

The Power of Words

Growing up Latina has taught me to be hard-working, passionate, family-oriented, and resilient, but the most important aspect it has instilled in me is an invaluable sense of solidarity with others. It does not matter if we are escaping political repression, war, poverty, etc. Latinos, like many other emigrants around the world, have one thing in common—the search for a better opportunity. Although I am not an emigrant myself, being the child of Mexican immigrants has taught me much about injustice, sacrifice, and perseverance. It is through their stories that I have been able to catch a glimpse of not only the struggles in a new country but also the ability to overcome adversity.

In today's society, the media utilizes negative terminology that, in my opinion, does nothing more than suppress the human side of the Latino story. Rather than hint at the causes of emigration, terms such as *alien*, *illegal*, and *undocumented*, place a feeling of strangeness, difference, and foreignism around us. I have had the privilege of listening to endless accounts of my parents' experiences, and none of these terms closely, or accurately, define their hardships. *Alien*, *illegal*, and *undocumented*, do not imply how my parents had to leave their country of poverty only to come to a place where loneliness became a part of their everyday lives. These words do not express that once that loneliness was filled with the presence of my siblings and I, they had to sacrifice time with us only to displace it with discrimination, and long working hours, at a job that paid them a meager wage. Most importantly, none of these terms connote the yearning they have of one day returning to their native country because, even though they obtained a legal status in the US, they continue to suffer due to a nostalgia that has never, and will never, go away.

I think the only thing that consoles me in hearing about the struggles my parents faced is the realization that they are not alone. When speaking to emigrants from around the world, I have found similar stories of hardship, courage, and perseverance, but it has been through my parents' stories that I have learned to understand these individuals' distresses and empathize with every single one of them. It does not matter whether they have emigrated from Mexico, Cambodia, Somalia, China, etc. they have all had the same dream of escaping the injustices of their old world, and of finding a better opportunity for themselves and their families in another country.

Through their words, they have left an imprint in the way I view humanity and have allowed me to see that I, too, long for change. I hope to one day return to the very country my parents fled to help individuals address particular social issues and develop solutions that could lead to a change in attitudes, policies, and behaviors. I want them to know their voices can enact small change and provide a stepping stone for the enactment of fairness and opportunity in their own communities. Above all, I want my parents to know that the struggles they faced, and continue facing, have a higher purpose and significance. I am proud of them for having had the courage to leave a country of poverty, corruption, and oppression, and thank them for giving me the opportunity to grow up in one that will one day make this dreamer a doer. The only thing I hope to do is to make them as proud as I am of them, and hopefully this day will arrive very soon.