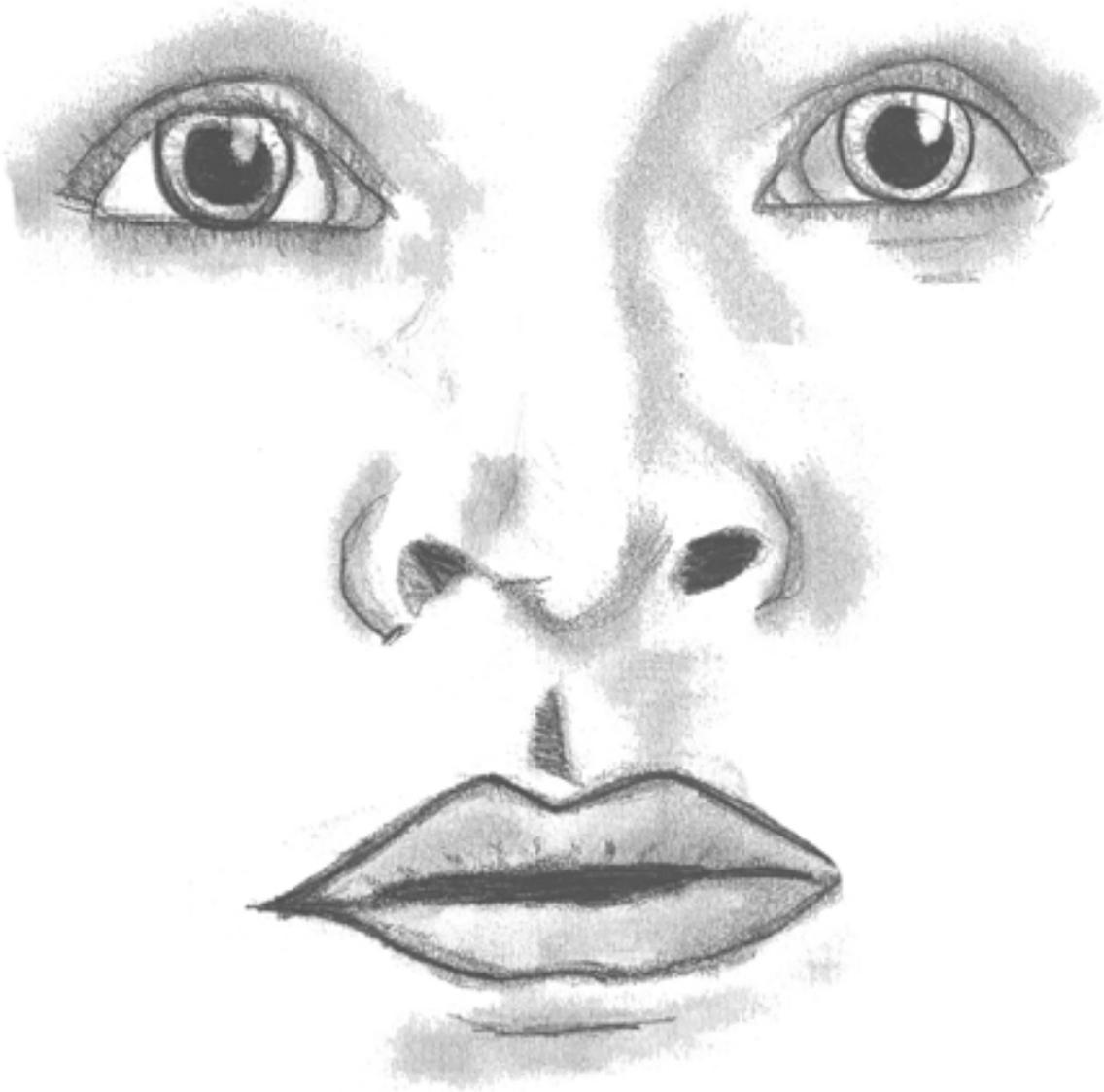


**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN
LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES**



BY PAULINA ASTURIAS

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Between Latin American
Communities**

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This book is part of a larger project.

For more information go to the website:
<https://www.bridgingthegap.paulinaasturias.com/>

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INTRODUCTION

This book goes far beyond the topic and the people related to that topic. It is not only about understanding and learning more about Latin American and its people, but about reiterating the importance of feeling like you belong. I would say that the gap in general between communities is the lack of connectivity; in other words, the feeling that you belong in that particular community. I invite you to put yourself in others' shoes and read these stories through the eyes of the people that have lived them to grant them the opportunity of being understood. Every story, every experience, is a part of your unique life story. There are just similarities between life stories. These similarities are responsible for provoking connectivity.

This lack of connectivity explains the gap between the Latin American's that grew up in Latin American countries and those that grew up in the USA but have a connection to Latin America. Those that grew up in Latin America have more commonalities between each other, mostly due to their surroundings when growing up, meaning their countries' circumstances. There are several repeated topics by those that grew up in Latin America. For starters, the topic that affects most people on a larger scale is politics. In several cases, political circumstances have the power to impact the countries' citizens on a day to day basis. Not every country and every person experiences it in the same way but it is definitely a topic that is constantly discussed and controls people's experiences in different time periods. Hand in hand with politics is the security, more specifically the lack of security. Every story that mentions politics also discusses how unsafe their country is. There are very few Latin American countries where you can walk on the street or take public transportation, there are some you can, but you have been raised to be constantly aware of your surroundings and be less trusting. Another constant topic is the class division between society; it is extremely apparent in all Latin American countries, that just by looking outside you are taken out of your little bubble and see the reality of most people on a daily basis. The social dynamic is also repeated constantly in different

perspectives and ways but in Latin America people's interactions are different, from topics of conversation to activities. The difference in social interactions can be because most people grow up in the same school with most of the same people, so the way they build bonds and interact is different than those that have relationships for less time and not in their growth period. In the contrary, a common theme between those that grew up in the USA is language: how it plays a huge role for them to maintain their culture alive and, in some cases, to help out their parents in conversation when in the USA. Then those that have moved a lot throughout the years have completely different experiences depending on the countries they have moved, and their families' circumstances, but most of them have learned to adjust to different cultures and environments. A topic they share is the strong sense of family. These are very family-oriented communities. All these topics are some of the similarities between these communities that help create bonds between them. In all cases, regardless that you have several of these similarities with people it doesn't mean you have to connect with all those that have them too, there are also several personality factors that define those connections.

Wanting to feel like you belong is the main drive that creates these bonds and be part of a community. We all have the right to decide where we feel more comfortable in and with whom. It is not about declaring your right to be classified under a term but about giving the term, your own definition, and keeping in mind that others have a different interpretations to that term. We are all entitled to our own perspectives. But never forget that others have a story too, and they deserve to be heard just like you.

The Stories

I will refrain from using terms such as LatinX or Latinos or international Latinos to avoid the confusion and the power that is entailed by those terms.

“I remember there was once a bomb threat and...”



