

Fragments of My Life

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My dad was thirty minutes late. My heart began to pound as my eight-year-old sister and I walked into the school's office to call our mom. When she arrived, we walked home quietly. The panic truly began to sink in when my dad would not answer his cell phone. My mom paced back and forth from the kitchen to the laundry room. I was ten years old now, so by 5:00 pm I knew something was wrong. I fidgeted with my writing assignment, unable to make coherent words adhere to paper. As the sound of SpongeBob SquarePants blasted from the television, my heart accelerated. Finally, I heard the battered, white truck creep up -- my dad was not there. I stood at the door and saw my cousin, Adrian, despondently mouth the words, "Lo arrestaron" (*They have arrested him*). I scurried back inside, crying silently to avoid attracting my siblings' attention. I prayed that I had misheard. I had not.

My father – my hero – had been arrested for being undocumented. I noticed my mom hide as the tears flowed silently down her face. When my dad called that evening, my voice betrayed me as he commanded "Se fuerte...cuidalos" (*Be strong...take care of them*). I could not console him when his voice cracked, pleading with me to be strong. I realized then that crying was not my duty. During the day, I was bound to hide my tears from my four-year-old brother when he asked for daddy. Being the mouth and ears for my mom, who did not know English, I maintained my composure. Only at night, sheltered beneath my sheets, did I allow myself to soundlessly cry.

What remained of my childhood began to fade when I was compelled to communicate with my dad's lawyer with adult-like confidence. He assured me the judge had agreed to release my dad under probation. I regained hope – perhaps too much.

Two days later, as my siblings and I arrived home from school, Adrian stood outside, his expression as painful as before. I rushed my siblings inside and turned on Jimmy Neutron, trying to impart normalcy. I walked outside, only to hear my cousin affirm, "Se lo llevaron" (*They took him*). My dad had been deported; the judge had broken his promise. I recalled my fifth grade mornings when I faithfully recited the Pledge of Allegiance, "...one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all." It was all just a myth. My heart hit the gravel, but now, no more tears – I was enraged.

On Monday morning, I walked into the school office, this time to ask for a refund of the entire \$300 my family had carefully saved for my sixth grade camping trip. I acted with the serenity my mother expected; my heart no longer pounded. My family needed the money to pay for my

father's return to the United States, during which he would, once again, risk his life trudging across the unforgiving mountain terrain.

A week later, a burgundy van parked alongside my father's rusty work truck. The door flung open, my father darted with exhaustion towards my brother, embracing him. They beamed at one another, but when my eyes met my father's, we began to weep. That was the second time I had seen my father cry and the first time I cried with him. His pain, fear, and despair were now mine too. I was no longer a child.

My family continues reunited, but the haunting memories are indelible. After years of learning to cope with the disillusion in my home country I have come to realize that I cannot expunge my pain. I can, however, work to prevent others from living my nightmare -- a realization to which I did not arrive easily.

Overcoming the traumatic event has been one obstacle in itself, but even more so learning to transform my raw emotions into something that is positive. As a seventh and eighth grader, the only emotions that manifested within me were resentment and distrust towards my home country, and more specifically, the "white person." I had to learn to trust my teachers again and see past their skin color. I had to learn that my neighbor would not call ICE on my father when he returned. I had to believe that this injustice had a solution and that I can be a part of it.

Learning to trust was the hardest. The Monday after my father's return an anonymous donor at my school had decided to sponsor me for my camping trip. Come Monday night, after accepting the donation, I had decided not to go because I was too afraid that I would come back and my father would not be there. I work up the next morning and started packing. I decided to attend and that was only the first trial in being able to trust. I had to struggle alongside my parents to pay the thousands of dollars we had borrowed, I had to struggle to hide my tears at night, and I had to struggle to be able to talk about the matter without crying. But the real struggle was trust; as a twelve-year-old I lost that trust, and I have never recovered it as idealistically as before.

Rather, I have found the bits and pieces that have allowed me to be empowered by the matter. That's why I packed up that morning and went on the trip despite all my fears; I didn't want to be pitied, so I could not pity myself. I left that Tuesday morning hesitant, uncertain, but willing to endure and fracture from pain, knowing that like a recuperating athlete I would build a stronger callus.

Thus, it is the legal difficulties that overshadow a world of have and have nots which propels me to create a society in which the trust among humankind is revived. Like any other human being I cope with the issue of trust in my fellow society members, which likewise impacted the trust I

had in myself as a twelve-year-old. Whether immigrant or non-immigrant, the issue is simply a matter of trust in those who are designated to protect. All the legal jargon is broken down to one word: trust. The trust when you hear a judge promise, when a lawyer signs a document, and when someone as dear as a father promises "it will all be okay." This is the trust that glues society together and has slowly disintegrated. But bonds I have formed with my teachers such as Mr. Perkins, my Physical Science teacher, have allowed me to experience that trust again -- a trust in the benign elements of society, and most importantly, in my power to change the world. That trust is nothing but...empowerment...the power to evolve, live, and act, together.