend on my parents. Being that I try to make my college life work around my parent's schedule I don't get a lot of free time, so it wasn't easy making friends outside of my classes. Luckily, First To Go gave me the proper foundation for me to prosper. It supplied me with other first gens who became my friends and information that became tools that I have used to survive college so far. It also gave me this wonderful opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic. This is

my first time traveling outside the country without my family and at first, it was a bit overwhelming. Then the excitement hit me. Woah! The Dominican Republic is a beautiful place with amazing people and a complicated culture and politics. I could not wait to go. Being in the Dominican Republic has given me a lot to reflect about. Mainly about the comparison of lifestyles and how being first gen affects this.

Family is important. Family is irreplaceable. Family should be cherished. For context, I live with my mom, dad, and 11-year-old sister. We live in a 2-bedroom apartment with me having my own room since being in college has its privileges. My dad works as a dental assistant and my mom works part-time as a campus aid. Pretty respectable professions for 2 individuals who never attended a 4-year institution. Indeed, they are my biggest supporters and inspiration. My dad had to go to a trade school since the company he worked for shut down, during this period we survived off of his unemployment checks, but we made the most of it. My mom was offered a job at the elementary school my sister attended, and she accepted as she saw the family's financial needs. I am immensely grateful for everything they have done to

keep the family afloat and I don't know if I will ever be able to repair them. We are a close family unit, mainly since we are all we've got, all of my grandparents are deceased and the rest of the family out of state and out of the country. In comparison, in the Dominican Republic, there are multiple generations living in the same household and extended family nearby. To my understanding, many Latin American communities tend to live this way, but my family has decided to live this way even though our extended family prefers a lifestyle like that of the Dominican Republic. The main consensus I have observed is the acknowledgment of a main maternal figure that keeps the family together and working. Back home we all collectively tend to highly respect and appreciate my mom. In the Dominican Republic, my host mom's middle-aged son did every task that was assigned to him and would take good care of his mother. This matriarchal family structure has positive and negatives effects in our current society. Yes, it gives women more power over family decisions but at times it can be stressful and too much pressure for one person which is why it is better to have a division of power in which each family member takes responsibility for a certain task.

Luckily, being outside the US was nothing new but being outside of the US

without my family was definitely different. However, because of the bond I had with my roommate for the trip, I was in no way alone and in a way, he became like an older brother to me. Since I am of Mexican descent and I have traveled there during my early childhood, during this trip I noticed the differences between Mexico and the Dominican Republic more clearly than with the United States. Food was a big difference for me personally. As a commuter, it is easier for me to bring food from home, so I don't get much of an opportunity to get outside of my comfort zone. Prior to the trip, I was expecting the food to be rich in new flavors and fruit based. However, the food lacked much flavor and was fairly simple in comparison to the spicy flavorful food that I'm used to. The food tasted exceptionally well regardless and I enjoyed it, it just wasn't what I expected. The language was a similar experience but less surprising. I know Spanish from speaking it with my family rather than from taking it as a foreign language in school. However, I was not expecting for certain words to have different meanings from what I knew. I took it as a learning experience and enjoyed noticing the differences in speech patterns. The way the water supply worked was a small challenge. In Mexico, you must fill up a tank with water to make sure you have running water until the next time water is

available. I would help my Aunt out the nights that water would come to make sure that there was enough water for everyone. However, in the Dominican Republic, my host mom did not tell me where the tank was so when there wasn't any running water it was quite difficult. Showering with a bucket of water was familiar but my family in Mexico would usually warm it up so it wouldn't be so cold. Regardless, I am grateful that my host mom made the effort to get us water to be able to keep clean. Finally, the climate. During the spring and summer in Michoacán, the state where my mom is from, it tends to be a tolerable warm climate with plenty of wind and occasional rain. The Dominican Republic was different, it was pretty hot with strong rains which is most likely the cause for the humidity. Regardless, by the third day, I got acclimated to the weather and it wasn't too bad to deal with. Mexico and the Dominican Republic may be fairly different, but I was still able to appreciate these differences and acknowledge that I have a lot to learn about their culture.