I was born in Caracas, Venezuela. I lived there until I was 18 years old when I left for college to the USA. My childhood was normal. You couldn't walk in the streets, only in private streets. I used to think it was weird whenever a tear-gas bomb was dropped at school but, at the same time it was kind of cool. The teachers would put cream in your eyes to heal the itching.

I remember there was once a bomb threat and they had to evacuate all the students. It turned out to be a joke that a High School Senior made so we could get the day off. All my family was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela. I identify with several things in Venezuela: like the food, the folkloric music, the types of friendships that are

dances, Chino y Nacho; the made and the ways of relating to others. **The culture of education is more relaxed**, you can fail, and it's not the end of the world. Classmates have your back, nobody judges you if you are struggling and they'll try to help. Those differences in the education culture are mostly due to the university we are in, but also to the United States, which is too individualistic and competitive.

When I think about the word “Home”, I think about my family from both sides, mostly from my Mother's side and my sister, my friends from Caracas and my roommate.

I believe there are **two main differences** between the people that grew up in the USA from those that grew up in Latin America. The first difference is **economic stability** and the other is **the way the country functions**.

In regards to the country, **in the USA there is a privilege of security**, even though American's don't see it is a privilege to walk in the streets without the fear of who is walking behind you, and not being afraid of motorcyclists. In regard to the economy, a lot of people that immigrated to the United States don't come from a family with good economic stability, I had the privilege to come from a family that

had a strong economic base. Even though most of the money saved was spent on my college tuition. **I would definitely change the economic privilege over security.** There is a sense of insecurity that remains in the subconscious of those Latin American's born internationally. I am constantly stressed by the people walking behind me at night, motorcycle sounds, shadows that I can't figure out. These are some of the little things that disturb my peace of mind from day to day.

—Mariana Alvarez
Oct. 18, 2019

“At the beginning of the coup d’etat in 2009 there was a lot of fear...”



I was born and raised in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Growing up in Honduras was very strict, when I was young, I would go from home to school and from school to swim and that was it, I couldn't go to public places nor could I be outside by myself. **A locked up childhood.** I went through things like the coup d'etat in 2009, in which the whole city had a 6pm curfew. You had to be in your house, and half of the city was closed.

the prior elections, the narcostate, and the dictator. Like this past summer I was in the car with my sister and **we went through a protest and they started throwing rocks at the car.** It is those kinds of things that people in the USA haven't had to experience.

At the beginning of the coup d'etat in 2009 there was a lot of fear. They would kill so many people from the resistance. **But as I grew up I got used to it.** It happens a lot, it happened again in the 2014

elections, the 2016 and again just now. Right now, our president is basically a dictator as he was elected unconstitutionally, and his brother has been condemned for being a drug trafficker, so we also currently have a narcostate. There's a big fight against him. Regardless he is the owner of everything including the supreme court.

My father was born in Panama and grew up in Miami and my mom was born and raised in Honduras. My four grandparents

were born in Palestine and grew up in Honduras, in different parts of the country. My father's dream is to move to Miami, but he doesn't move because his mother is still in Honduras, and **the Arabs have a strong culture of family.**

I mainly identify with the people in Honduras, including the two people that raised me. One of them came from a very poor area up in the mountains. She is very Honduran. Her family comes from indigenous'

background. And the man that raised me, the same, he comes from a very famous area in Honduras. I got along really well with them until their death, and they are a big part of why I identify with Honduras, mostly due to the reason why they died. **It is the country that has given me everything.** But, It is easy for me to identify with the USA because my dad is very American, he listens to country music and follows American sports. But for me "home" is wherever the five

people of my immediate family are. Right now, I would say my home is located in Miami, **because it is the only place where my family are the only people in the house.** Miami is where I would go every summer and break since I was born, I even lived there during seventh grade because Honduras was really bad, but, I didn't want to stay in Miami, it was not Honduras, where my people, including my dad, were mostly at.

—Faiz Sikaffy
Feb. 12, 2020

“My great-grandfather was assassinated by Somoza’s guards...”



I don't really know where I am from. I was born in Charleston, North Carolina, but I lived there less than one year. My parents decided to move back to Nicaragua as soon as I was born, I lived there only five years. We moved to Panama until I was in fourth grade, and then we moved to Costa Rica until I graduated high school and came to the USA for college. There is a big rivalry between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. I

never felt like Costarican or Nicaraguan, I think of myself as more culturally related to Nicaragua, where my family is from, but with parts that I relate with Costa Rica. Every vacation I would travel to Nicaragua to see my family, each trip became a little piece of my life there. I lived next to my grandparents, part of the importance of being Latino is the sense of family. **I got to appreciate my family more every time I would see them.** In Costa

Rica, we made friends that became our family. As a Latino, we need to have that type of love and family.

Costa Rica has a beautiful culture, education is incredible, it's a very progressive country. I am very grateful for it, **but it was not easy to grow up in a place where the worst insult was “Hay que Nica!”** (translation: What a Nicaraguan!). This makes me understand a little better the difficulty that all the LatinX face by being in the USA and

being so isolated, segregated by the US culture, very similar to growing up in Costa Rica.

All my family is from Nicaragua. My parents had to move at a very young age to Costa Rica because of the war in Nicaragua. My mom lived most of her life there until she graduated high school. My dad had to move a lot because his father was in politics, until he arrived in Costa Rica and met my mom, they moved back to Nicaragua. Regardless they always tell you they are from Nicaragua. My dad was very involved with Nicaragua due to his family's involvement in politics. My grandfather was one of the leaders of the second Nicaraguan Revolution when they were trying to remove the Sandinistas.

Mostly because my great-grandfather was assassinated by Somoza's guards, the dictator of Nicaragua before the Sandinistas came, and my great-grandfather was one of the leaders of the first Nicaraguan revolution. This made him more nationalist, maybe because they **had to leave Nicaragua from one day to the next, leaving almost everything behind.** My grandfather was forced to leave because my grandmother was kidnapped by the Sandinistas while she was pregnant. He finally caved.

Both my parents would love to go back but because the situation is equally bad, they can't right now. Before this Christmas, the last time I went to Nicaragua was two years ago. Since I graduated high school I don't go as often, there

are too many robberies and **the cops have been mugging as well, especially around Christmas.**

Having moved this much gave me a lot of adaptabilities, it also helped me make friends fast, and feel comfortable rapidly. I had to become outgoing, mostly when I moved to Costa Rica since it is a very close-minded culture, **I had to learn to make the effort and be very open.** Sadly, when I came to the USA I noticed the amount of people that are not interested in learning anything about internationals.

Home for me means a Sunday morning after breakfast in my parents bed, watching movies and not showering to go to Church. Sundays are a very special day for my immediate family. **I would say home is where my family is.**

—Melissa Leal
Oct.29, 2019

“These are politics that affect your decisions on a daily basis...”



I am from Buenos Aires, Argentina, but was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Growing up in Buenos Aires was really good and fun, with many friends, a lot of sports, and family. I grew up in Bella Vista, where my parents had their house. I went to two schools, most of my friends are from my second school, since I left my first school very early as it was too expensive and small. I played a lot of soccer, tennis, and polo. I would go to Uruguay for vacation

and to the South of Argentina.

