

2017

Just Our Secret?

Abraham Jiménez
Humboldt State University

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Recommended Citation

Jiménez, Abraham (2017) "Just Our Secret?," *CouRaGeouS Cuentos: A Journal of Counternarratives*: Vol. 2 , Article 30.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/courageouscuentos/vol2/iss1/30>



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Just our Secret?

Abraham Jiménez

My brother, Jonathan Jiménez, was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome around the age of eight.

It is a form of Autism, a developmental disorder affecting the ability to socialize and communicate effectively. All I remember was that we had the same classes until the time he was diagnosed. He was transferred to another elementary school because mine did not offer classes for kids with conditions like his. I persistently asked my parents why he had to leave. They didn't tell me anything at first, but I always suspected something was off and different with him; he didn't talk like me, he didn't walk like me and he didn't go to the same classrooms I did. Because I was persistent, they told me when I turned ten. They told me he had Asperger and that he had to stay in Special Ed. classes until he showed signs that he could be in regular classes.

"Pero, no se lo digas a Johnny. No quiero que piense que ser diferente es malo o es raro."

"Okay, okay ma. Yo no voy a decir nada," and I didn't. I kept that secret from him for so long. I never told him when he and I were separated in elementary school and that he had to go to special classes with kids "just like him." I never told him when our parents pushed him more to read the extra page or take another hour to study for the upcoming test. I never told him when he was crying and asked me, "Why can't I be normal like you?" as if I were normal. I wanted to tell him, so that he could understand it, confront it, and deal with it.

I was, however, convinced it was beneficial for us both if he didn't know; he would continue with his life without knowing and I wouldn't feel bad. Because he didn't know what was happening, he hustled, harder than anyone I've ever known. All throughout

middle school, he was still in Special Ed. classes and took a lot of abuse from people. By his junior year in high school, he earned his way into regular classes, and wouldn't you know it, he even had a couple with me. A couple of weeks before our graduation, I decided to tell him. If people were to ask, he would know and he could explain it in the way that only he could. So, I told him and he looked a bit shook. In the end, he nodded and said thank you. I thought he was going to flip or give me some sort of lecture about how I couldn't say anything before. Instead, he said, "I've always known that I was different."

But now it has a name: "Johnny's Gene."

REFLECTION

I registered to take this class around April or so of last semester. I didn't know what this class was going to be about except for the study of Chicano history and that seemed like a good class to take. I never considered myself Chicano, just another average white guy who had parents from Mexico. When I explained it to my parents, they seemed happy of the fact that I would get the opportunity to understand and know what the history of their people was. So, I went into it with some high hopes and expectations.

Right from the get-go, I was hooked. I felt proud to be a part of this Chicano culture. The professor explained to us that the word "Chicano" was used as an insult to people with a Mexican background several decades ago, but people started to take the word back and used it as a power move/symbol. If we were to call you "Chicana," you'd say "Hell yeah, I am!" That type of enthusiasm really is unparalleled when it comes to what you believe in and what you stand for.

I left the class the first day with *orgullo y con las ganas para venir otra vez*, and it became fun for the majority of the time being there. With the freewrites, we had a chance to connect with our classmates because many of us shared similar upbringings. It was nice to hear that this person had the same thing growing up as this person or that their parents made them the same dish growing up in the exact same way.