As mentioned before, being a first-generation college student is a part of my identity, especially now that I am actually in college. In fact, thanks to the First To Go program I was able to not only travel to the Dominican Republic but also be the first in my family to do so. But this means so much

more to me than that. It was truly an amazing learning experience and I wouldn't change a thing about it. For most Haitians in the Dominican Republic, being a first gen means so much not only because it means they are trying their best to be accepted but also because of the work opportunities that will make their lives better. Being a college student alone is so much more of an honor to me than it was before since now I see my privilege living in the United States. I also acknowledge the struggles that my family went through and the restless nights I spent in high school and how all of it is paying off. For me, this trip wasn't to pity the ones less fortunate than us, it's more to appreciate and be grateful for what you have. I also saw many parallels with how immigration is dealt with in the Dominican Republic and in the United States. In a way, I feel like an outsider or that I don't belong in college because of the lack of knowledge or preset resources that other students have. What has helped me the most in embracing who I am is the first gen community that I hold near and dear now. This is because now I feel like I belong, I just have to use different tools to survive and go through trial and error to find my own way. I am eternally grateful for being able to study abroad since I did not get the opportunity in high school. Another perk of being a college student, you have the opportunity of traveling and with

the incentive of learning about another culture. In fact, I had no clue what Haitian Dominican relations looked like prior to this trip. It is a situation of the oppressor and the oppressed occupying the same area that is much too familiar and common in the society that we live in today which is a harsh reality. Any small action can help towards change, this trip really got me thinking about what can be done. Especially since we got to meet local children of the workers that live in unsuitable conditions for just for being Haitian, of low class, or in most cases both. Meeting them was a fun experience but later I felt helpless since these children will have to grow up in the same conditions as their parents. Regardless, it also gave me hope since they still found happiness and were just happy to be together as a family and being alive. In a way, Haitians and first gen students have some things in common. For one, both communities are largely underrepresented, and they must take control of telling their story otherwise nobody knows what each go through. In addition, they go through struggles that are specific to their identity that they have to figure out mostly on their own yet find help within the community when needed. Ultimately, this trip was an amazing eye-opening experience that is very beneficial to first-generation college students not just as a study abroad

experience but to also acknowledge a bigger picture of compassion.

Since each person is different and had not been to the Dominican Republic, everyone had a unique experience tied to what they knew as familiar and what they have been through in their lives so far. Personally, as mentioned before, the aspects of my identity that affected me the most were being Mexican-American, a first-generation college student, and the family archetype that I belong to. These aspects in addition to the rest of my identity are what shaped my experience and helped me overcome certain struggles that I faced and enjoy certain parts of the trip in my own way. Luckily, I tend to try to make the most out of any experience handed to me regardless if I am familiar or not, which is sometimes easier to do depending on how much effort I am willing to put in. This trip challenged me to try new things ranging from food to communicating to making new friends, overall a worthwhile experience that I would not change a thing about. I would highly recommend this trip to any college student as it is an experience outside of the college comfort zone that is just the right balance between unfamiliarity and a sense of togetherness from other students and the people who made this trip possible: CIEE, Mia, Jenni, and Lexie!

MY FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

By Laura Mejia

One of my main goals in college is to obtain an education that will lead me toward a good career. At home, I have my crazy family to support me while I try my best to accomplish this. There's ten of us at my grandma's house every night. My parents, my grandparents, my brothers, my aunt, my cousin, and my dog. To my parents and my grandparents, I am the perfect role model for my brothers. To my brothers, I am irritating. To my aunt and cousin, I am sarcastic in a good way, I think. And to me, I am a daughter, an older sister, a Latina, a first-generation college student; these are just some of the qualities that I identify with that form the person I am today.