My childhood was different to those that grew up in the USA, not only because of the cultural differences. Even my sisters that did half their High School experience in Argentina and half in the USA tell me there is a huge difference. **For me, it is mostly because of the social differences**, as in the parties, the social gatherings, we have a more hippie way of life, we get together to drink Mate,

and in some ways it is a more social environment. In regards to academics, it is pretty similar since my school had the American system. I came to the USA to study because I thought it was a big step ahead of what the “status quo” was, but my primary reason was because I was playing soccer and wanted to have a good experience in both academics and sports.

My parents are from Buenos Aires. From my father’s side, my grandmother is from Buenos

Aires and my grandfather is from Italy, from my mother’s side my grandfather is from Buenos Aires and my grandmother from Denmark. **I identify with Argentina with absolutely everything**, all the good and above all the bad. I am 100% Argentinian even though I was born in the USA. For me “home” is my friends, family, girlfriend, sports, barbeques, all the social aspects.

Culturally we are the country least Latin American of all the Latin American countries. We have a very pronounced accent,

close to Uruguay but that is a smaller country. We dress differently, Argentina tries to imitate the European fashion, instead the other Latin American countries immitate the US fashion. The difference is highly noticed when we dance, we don’t listen to Salsa or anything like that, everything is tecno and a little Reggaeton.

I grew up in a country where my family was highly exposed politically, it was not favorable as the opposed political party was governing. This continues to

be a factor that pushes me to try and make a change, **my biggest objective is to help Argentina in some way.** The US is such a big country that they don’t directly experience the consequences of living under a bad leader. Their presidents are not as corrupt as in Latin America’s. The US maintains near the center, so **they don’t experience as much the notion of living affected by a government.** In Argentina people can’t even get Dollars. These are politics that affect your decisions on a daily basis.

—Nicolas Macri
Jan. 22, 2020

“Politics was in the center of life but not enough to fully change our lives...”



I am from San Salvador, Salvador. I liked growing up there, even though we always had the obstacle of violence and insecurity, **you had to keep your back safe**. We were never able to go to the street to walk and play, therefore we would live in gated communities so we could freely go out and play. **People weren't able to walk on the streets**, until recently, we would have drivers. Besides that, it was really good, I am still

very close with my friends. My family is also really close, my immediate and extended family.

One of the biggest differences to growing up in the US is violence. Also **living in a place that is not politically stable**, I was born with a rightwing government but was raised with a leftwing government, the US has mostly been rightwing. Also, the topic of alcohol, it was introduced to us since we were 14, it was never a big deal, therefore

coming to college we tend to be more mature when drinking.

My four grandparents are from Salvador. My father moved to the US when he was 7 years old, because of the Civil War, he then went to college. Therefore, he was very exposed to the US culture as I have been. My mother is from El Salvador, just like her mother, they even graduated from university in El Salvador. Because my father was exposed to the American culture, he thinks

differently in some aspects, and has instilled several values that might not happen in Salvador, but he is still fully Salvadorian.

My grandparents left Salvador when **one of my grandfather's uncles was killed in war**. That was the red flag that made them leave. They had five kids, ranging from 7 to 30 years old, the youngest was my dad. **They had to raise them in a whole new environment**. My dad lived for a while with his sister because his parents were travelling a lot. It was not a bad experience for them, my dad had

several friends from El Salvador that were there. They moved back when the war ended, my dad stayed there to study but then **refused citizenship and moved back**. I don't have any family members in politics, but Salvador did suffer a lot, and I believe my dad did too, as there were times that we feared that the president would go to the extremes of Venezuela. **Politics was in the center of life but not enough to fully change our lives**.

El Salvador is a very small country but has everything one

needs, there's a lot to do. **If I hadn't lived there, I wouldn't be who I am today**. I've always been very adventurous, and in El Salvador the beach is half an hour away, the mountain too, you can do and go anywhere, me and my brother took advantage of it. For me "home" is the place where all the people that love and value me are, that my friends are not only friends but family, people with whom I feel comfortable and relaxed.

—Alejandro Meza
Jan. 22, 2020

“When I go back my parents have to remind me that I have to be careful...”



I was born and raised in Lima, Peru. **I had never been asked before how it was to grow up in Peru** until I came to the USA, for me it was my reality, I didn't know something different. I noticed several differences when I got to the USA. There is a lot of traffic in Peru in comparison to the USA. Everyone speaks Spanish. People are more rough in conversation. There isn't a lot of conscience in regards to the social problems that seem to be the center of

conversation here, like political problems about the rightwing and leftwing. There isn't much conversation on racism or sexism or women's rights. **Some of these topics appear in conversation but they are not the center of it.** Those are the differences that I have gotten from being in the USA.

I went to an American school, I was there for 14 years with the same people, so when we graduated they became like my brothers and sisters, **they**

t are the people that know me better than anyone, they are the type of people that no matter what happens whenever we get together it is like the old times. In terms of security, my parents are very careful, since Lima is unsafe, some zones worse than others. Where I live I feel safe, **sometimes I idealize it and when I go back my parents have to remind me that I have to be careful,** I can't walk with my phone in my hand in front of my house.

My childhood has been different to those that grew up in the USA. It has been less independent, since my mom doesn't work she was always there with me. **They always gave me a lot of freedom, but at the same time I always had them very close to me.** I think that the family union is different in my family from what I've seen is typical in the USA, like either both parents leave for work or one has to stay but in my case, even if both my parents aren't home we have maids that look after us.

My father is from Peru, his father was from the mountains and his mother from the Amazons. My mother is from Buenos Aires, Argentina, her mother is from the city but her father is from the countryside. My parents actually met in Washington, when they were in their 30's. They moved to Ecuador because of my father's job, that is when my mom stopped working and my brother was born. They left for

Lima 4 years after. My mother's parents are now in Lima too.

With Peru I identify with the way of speaking, the activities we would do on a daily basis, the shared experiences, the food, the Latin American music and my family. **For me “home” is wherever my family is in, right now it is Lima, Peru.**

—Valentina Alvarez
Jan. 24, 2020

“You become an untrusting person...”



I was born and raised in Lima, Peru. I had a good childhood and adolescence in Lima, **mostly due to the environment I grew up in**, which is not necessarily the same for everyone. I had the opportunity of being surrounded by people that I connect with, and with sports I was able to maintain a structured and secure lifestyle, it allowed me to fully form as a person. **But, I know that growing up in Lima is not always the same.** I am very grateful for it. I

was an introverted kid, I didn't enjoy being in places with a lot of people but I got over it due to the support of my family and the people around me, I guess it was mostly due to fear. I started making a lot of friends at school, I did good, I started playing sports. I became very social, I don't think I was troubled. I would say that “home” for me is Lima, my house, my school, soccer, and my family.

