

Nantucket Book Foundation Young Writers Award 2018 Finalist

“Home”

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11th grade

When I was only two, I was brought into this country. I grew up learning the language, the culture, the history, etc.. To me the United States was my home. My parents made sure to teach me about our Hispanic culture and for them it was beyond important for me to be bilingual and not forget about my roots. It wasn't until I was around eight that my parents told me that I was not born here. Being so young I did not think much about it, but once I started looking for my first job was when my parents explained to me that since I was not born here I did not have a social security number and was considered illegal. This broke me because I had always seen people treat Latinos in a very nasty and cruel way. People such as my friends and everyone I knew never treated me differently during that point because I had been going to school with the same group of kids for years and people just assumed I was “American.” I was ashamed for not being here legally and that caused many issues with my family which now I look back at and feel guilty about because I know that they did what they did because they wanted me to have a better life and an actual shot at a bright future and career here.

Once I knew the truth about my status here, things kind of changed for me. I kept it a secret, but I started lashing out at people who would make racist remarks because in a way it was insulting me without even knowing. I would always get questions about things like what do you want to do or be when you grow up, and I told them the truth; I want to go into healthcare. But it broke my heart because I knew deep down I might not be able to attend college and I would fall into the stereotype of being a maid or something and all my hard work would be put to waste.

As embarrassed I am to say this I know that I once was brainwashed into being racist toward my own race because it was something I had

grown up around. I had heard from some fellow friends and my family about what El Salvador was like and how dangerous but beautiful it was. I remember my brother going every summer for vacation and feeling envious but at the same time very happy because I knew I didn't want to go to a place that so many people run away from. I remember always feeling a little out of place because I had grown up around white people so new students who would come from El Salvador would straight away dislike me because they would place me into a stereotype without even knowing that I could relate to them in many ways. There was an incident back in 8th grade where I was trying to speak Spanish to some girls because they didn't know English and after I left the locker room and came back I heard them talking about me saying that I was privileged and thought I was higher up than them and that I was a princess and a disgrace to the Spanish community. This made me really upset that I just never tried to talk to them again.

In the spring of 2017, my parents filed my paperwork for my residency here and in November I got a card saying they accepted my paperwork, but I had to go back to my birthplace for some testing and for my interview with the embassy there. I was in complete shock because I did not want to go. I cried a lot, begging my parents not to make me go, but they told me I had to go so I could have an actual shot to achieve my dreams. I was originally only supposed to go for three weeks, and things got complicated since I was without my parents and traveling alone. I ended up having to stay almost two months in a foreign country to me.

Being there was quite an experience; it definitely opened my eyes and made me a better person. Being there I felt very lost because people off the bat knew I was raised here because for starters I had a very slight but noticeable American accent while speaking Spanish. I was very picky about certain foods, I knew zero history, and most important I had and still have the mindset of I can do and be anything I want to be and this is something that is not very proudly looked upon. In the eyes of everyone in El Salvador a woman's job is to get married as early as 14, have kids, raise them, cook, clean and that it. The fact that I did not know to cook Spanish dishes or kill a chicken or even wash my clothes on a rock made

people think I was insane and automatically made me feel like I was stupid.

While on this trip, I decided to make the best of it and learn something from it and see the beautiful parts of the country. I finally realized why people run away and it is because the government is so corrupt and poverty is everywhere. Many families can't afford food or clothes, let alone sending their kids to school, so kids will start working as early as seven. I would see kids selling candy on the streets when they should have been in school and this just really stuck to me because it shows how much I took for granted. You really can't have a future there unless you come from a family of money. Even work there is no work and even if there is you are making enough to survive which is heartbreaking.

On January 27th was when I was able to return home and the minute I stepped into the US legally I was a changed person, not just because of my legal status, but because I was no longer ignorant. I was beyond thankful and overwhelmed to be back home and with my friends and family, a few days later at dinner my mom asked me if I had the chance of choosing whether to go to El Salvador or to have stayed here what I would do, I replied saying that I would choose to go to El Salvador even though I did go through a lot and had to go through things I should have never gone through because it humbled me and opened my eyes and changed me. It was truly a life changing experience and taught me that judging someone or something is something that should never be done because you never know what will come from it. I am beyond proud of my roots and my culture equally as I am proud of my American roots and this culture that I was raised in.