When I first started college, I didn't just want to meet the expectations of a college student, I wanted to exceed them. I was the first person in my family to attend college, but that was not going to limit me in my success. So, I wanted to do the best I could. I slept the right amount, attended every class and finished every homework assignment. I over-studied for every test in order to receive the best grade I could. When it came to classes and grades, it was all up to me. If I failed, it was because I did not do enough. If I did well, there was always room for improvement. School was

the only place where I felt completely in control.

However, as a first-generation college student, living away from home was a strange concept to my family. So, I commuted to a university where 90% of freshman lived on campus. I went to class, attended club meetings, worked, and then went straight home. Although I attended Loyola Marymount University, I felt out of place and disconnected from my peers. I had a few friends, but I didn't hang out with them outside of school nor did I make the effort to do so. Due to this challenging transition my freshman year, I wanted nothing more than to graduate already and start working.

Moving into sophomore year, I devoted most of my time to finding a summer internship with a company that could potentially offer me a full-time position after college. The time and energy I devoted was worth it as I found myself with an internship for the summer. However, it was very draining because I had focused solely on school and work. Additionally, at the beginning of the school year, I received a scholarship for first-generation students in the College of Business Administration. One of the requirements of this scholarship

was participation in the First-To-Go program. Although I saw the FTG program mainly as another line on my resume, I started to realize that it gave me an opening to see my friends more. I joined a mentoring club called El Espejo in order to mentor middle-school students from Lennox Middle School while at the same time sharing that experience with my friends also. The more I saw my new friends from college the more I started to open myself up to them; I found myself wanting to stay on campus to hang out with them more even if I didn't have to.

During junior year, I felt most connected to my friends than I ever had. I became more involved in FTG, not because it was a requirement, but because I found my place in this community and wanted to involve myself as best I could. I helped out at the FTG retreat for freshman scholars because I remembered how lost I felt as a freshman going into college. Additionally, I began to go to the FTG lounge on campus to meet new people and see my friends in between classes. I couldn't help but feel saddened because I felt like I wasted my first two years of college focusing on only working toward exceeding the expectations of a first-generation college student. Expectations from my family, but also

expectations that I had for myself. There was not enough time in the day to complete my school work, be with family, and have fun with friends. I felt as if I was spread too thin. I set myself up for a good job after college. I have friends I love in addition to the family I love. Whereas before all I wanted to do was graduate, now I wish I could postpone the date for a little while longer.

As I reflect over this experience, I will focus on maintaining a new perspective as I enter senior year in a few months. I cannot feel sad over the time I did not make an effort to find friends. During my senior year, I will enjoy the friendships I have made with those in the First-To-Go community. Instead of focusing on my regrets, I will focus on the positive and enjoy my last year at LMU. Just because I am graduating in 2020 does not mean that these friendships have to end. Therefore, the pressure and fear of failure as a first-gen college student pushed me into a state of working constantly. When I found my First-To-Go family and community, I realized that I was not alone in this pressure and fear. My community allowed me to break from a state of constant worry about the future to one where I could enjoy the present moment.



MY COMMUNITY

By Jordyn Patterson

A community hero died; his name is Nipsey Hussle. My hero died; he is my father. I knew about Nipsey Hussle and the things he did, but I was not his biggest fan. Why was I so emotional from his passing? This event brought up many emotions from past trauma and it hurt to see this happen again. Nipsey Hussle was a part of a gang... unfortunately, my dad was, too. Nipsey Hussle was on the road of building the community back up and strong for the people similar to him; my dad was trying to better his life in order to get our family back up and running healthy. Around thirty years of life for Nipsey Hussle. Around thirty years of life for my dad. Both had little girls to look after in this cruel world. Both were forced to leave their little girls due to gun violence in the street. But wait, this sounds too familiar. This same event is repeated too many times in my community. I love my community, I have much pride in my community... but they were right, it is dangerous at times. I was blind to the dangerous-ness because it was so normal to me. This was a painful moment of realization. I need to create change, make this different. I need to grab the baton from my dad and Nipsey Hussle and continue to better the life of my family, community, and myself. I don't know what I want to do in