Lima is an insecure city, there are a lot of robberies and assaults. Thankfully I was not alive in the

times of terrorism. **It is not a city where your parents can tell you to go walking anywhere**, as there is always a big risk, you are always reminded to be careful and aware. **You become an untrusting person**, you don't talk to people randomly, if someone randomly approaches **your immediate thought is that they have bad intentions.** You learn to protect yourself and behave, of course, depending on where you are moving.

My childhood was different to growing up in the USA. **First of all, interactions and behaviors in the street are different.** You can also use public transport, but in Lima there's always the fear of what could happen, as well as it is extremely disorganized and insecure, especially for women. In the USA, the topic of racism is very common, which I am not used to, it is not something typically addressed in Lima. From what I see, the family dynamics are

different, depending on the house, but in general the kids don't seem as close to their families as it is in Lima. In education, I believe it is similar, at least in my case, but **lower social classes in Lima don't have access to education.** Because I would play soccer, I was more in contact with other social classes and **I felt the inverted racism**, where they made jokes of my life opportunities such as education.

I identify with many things from Peru and many that I don't.

But, I identify a lot with the National Soccer Team, the food, the people I grew up with, my school, which are the people I truly connect with. Country wise, because there are many social class differences that I believe that should change, **it makes it harder for me to feel national pride.** There isn't a union between the people, from the ones with Spanish background, the indigeneous, and the people from the past, there is a big economical gap.

—Miguel Yzaga
Jan. 22, 2020

“You encounter several realities within one country, very valuable...”



I am from Santiago, Chile. I have several good memories from my childhood growing up in Santiago. It is a big city, very socio economically divided. Since I was raised in a high socio-economic sector it was very strange to notice as I grew up that my childhood was not like the majority. **You encounter several realities within one country, very valuable.**

I went to the same school from Kinder until graduation. In the USA people speak very

segregated of their school experience, since they seem to divide their life depending on their years in school. **I cannot relate, I never had that transition between school periods.** I think that is what made the transition to college harder. For people in the US is simply another phase. For me it was really weird. **I had forgotten how to make friends.** I feel like they know how to handle that with ease. But I prefer having grown up with the same

people, I know very well about 80 classmates from the 120 in my year. I have experiences that I have shared with my friends since we were 6 years old, they are like my sisters. **I believe that the people that haven't had those experiences their bonds tend to be premature,** since growing up and going through adolescence with the same people shapes you in a different way.

The USA is like a melting pot, people come from

all over, Santiago doesn't have that many internationals, it is not diverse, not even socio-economically. My family is very similar to my friend's families. Where I live in Santiago is not that dangerous, you can walk, take the metro, take buses. There are several places that are way sketchier and dangerous. The center of the city is 50:50 safe, **it is where all social classes meet.** It is safe to walk there but there is a bigger chance that you'll get mugged. It is very similar to Durham, but at night Santiago might be more unsafe. Poverty was the main issue in the 2000's during the transition to democracy. Before, 40% of society was at the poverty level, now it is about 10%. **There's a big percentage of people in the mid-low class who can**

afford the basic needs but don't have enough for the end of the month or to pay for education.

I identify with Chile's history, **I can still feel its presence,** especially with the dictatorship and all the repercussions that followed. Chile is very nationalist, I feel more Chilean than ever by being in the USA. **It is dangerous being too nationalist,** you create boundaries in thoughts.

Politics is a recurrent topic in my house, especially when we gather for meals, someone always brings the topic. Therefore I made a habit of being aware of what goes on politically and the importance of taking a stand, **understanding that I am privileged, and what my role is.** This is somewhat weird in Chile, as they have depoliticized,

now only 40% of the population go to the optional voting when it used to be 80%. I think this occurs because the political class has separated from the rest of the society, the majority of the people do not identify with a politician as they seem to be from the same privileged social class that studied administration or law in the same university. The private education system segregates the social classes. Our government is similar to the US, very elitist.

Home means family. My house in Santiago, Chile, **not only the structure but the memories:** when all my family is sitting having discussions, Ezequiel, my brother, telling my dad to let others share their opinion, my dad discussing like crazy, and my boyfriend watching this circus.

—Ariadna Chuaqui
Oct. 31, 2019

“...how easy they throw away stuff that could be extremely functional...”



I was born and raised in Lima, Peru. The truth is that family is a central topic of Latin American culture. As well as having a small social circle. When I was a kid I didn't notice how the people in my circle would go to the same places, restaurants, that I did. **As I grew up I realized how restrictive a society like this could be,** one of the main reasons why I came to study in the USA. **I realized that my ambitions and way of thinking was different**

than in Peru, in some instances I felt like I didn't belong. There's a big difference between the people that prioritize a social life more than academics. I was aiming at a hard career and my friends didn't understand that I couldn't always go out with them because I had to study. **Nobody in my family came to the US to study, it was a very lonely experience.** I didn't grow up with the American expectations, I didn't even know what a Common App was since I came from a British school. My

college counselor didn't care if I got into a top American university. It was until my IB where I made more academic friends. When I went for an exchange to New York **I met a lot of people that also wanted lifestyles that met halfway between the social and academic.**

I think that my childhood has been different to those that grew up in the USA. I wouldn't have had the same experiences growing up as I did. I come from

a family that taught me a lot of values, like empathy, awareness, simple education gestures like cleaning up after ourselves even though we had maids. I grew up with a level of maturity, mostly understanding how the rest of the world works, and being aware of how grateful I am to be part of the 1.5% of people with the opportunity to leave my country, where there aren't that many resources or opportunities. I sometimes see in the US how people throw away food, and **how easy they throw away stuff that could be extremely functional and relevant for a kid in my country.** At the beginning it shocked me, I noticed the many limitations in my country, **but at the same time it made me feel closer to my culture and understand how a lot of Americans are blinded to the reality of others outside their bubble.** Moreover, I had the

opportunity to work with women that came from situations of sexual abuse, and sometimes got pregnant by their father's and didn't have a way to raise or even have an abortion. In the USA, the problems in that regard are in another level in a way. **If I had grown up in the USA I wouldn't have this perspective, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to see outside of my little Social circle in Lima.**

My grandfather from my father's side is a Chinese immigrant, he was escaping the war, he didn't have a family. He met my grandmother, Chinese descendant, and had my father in Peru, he is technically full Asian. My mom is fully Peruvian, I am a half, even though my dad grew up in Peru and doesn't speak Chinese. Since the Chinese community immigrated to Peru as a very poor society, my

grandfather would sell Wonton in the central market in Lima, it is so interesting how it has evolved. I grew up eating Chifa at Christmas, which is a fusion between Chinese and Peruvian culture. My mother was born in Tarapoto, Peru, which is one of the Amazonic areas. From there on we remained in Lima. **The difference between Lima and the rest of Peru is huge.** My mom moved at 16 to study in Lima, **she thought that her province was too small, just like I did, but I moved from Lima to the USA.**

For me "home" is my family, **I really cherish them, even more when I came to the USA,** I was so grateful of not having to move that much, because in some way you need to have a culture as a base, and home is home which is my house in Lima.

—A. L.
Jan. 24, 2020

“You could see the division between the internationals and the Dominicans...”



I was born and raised in the Dominican Republic. I was born in Santo Domingo but grew up in the north coast, in a very small and touristy town called Sosua. I went to a small school. My whole year was only 20 students and most of them were international. A lot of people would come and go depending on the economy. **Only 7 of us ended up graduating together.** There was nothing to do in the afternoons, everyone

there was a professional surfer or into other sports. I loved growing up there. We went back to the capital, Santo Domingo, when I began high school, everyone there were fully Dominicans, my class was about 90 students. **It was a big change.** I grew up speaking English with my sisters, since we were in a very international area. My mom wanted us to go back to the city **so we would live a more Dominican lifestyle.** I

always say to my mom that we moved in the perfect moment, right when we were going to start socializing more and we would get to know our family more.

I realized how restricted the Dominican culture is. Also the way Dominican's interacted was different, it was not hard for me to make friends as I already knew people, but it was different. You could see the division between the internationals and the

Dominicans, **they wouldn't mix.** I wasn't used to it as in my school you had no choice but to mix with everyone. The biggest difference with the USA is the culture, the values and the people, even though I didn't grow up in the city, it is still very different. **A lot of these differences come with the way you socialize,** the people you hang out with influence the way you see things and life in general. I couldn't be more different than my cousins that identify themselves as Dominican but grew up in the USA.

All my family is Dominican, even though we have french and libanese backgrounds. My dad decided to start his business in Sosua, and my family invested in hotels there so they wanted my father to stay there to manage them. They always loved that town but my mom wanted to be closer to her parents.

I identify a lot with the people, culture, language, the way of expressing, even the topics we speak, and the music. When I miss my home I listen to Dominican music. But there are some things

that I don't identify with, as it is a country that is struggling a lot. **There are also several values that don't make sense to me,** it is a very snobbish environment, materialistic, everything is based on appearance, people are very judgy, but at the same time it is very open and you are treated like family. So, I would say “home” for me are the people, my sister, my four best friends from home, at Duke with my friends, **it is the people I am most comfortable with.**

—Maria Lulo
Feb. 12, 2020

“But, after seven years they couldn’t take it anymore and...”



It is complicated for me to answer the question of where I am from. I was born in Cali, Colombia, but raised in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. I left Colombia when I was two, lived for a year in Miami and then Puerto Rico, **it was the only place I actually knew.** I really liked growing up there, I had a really nice childhood, I would play all the time. One of my friends from childhood, even though she moved when we were 7, is still one

of my best friends. Though, it was a normal childhood. **I was not able to go back to Colombia until I was 10,** I never went to a cousin’s birthday party or my grandparents house. My childhood was basically my parents, some of their friends and my friends **I didn’t think I was missing out on anything. For my parents the experience was different.** I would notice it a lot in my house, we would be with friends, and they weren’t, they never really tried to make friends.

When I went back to Colombia I noticed the differences compared to Puerto Rico, I could see how some resources were only accessible for certain people when in Puerto Rico they are mostly equally accessible. The economy in Puerto Rico is not good, and everything is more expensive as it is in Dollars. **It was harder to have the kind of lifestyle you could afford in Latin America.** I would compare my childhood to my friends and it was very similar.

One of the reasons my parents decided to move to the US in the 90’s was because of the excessive drug trafficking and crime. They wanted better life opportunities and my dad had been offered to be transferred to Miami. **But, they didn’t know the language so they had a hard time adjusting** and they didn’t like it. As soon as the company opened opportunities in Puerto Rico, they moved. I couldn’t say how different my childhood had been in Colombia, maybe I would have been closer to my family, as if something happens to them I am not as affected because I didn’t create those bonds with them. **But, growing up in Puerto Rico also gave me US citizenship and opened many opportunities for my professional life.** Even though Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States, culturally it is very Latin American. **Primary because the language is Spanish.** Also, the types of foods are sort of similar and music. There’s also a big Colombia community in Puerto Rico.

My parents were highly affected by moving to the US. **Primarily because they couldn’t go back for seven years.** We could only go back once we were officially citizens of the US and for it to happen you had to stay in the US for 10 years. My mom would cry all the time, she needed her family. They hadn’t seen anyone of their brothers and sisters, and they both had a lot. But, after seven years they couldn’t take it anymore and they sat us in the living room and said **“we are going to Colombia.”** We were confused, me and my sister knew it was prohibited, but they

made the decision because **they couldn’t continue to be that apart from their families.** They looked for an immigration attorney and came up with a plan. The original plan was to fly to Ecuador and drive to the Pasto, a Colombian border where they would only ask for the ID, and from there take a plane to Cali. We even went to buy winter clothes to be prepared but **two weeks prior we were told we could fly to Colombia and the issue was only flying back.** They cancelled the other plan and bought new tickets, as well as they realized the law in the border had changed and now they requested for a paper that my parents didn’t have. **It was horrible when we got there, extremely impactful,** my whole family was there, they even brought Mariachis to the airport, everyone was crying, **people I had never met before were hugging me** and would call me “monis” as in blonde. It was so weird but my parents were extremely happy. We went to my father’s house where the rest of the family was waiting, it was all a surprise. **I could see how that separation affected them because if it hadn’t they would have never made a decision that would risk losing everything.** Thankfully, we were able to come back without an issue, but I remember how my mom would tremble in migration, that uncertainty, we wouldn’t get how dangerous it was since we were kids.

They were mostly affected in the social sense, **they never tried to make friends,** they purposely closed off, I honestly think it is because they just don’t care, they didn’t even want to go to our school activities. It was hard

for us trying to convince them to join us but I think it doesn’t affect them that much since they have each other. **It is like they left that part of their life back in Colombia,** were they used to be very social. I know that my parents want to move back, they don’t do it because they are comfortable in Puerto Rico but if they had the opportunity to have that established life in Colombia they would do it. After that time, we visited Colombia a lot. As we grew up it got harder to go as much or to coordinate with the rest of the family when to go. My sister grew up with a stronger tie to Puerto Rico than me, **even though I grew up there my mom would always enforce the Colombian culture.** My accent is Puerto Rican but I understand the Colombian slang, when I was little my accent was Colombian but it transitioned as I grew up. My mom does Colombian food, we listen to Colombian Christmas carols, and little things like that. I know where things are in Cali, I know how life works there, **and I am comfortable but I’ve never had the experience of living there.** And simply growing up in Puerto Rico is a unique experience. I have 18 best friends, a huge group that is not common, and we always talk about how good our adolescence was, **Puerto Rico isn’t unsafe so we had a lot of freedom in what we did.** It made me proud seeing the Puerto Rican flag in the halftime show of the Super Bowl. Therefore, I would say “home” for me is Puerto Rico, **maybe it isn’t for my parents but for me it is.**

—Laura Muñoz
Feb. 14, 2020

“It became more about getting the rest of my family out of Venezuela...”