my life for a career, but I know I want it to be something that I can use to help my community. These events have to stop repeating themselves. Nipsey Hussle's story made me sad not only because he was one of my community heroes, but because his story was very similar to my dad's. Nipsey Hussle's daughter experience during this time is very similar to mine when I was her age due to the passing of our fathers. My college experiences have introduced me to life outside of my community. I see that life does not have to be like this. With seeing all of the social justice movements at LMU, I am inspired to create change for my community. I will create change for my community. Since I come from a low-income household and community, going back and forth from LMU to LA has really opened my eyes to the issues and problems occurring back in my community. It has reshaped my outlook on my community. I love it, I have much pride in it, I plan to take care of it, I plan to better it. The very different experience I have when I'm at LMU versus when I'm back home exemplifies the first-generation experience. I am constantly comparing the new amount of privileges I have since I've been in college with the lack of resources my family and friends have back home. I'm living out

some of my family members wildest dreams by being in college, gaining all this education through experiences and class lectures. I live this life while still experiencing community traumas. I owe my

family and my community. This moment of realization with the similar experience of my dad and Nipsey Hussle highlighted my new-founded life purpose.

FOR THE BOTH OF US

By Luisa Valle

August 18 of 2016 was the day I lost my father to a sudden and tragic accident. Having grown up in a nearly perfect family, it was a possibility that would have never crossed my mind before. I regret not fully appreciating the blessing of the family I had all those years and never realizing it could ever end. My emotions were inscrutable, and I could not accept a death I had not seen coming. How could you spend a night laughing with a loved one only to be told that he had passed away the next morning? How do you think about a life ahead without a loved one who was there your entire life before? I had experienced death for the first time, but in the hardest possible manner. I had to endure my own mourning, meanwhile supporting the rest of my mourning family. The hardest part of all was going back to our own routines being looked at with eyes of pity, no true sympathy, and eyes expecting you to move on so quickly. The thing is, you never move on; you just learn how to cope with the lamentation and suffering. The loss and pain never fade, but neither do the amazing memories. I forever hold in my heart the days spent alongside my father, and admire the momentary time given.

It has been nearly three years since my dad passed away, and although I am at peace my loss, it never gets easier. One of the hardest things I deal with is feeling alone in my grief and feeling as if no one understands. It's difficult for me to see nearly everyone continue on having new experiences with their dad. It's difficult listening to a friend complain about their dad, hearing someone call their dad about car issues, and seeing dads be present for their children's graduation. I am constantly reminded that I no longer have the opportunity of having my dad with me in every milestone of my life. However, I have learned so much from it. Just as everyone who has not experienced death, I was young, naïve, and never fully anticipated the complexity of death. It is now a truth that I have to embrace. I have been learning how to survive without my dad and am now living for the both of us. I am now capable of appreciating time to its fullest extent. As much as I enjoyed my time with my dad, I regret never understanding that our treasured time would not be infinite. Now, every moment I spend with a loved one is a cherished moment, because I understand that tomorrow is not promised to everyone. I have come to understand and accept that he may not physically be here with me when

needed, but he will always be with me spiritually.

Despite such an unfortunate situation, it has turned me into my best self. I have continued my education at Loyola Marymount University and continue on every day knowing I am not only doing this for myself, but for and with my father. I have a constant motivation to make my father proud of the endurance I possess to continue so strongly in every way possible to succeed and push forward. I see him in me every day, and quite literally when it comes to my eyebrows, nose, eyes, and smile. I am infinitely grateful for every path he paved for me to be where I am today. May he rest in a blissful peace, as I continue to work towards that peace in my own life.