I was born in Venezuela, all my family is from there, but I grew up in Miami, USA. Growing up in Miami was really interesting. **I was raised by Latin American parents so we would always speak Spanish but at school, we would only talk in English**, even though all the kids had Latin American parents. I struggled a little learning English when I first got to the USA. I even spoke English with my brothers, but Spanish with my

friend's parents. I first moved to New York when I was 3yrs old because of my dad's job, and I moved two years after to Miami.

I think my childhood was different to those that grew up in Latin America. If I had grown up in Venezuela, well my family is very Venezuelan and they had a lot of friends that were still there, so we would have probably spent a lot of time with them doing what they do, like going to the same vacation places, and I would be

closer to my cousins. When we left for Miami it was like starting all over again, it was a different system especially regarding schools. **We still maintain many of the Venezuelan traditions**, like eating arepas and my mom makes Hallaca for Christmas. We would spend all our summer vacations there. Regardless, I think I had an American experience growing up, specifically the experience of a kid in Miami.

My family didn't leave

Venezuela for the political situation. **My father left Venezuela because he wanted a more interesting working experience.** Right when we left worse, **therefore after 5-6 years** the political situation became **we couldn't go back** because it was too dangerous, and there weren't many opportunities there. It became more about getting the rest of my family out of Venezuela, the only ones that are still there are my grandparents, my father's parents visit us a lot as they are retired and they don't spend their time in Caracas, they live in Margarita. **I think it was very hard at first for my family**

to move. Mostly when I got to New York because it was not common to be from Venezuela and not speak English, that eventually gets better as you learn. Miami was also hard, but it was mostly a shock, but I think it was worse for my cousins that moved when they were adolescent. **It is very hard to get incorporated in the American education system**, where everything is more organized and structured, and it is a different way of learning. **Miami makes it easier because there are several people in the same situation**, even though most of them are more American and used to speaking in English

and the American system.

For my family our Venezuelan heritage is very important, they always wanted to go back, and live that culture. But, because of the insecurity we stopped visiting and slowly became more American, **regardless, we are both American and Venezuelan and I don't think that will change.** I would say “home” for me will always be Miami, is where I live and I grew up. I don't feel like Venezuela is my home because I never lived there nor spent enough time.

—Antoine Esber
Jan. 23, 2020

“English was forbidden in my house...”



I am from Monterrey, Mexico. I was born there but moved to Houston, USA when I was 7 years old and stayed there until college. Monterrey is very routinary, everyone knows each other, people go to the same schools, have the same friends, I loved living there. But, Houston was very different, since I was new **I had to make new friends and try to speak in a language that was also new to me**, at least I went to an American school in Mexico so it helped. I was able to make my

two best friends, a Venezuelan and a German, who I would see every day since they lived in the same neighborhood as me. I go to Monterrey every Christmas, I never miss one, and all of May and August, I try to go at least three times a year with my family since I left for college. **My parents are back in Monterrey.** I haven't gone back to Houston for pleasure since I left, I haven't seen my friends from high school either, I've just seen one since I left for college.

My parents were both born

and raised in Monterrey, my job and was in charge of the logistics of the south of the USA. My mom had stopped working to raise us but since we are older now and she doesn't need to drive any of us she is looking for a job in education again.

For me moving to Houston made me more open-minded than the people that stayed in Monterrey, which is not always seen as good in Latin America. In my opinion it makes me friendlier, understandable and to have more empathy for people. It makes you more complete as a person, as well as I got different experiences in many aspects, I met a lot of people and it is even

and raised in Monterrey, my dad only lived in Phoenix for two years for his masters. My grandparents from my father's side are also from Monterrey and have always lived there. My grandparents from my mother's side are from Torrión, Mexico, but they moved to Monterrey when they got married because of work opportunities. My parents moved to Houston in 2007 with my sister newly born, two months before the hurricane, because my dad got a promotion on his

more impactful in my professional life. **For my parents, I don't think it had the same degree of impact** but they made new friends. My mom would always say that **I would be happy in both places but I would always be missing something**, as I leave a part of me wherever I go. Having moved was good in general. Since my brothers didn't grow up in Mexico, **English was forbidden in my house so we wouldn't lose our Mexican culture**, but you can still notice the American influence in them even though my parents did a great job to maintain the culture. Because they moved back to Monterrey, the

American influence should lessen.

I identify with the passion for football and the food, and with the lifestyle in regards to friendships. **The word “home” is very heavy**, but it is wherever your friends and family are, where you feel comfortable. I spent three months in Washington and four in Sevilla and it was my home but I couldn't assign it that word. It isn't the same since my true family wasn't there. I guess that in time, wherever I go would be my home, for now home is in Monterrey.

—Angel Cuevas
Feb. 14, 2020

“My grandparents decided not to teach Spanish to my parents because of racism...”



I was born and raised in Santa Maria, California. **But, my answer to the question “where are you from?” depends on who is asking and why.** Because sometimes the question refers to your ethnicity but other times it is actually where you grew up, therefore I usually ask a follow up question to understand what they are referring to. When it is based on ethnicity I say that my great grandparents were born in Mexico so I would be Mexican.

I had a lot of family around growing up in California, since a lot of my mom’s side of the family also lives in my hometown, therefore **I grew up meeting a lot of people that I ended up being related to.** My family was very well known in my hometown. My family is also super catholique so I went to a Catholique and private school. It was the same school, from kindergarten to 8th grade, that my mom and grandmother went to, and the

same high school of my mom. My mom or grandparents would usually drive me to school until I got my license and would drive me and my brother, even though I could have walked to my elementary school as it was 7min away. Regardless, in high school it was a 50min drive to get to my school.

I think my childhood was different to those that grew up in Latin American mostly due to the language, I only learned it at

school. **My grandparents knew spanish but decided not to teach my parents because of racism.** It is weird and unfortunate that both sides of my grandparents decided place in Mexico and to a very rural not to teach their children. I’ve only been to a commercialized place in Costa Rica so I’ve only been exposed to the two extremes of Latin America. Some of the differences I could tell is that all their communities are gated, I would associate that to east LA or where my dad grew up, therefore I would be very alert. **I could feel the insecurity** when I was in Costa Rica, where we were staying there were guards 24/7 and we were told not to stay in Chomes after dark, **but my fear went away when I got to know the people.**

My father and his parents I assume are from Garden Grove, California, and my mom and her parents are from Santa Maria, California. My great-grandparents from my mother’s side and all her family are from Chihuahua, Mexico, they were in Agriculture. I don’t really know where my father’s side of the family is from in Mexico, except that one of my great-grandparents was born in the area of California before it was California. **I think they moved to the USA to look for work opportunities.** I was only able to meet my great grandmother from my mother’s side before she passed away, at 99, and I also met my dad’s grandfather but don’t remember him. I don’t really

know that many stories from their time in Mexico. **It is so far in the past that my family lost contact with those that stayed in Mexico.** My grandmother keeps the Mexican culture alive in the family with her cooking and traditions like singing Mexican jingles and sayings. **Coming from where I came from had a lot of people questioning my ethnicity** so I felt I should try to get closer to Latinamerica. I would say that “home” is a feeling of warmth and comfort, it has everything to do with the people you are surrounded by, for me it would be in California, and especially the house I’ve lived the longest in.

—Caitlyn Martinez
Feb. 28, 2020

“...you fall into that spectrum trying to discover where you fit...”



I am from Nicaragua but I was born in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico. My dad's first job after his PhD was in Mexico, I was there for less than a year and left for Nicaragua, where I grew up. **My childhood was really good, my adolescence was not the best.** When I was a kid there was so much to do, it was a healthy environment for a kid. You could do several activities outside, you weren't hooked on going to the movies or mall. But, when you are

an adolescent and start going out, **there weren't any museums or any other recreational activities,** the only thing there was to do was drinking. Mostly we would get together in houses, now more than ever. There were some clubs, they would only last 3-5 months and they were usually a facade for drugs and money laundering.

I think that if your parents were keeping an eye on you or you wanted you could do more things. Regardless when you grow up

it stops being like a community, you are not being protected any more, and you realize there is a lot of criticism, gossip and expectations that don't match between the conservative catholic society and all the kids that are experimenting as they grow up, **you fall into that spectrum trying to discover where you fit.** "Pueblo chico, infierno grande," meaning that because everyone knows each other, if you do something everyone will

find out.

I also enjoy walking and discovering new places, and in Nicaragua I had to drive to certain parts in order to do so, **it is not as if I could just walk out my house and go somewhere walking.** I wasn't happy in my last years in high school, even now when I go back, I don't like going out at all, there isn't conversation that I wanted to have. I don't click with them, it is a very cliky society. I do connect with my family, I like going to where my dad is from and being with the whole family, it is more comfortable. **In my experience, my school had a huge impact,** I hated it, a lot of people did too, it was a catholic school, it was

"ciudad de Dios," extremely conservative. My mother is Puerto Rican, my grandmother is still there. My father and his family are from Leon, Nicaragua. My father is the youngest of 11 and my mom is the youngest of 6, therefore **I have many cousins that is why it didn't affect me much not going out.** My whole family are agriculturists. **My mom thinks of herself as Nicaraguan,** she goes everywhere and knows all the places. We would alternate in spending Christmas' and Summer's between Puerto Rico and Nicaragua, because of the political situation my grandmother doesn't come to Nicaragua anymore.

I really like the attitude of Nicaraguans, whenever horrible things happen, you can be stressed or sad, but there's a yearning for living and enjoying. I identify with the food, drinks, traditions, sometimes the revolutionary music. But, mostly the history of Nicaragua, because my family experienced the war and now all that is happening, we have many stories of those times. **The life that my father and his brother lived is extremely interesting.** For me "home" is wherever my family is, or people that I consider my family.

—Sofia Velasquez
Nov. 05, 2019

“The culture that I experience in my house is what I see everywhere I walk...”



I was born and raised in Miami, USA. I liked my childhood because people are very similar, it was not so different from visiting Colombia during summer breaks. If I had grown up in another place in the USA it would have been different and less Latin American. In my neighborhood everyone was from Colombia, Dominican Republic or Cuba. In my school there were many Latin Americans or from

Latin American background, a lot of Afro-americans, and only one or two full Americans, very cultural. **I wouldn't speak Spanish much with my friends**, only with the ones that had just arrived from Cuba. With my parents I would only speak in Spanish. I think my childhood was different to those that grew up in Latin America because they see the world in a different perspective, **instead I see it in my parents**

perspective, which is a little different from the American's perspective. **We look at some things very similar but in others very different.**

Most of my family is from Medellin, Colombia. My mom and dad moved when they were 23-24 years old. My parents met in Colombia, they came to the US when my mom finished school. My dad wanted to move because he wanted to be more independent,

he didn't have a good relationship with his father and his mom had died when he was young, **he was basically raised by his sisters that were already in the USA.** He was a bit crazy, and didn't even finish school, **but he wanted to find a better life in the US.** My mom primarily left with him because her dad refused to pay for college so she didn't see a reason to stay. **I believe that immigrating to the US was good for them.** My dad had cancer, so

he was able to get better treatment and doctors. He is fine now.

I would go to Colombia every summer, but I haven't been back since I started high school. **I was the only one that was born outside of Colombia,** I have some family in New York and Miami but the majority stayed in Colombia. I really like how nice people are in Colombia, **the culture that I experience in my house is what I see everywhere I walk there,** it is more fun, countries in

Latin America are more open to have fun when young. I also like seeing my family that I don't know as much. But, I identify more with the sports than with politics, **I don't identify much like my parents do but I am interested** in the history and culture to understand my parents better. For me “home” is Miami, I am more attached to memories and people, so home is wherever my family is.

—Michael Castro
Jan. 24, 2020

“That view makes me feel in one way or another like I belong...”



People are looking for different things whenever they ask where you are from. When an American asks me I say I am from Chile, as they want to know if I was born in the USA or if my family is from somewhere else. When a Latin American asks I say I am from Chile but from the USA, because they are asking to get a better cultural context of where I am coming from. But, when a Chilean asks it is because I am not fully like them, they

want to understand the difference, therefore I say I am American.

I was actually born in London, UK, but I moved to Barcelona, Spain, when I was three years old and I stayed there until I was eight or nine and moved to the USA to Jacksonville, Florida. Therefore, I was basically raised in the USA. It was not that bad, my parents really liked it because it was secure and there weren't many drug crimes like in the bigger cities, therefore they didn't

worry a lot about me. Regardless, **the people's mindset was very different, they were very racist and homophobic,** it was the first time I experienced that.

My sister takes for granted the opportunity she had to grow up in countries with so much culture and richness. She also got to move to Santiago, Chile, and is still living there, she never lived in the small town in the USA that I did. My mom's side of the family still lives in Chile. My grandfather

is Palestinian and grandmother is Spanish. My dad is from Boston, his family is Jewish. His parents and grandparents are from Russia, Lithuania and Lithuania. My mom is fully Chilean, she doesn't speak a lot of English, **she is the reason why I speak Spanish like I do.** I am so grateful I had the need to speak Spanish. My brother didn't so he didn't learn it as good. At the time I didn't appreciate it as much, I didn't enjoy being the translator to my mom on things she should have known. It happens a lot to Latin Americans in the US.

Moving so much made me independent. I could live anywhere knowing my family is on the other side and we would continue being a family. Remembering to speak with

the people you care about is an ability. My parents didn't have to talk to me about moving so much since the transition between countries had been really smooth. Because I've moved so much people think I am more interesting than I am.

We would go twice a year to Chile, **whenever there's an opportunity to speak Spanish I take it.** I really like the view from the mountains, from any part in Chile. Santiago is surrounded on three sides by mountains and the other by sea. I remember that the view from my grandfather's apartment was beautiful. My favorite part was flying to Chile

looking at the sunrise that occurs at the top of the Andes mountains. That view makes me feel in one way or another like I belong. The food I eat also makes me feel I am Chilean. I don't eat that much Chilean food but I eat a lot of Arabic food, a big part of society in Chile comes from Arabic cultures therefore in a way it makes me feel from Chile too. I am also very aware of what goes on in Chile, even though it doesn't directly affect me, being able to answer in detail when being asked makes me feel like I am from there too. For me "Home" is any place where my whole family gets together.