HAVING A PLACE

By Mirian Melendez

I grew up in the streets of East Palo Alto, California, yet I felt like I spent my time roaming around streets not of my own. Growing up I was always crossing a bridge, a freeway, and other roads just to get to the “good” side of town and stay away from my home. My town was considered frightening for many, dangerous, too violent, too poor, and too ghetto. From a young age I knew the history of where I lived, I saw everyday with my own eyes how my neighbors and I lived, I witnessed the struggle of the violence and poverty. I knew what it took to live in my town, so regardless of what others thought about my community, I saw the strength and resilience of the people who lived in this town with me. My family has lived in East Palo Alto for over 30 years, my parents and older siblings have seen the drastic changes this city has had over time. I have also seen an influx of new businesses, tech companies, new buildings, and houses being added to our town due to gentrification. Being born in my city granted me with an epistemological look towards the issues surrounding my low income, immigrant, and poorly resourced community. Despite having had to receive my education across town, I used my story and experiences living in East Palo Alto to transform my education.

Personally, I have enjoyed living in my town; this is where I was born and raised alongside my siblings and my friends. There were moments that I did not feel that the physical environment was safe for kids like me to grow up in, but that did not keep my family from truly seeing the potential that this town holds. My family and I have always loved the atmosphere and culture of this community. However, I was not able to grow up going to schools located directly in my town because these schools lacked the financial and educational resources to help their own students. That is why my mom decided to send my brother and I across town in the wealthier area to get a “better education.” In reality, I was not really getting a good education at the Catholic and private elementary and middle school I attended because they did not remotely meet educational standards. My elementary and middle school took in all the kids from my city. Every one of us students was from East Palo Alto, we were always hoping this school would take us in and give us a stellar education. We did not have classified teachers, we went through various substitutes, and lacked various resources for students. Even though, we did not have a great academic achieving school and the resources necessary for our success, we did

have access to more opportunities than those presented to students attending schools near my home. I gained many personal values, empathy for others, and a willingness to take action for justice, which made me the person I continued to grow up to be. During my time at my middle school I was fortunate to be accepted into an academic scholarship program that provided full-ride scholarships to students to attend a wealthy and academically rigorous high school. The program was meant to not just provide us with the financial resources to attend a great school, but rather was a support system filled with mentors, programs, activities, and guidance to keep us on track from the 4th grade until college. As time went by and I was going to begin high school, I remember the first thing I said when I entered the private, enclosed gates of the school, was “I do not want to go to school with all these white and rich people.” My whole family who was in the car turned to me and went off on me about how this was a great opportunity and how I did not understand the privilege of attending such a great school. They reminded me about the hard work and dedication I had been putting in to my education and this program since the 4th grade. They wondered why now are you saying this after years of sacrifice to attend this school. I understood why they were

upset with me, I mean I spent my whole childhood, weekends, days and nights just focusing on improving my academic skills. I knew that I could not give up at that very moment, but just keep fighting the fight I had already started.

Moving on to high school, this is where I begin to learn more about myself and how to deal with the obstacles being a person of color attending a predominantly white and wealthy school. Overall, high school was not easy. I loved my teachers, my school, and the immense support I was receiving. But, I had to learn to embrace where I came from, the struggle to get where I am, my background, the work and the jobs of my parents. There was no room for me to feel ashamed of who I was and what made me Mirian Elizabeth Melendez. I knew that all these wealthy kids were sitting in a comfortable seat, but my seat was constantly moving with new struggles everyday. I took my story and brought it to the table because my seat and desk was present in each classroom, I knew no one could take that from me. I dedicated every piece of myself to my education even if that meant staying late at school till closing (7pm), joining every activity I could, taking the bus home, and taking advantage of every resource and help I could get. I used what I had and shared with others my journey. Now I hope that the program I was

fortunate to forge as the first cohort and which I continue to work with during my summers, continues to help kids achieve their dreams. Being a kid from EPA, who would have thought I would accomplish so

much up till this day to be currently be attending and receiving my education at Loyola Marymount University.