—Nicolas Cort
Oct. 30, 2019

“...we are desperate to be defined as something but not as something else...”



I am from Montevideo, Uruguay. I was raised there, except for 6 years of my life that I lived in Argentina, from when I was born until I was 6 or 7 years old. My parents were living in Argentina but wanted me to be born in Uruguay, and when we moved back I lived there until I left to the USA for college. I loved growing up in Uruguay, it has those benefits of living in a small place, very connected to

nature, drinking Mate, playing guitar, a lot of time taking, a **very calm life**. But at the same time, it also has that mentality of talking more about what the other person is doing. I really liked it but I also enjoyed this period of discovering the outside.

Having grown up in Uruguay is very different than growing up in the USA. Mostly due to the habit of having family around, everyone lives in the

referring to birth or experience or blood, was born in Libano but grew up in England. Her father is American and she came to the US for college. Her mother was British but lived in India. My mother had to learn Spanish, she identified more with Uruguayan culture than American. I identify with Uruguay with the relationships of friendships and families, as well as the closeness to nature, the plazas and the beaches.

The question of “what is home?” is complicated for me now, something that I’ve been thinking a lot about. I was used to associating it to my house in Uruguay, but this last few years my whole family has gone to different places, therefore “home” would be when my whole family comes back together, also Fela, my boyfriend, and **I would consider myself as my home**. I think it is really interesting how

as humans we have the need for belonging, of having a label, and at the same time we complain about it. **We are desperate to be defined as something but not as something else**. It seems like one of our basic animal instincts.

—Lucia Zerbino
Nov. 21, 2019

same place since childhood. Instead, in the US they are used to changing friend groups, it is more of a fraternal relationship. Also, coming from a small country makes you be **more aware that not everyone thinks the same way and to look at different perspectives, and to be more in contact with nature**.

My dad is from Uruguay. My mother, **depending on the definition of nationality if**

My Story



I was born and raised in Guatemala. I loved my childhood, it wasn't easy due to several environmental and personal circumstances, but I wouldn't change it. **I was granted the gift of acquiring a perception of the world at a very early age** that takes many people years before they see things the way I do, an eye opening experience to reality.

I moved to different houses and apartments throughout the years but I always remained in my same school, all through

kindergarten until high school. I took a gap year and moved to the US for college. **Living in Guatemala, like many other Latin American countries, is not safe.** I would never walk outside my condominium, as they are all gated communities, or take any public transportation. We grow up with the mindset of constantly looking over our shoulders and making decisions that won't put us at high risk. I would never cross the street with my phone being visible or stop and talk to

any strangers. **You learn to be prepared for the worst outcome.** Educationwise, my school had the American system but it was experimental so the curriculum was different. Growing up it was a great school in all senses but when I got to high school the academics level decreased but, since I was close to graduating, I didn't change schools. **Regardless, it made it harder to get used to and be in same academic level when I got to college.** Still, being

an overall good student and very responsible, made the transition easier. But, since I didn't have the support from the school to get into a top university in the US, I was enrolled in programs outside school to help me prepare for tests like the SAT and ACT. **Growing up, I was very blinded to the politics of my country,** I didn't go through a dictatorship nor anything big like that, except a lot of corruption but that didn't directly affect my day to day. Since I've been more aware of what happens in my country, **I got more involved with the politics,** as it now has a direct impact on me and my family. I've grown the yearning to do something for it, there is so much potential and we are currently in times of big changes and improvements. **I believe that my country will be highly improving in the upcoming years.**

If I had grown up in the USA, I wouldn't have had any of

these experiences and probably wouldn't have opened my perspective as much, even by living the same personal circumstances I did. **It is the combination of both, the personal and environmental circumstances that made my perception.** People in the US don't tend to have that sharp instinct of protection, it's easy for me to travel in crazy circumstances and don't have my phone or anything stolen from me. To some degree, **I love that personal security of being able to deal with unprecedented circumstances.**

My mother is from Puerto Rico, USA, and most of her side of the family as well. We would go almost every summer to visit Puerto Rico and would travel every new year's. My father and his side of the family are from Guatemala. My great-grandmother's father came to Puerto Rico from Spain, **so we have Spanish heritage,** as many of the Latin Americans do.

I identify with everything from my country, the good and the bad. Even though there are several things that aren't good, such as the social class division, it has so much room for improvement and an incredible amount of opportunities for development that **I do identify with its potential.** I also identify with little things like the people, the social dynamics, the conversations, the way we have fun, my family, way of living and many others.

Living in the USA has made me love even more my country. Seeing the difference in social interactions makes me value even more the friendships I've made and keep making everytime I visit home. **I've rarely experienced that type of welcoming environment as the Guatemalan people provide,** not even just to a local like me but to my friends that have visited. I would definitely say my home is Guatemala, my family, and my friends.

—Paulina Asturias
Apr.04, 2020

The Conversation

The Conversation is a combination of parts from the audios of the interviews that interact with each other to give the impression that the interviewees are having a conversation about the gap of the Latin American communities. You will hear their points of view on why the gap exists, the differences between both communities and the cultural shock of the American society. The conversation concludes with some general and important points that we should take into account when interacting with other communities.

TO LISTEN TO THE AUDIOS GO TO:

<https://www.bridgingthegap.paulinaasturias.com/the-conversation>

Artist Statement

Because of my personal connection and inquiry on Latin American communities I focused on them in this project. Before I came to Duke I had never experienced the cultural gap between the Latin Americans that grew up in Latin American and those that grew up in the USA. I didn't even know such a gap existed. This is a conversation we never have, we think of the gap in the back of our mind but don't address it, therefore I wanted to give a chance to these communities to speak and be heard about their life stories and to simulate the conversation that we should have.

As a psychology major, I like to work with people, in understanding where they are coming from and to see the different perspectives. I like researching the topic of identity, feeling of belonging and connections, the best way to do so is by talking and listening to people about their personal experiences. This project is a combination of all my interests, from topics to artistic medium. I enjoy a challenge so in this project I decided to try different mediums. I had never drawn this much, I had never done a realistic portrait, nor had done big drawings. This is the first time I have done a project on this scale, but I enjoyed every minute of it. I learned so much more than I had initially thought.

My biggest goal in my art is to evoke something in the viewer, any emotion or reaction, in any subject or work of art that I do. I like to be transparent in my work. If I am representing people I will do it as close as to their point of view as possible. I want their voice to come through, I channelled that voice and organized it in a way to give expression to that voice. I don't put constraints on what they decided to address, I let them interpret my questions the way they did and answer as short or detailed as they desired. In the same way, I want this project to be representative of each individual's story. I analyzed the content and formed conclusions and a flow of ideas that came from the answers of the interviewees. In my future work I will continue exploring people and experimenting with different media.