LABEL-LOVERS

By Nicole Hernandez

I have never been one to focus on labels. In fact, one of my favorite pastimes is thrift-shopping. Yes, I can appreciate a nice, new pair of heels, but I do not base my entire shopping around a certain brand, or label. The same way that I do not conform to certain fashion labels, I tend to stay away from constraining social labels. In fact, my parents raised me with little emphasis on social labels. I never felt defined by my race, gender, economic status. My parents taught me that those labels were insignificant, and that what really matters is a person's character. So, I spent most of my life with little focus on labels. Yes, I am Mexican but to this day I hate Mexican food, and for the longest time Taco Bell as my favorite Mexican restaurant. Yes, I am the first in my family to go to college, but my parents dragged me to SAT prep classes, read over my college applications, and were knowledgeable and involved throughout my entire college process. And yes, my mom was an immigrant to this country, but now she works with attorneys and judges and she is probably better at English grammar than I am. This was my life for eighteen years, I never knew any different, and I never wanted anything else. However, when I started college, my whole upbringing was attacked.

I discovered very soon into my first year of college that the world is filled with label-lovers, people who have a close-minded idea of what each social label should entail. There were suddenly so many harsh dichotomies that were promoted: “us vs. them,” “white vs. people of color,” “rich vs. poor.” All of this went against everything I was taught about equality, fairness, and open-mindedness. Moreover, as time passed, I felt more and more like I was an outsider because I did not (and I still do not) fit into societal expectations of what it means to be first-gen, Mexican, a girl, etc. For example, my first semester I joined the Latinx communities at LMU; however, during meetings, I felt like my experiences were invalid because they didn't match the majority's. Everyone at the meetings spoke perfect Spanish, loved spicy Latin foods, and liked the same Latin artists (and at the time I didn't even know what Reggaetón was). I felt like a complete outcast, especially when the group would criticize “gringas” or “gringos” or ask “What do you mean you don't speak Spanish, aren't your parents Mexican?” I would get so emotional because before college I never paid attention to race, or what was expectations were associated with being Mexican. I felt

out of place in a community that was supposed to be a safe place.

Then, I experienced similar alienation when I tried bonding with the First to Go community. I remember a time where certain classmates would harshly criticize “rich people.” These individuals had the mentality that just because someone had money, they were automatically bad. Suddenly, I felt attacked, isolated, and angry all at once. My family is not rich but we are blessed with a lot, but it has all been through hard work and strategic planning over the years, and to have all of that work invalidated and antagonized was something that I struggled with. My parents raised me to treat everyone equally regardless of their backgrounds, yet these people were judging others for simply having money. This made me feel very insecure and I did my best to hide my family’s wealth. I was afraid to share anything about myself, in fear of being judged. In my heart I knew that this was wrong, but I just wanted to fit in, like any college freshman, I just wanted to be accepted.

It took many emotional phone calls with my parents, my boyfriend, and my closest friends before I realized that yes, the world is filled with label-lovers, but that doesn’t invalidate my experiences at all. In fact, I have learned that it is only through sharing my feelings, upbringing, and

perspective that these confining labels can be broken. If I hide myself then people will remain close-minded. Maybe when people meet me, they’ll realize that wealthy people can be humble; that not all Mexicans speak Spanish; that first-gen does not mean poor and oppressed; and that Taco Bell has some great burritos. However, biases don’t change unless perspectives are shared, and that is something that I have committed myself to doing. Sharing, learning, and growing with and for others.

The background is a piece of paper with handwritten text in black ink. The handwriting is somewhat messy and expressive. There are several white rectangular boxes overlaid on the text, each containing a line of the quote. One word, 'VISION', is highlighted in yellow. In the bottom right corner, the name 'audre LORDE' is written in a cursive script.

"when i dare to be powerful,

to use my strength in

the service of my

vision, then it

becomes less and less

important whether

i'm afraid."

audre
LORDE