

2016

The Bitter Taste of Ice Cream

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Recommended Citation

Ortega, Mireya (2016) "The Bitter Taste of Ice Cream," *CouRaGeouS Cuentos: A Journal of Counternarratives*: Vol. 1, Article 19.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/courageouscuentos/vol1/iss1/19>



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The Bitter Taste of Ice Cream

Mireya Ortega

I was in 8th grade. It was after school, my day started out normal. School let out and friends met up to walk home together. Except today was different. I decided to walk a different route home. I was with my best friend of many years. We were walking home together and like in any neighborhood in North Hollywood, there are always raspaderos waiting for school to let out to sell ice-cream to the students. I remember one raspadera in particular. She was in her late 20s or early 30s. She was Hispanic, I could tell by the caramel color of her sun-kissed skin. She was alone, hauling an ice-cream cart towards the school. She stopped in front of the sidewalk.

Students flocked to her to get their daily fix of sugar. I didn't have any money, so I looked back at her, longing for an ice-cream bar in the hot day, but I saw something strange. All the kids were suddenly keeping their distance. That's when I noticed the man and woman next to her, both were Caucasian and had dreads in their hair. They were screaming at her; vile things that only people like her and I would be offended by.

“WETBACK!”

“ILLEGAL!”

She doesn't speak English. The man grabs her cart and shakes it as if it would fall apart right then and there. She does not cry, I am astounded. I turn to help her but my friend grabs my hand,

“No” she tells me.

“They could hurt you.” I looked at her in disbelief.

“But,”

“NO!” She yelled at me.

The man tells her to get off his yard. She tries to defend herself with the little vocabulary she's got.

I'm losing sight of her. My friend is dragging me around the corner. We are at the stop light. There is a knot in my stomach. I can't breathe. The day goes by. I am home, my mother is getting ready for bed. I lay next to her, this seems strange to her.

Then I breakdown. Through my sobs I tell her what I had witnessed. How horrible I felt because I did nothing, how helpless I was. She lets me cry into her shoulder. My brother walks into the room, he heard me crying. I am ashamed. That could have been my sister, my mother. That could have been me.

And I did nothing.
I was ashamed.

Reflection

I've always had trouble writing; I have this looming sense of doom that I will end up hating everything that I write down. This is why even though I have always wanted to write, I have never had the guts to actually put my thoughts on paper much less publish them. Publishing one of my stories is something that I never thought I could do. I couldn't even write them down and now I'm going to be publishing one. Writing does not come easy to me. I always want whatever I write to be perfect. Before taking Chican@/Latin@ Lives class, that was what I always thought. But when we shared stories that might not have been the best writing, I felt better about my own incomplete thoughts.

I never thought that what I wrote was good enough for others to read. Yet I always found myself wanting to share one or two stories from the prompts that were assigned. Maybe it was because they were about things that we ourselves had gone through, and I have always prided myself in having some really crazy stories. Stories of my many brushes with death, or funny stories of the daily happenings in my family. Some are sad stories that bring back memories that re-open wounds, others are sweet remembrances of better times. All in all, they are events that, while they might seem like stories to others, they are very real to me.

After writing a couple of my thoughts down, there came the feeling of excitement over what the next prompt would be and what story I would have to accompany it. I hoped that I could find

the right words to describe what I had seen or thought. I wanted others to understand why this story or thought was important to me. Many of my anecdotes are not particularly about things that one would consider happy. Many of my stories stem from trauma. I find that humor helps trauma, so I find myself using humor in my freewrites to deal with the baggage that are the thoughts that end up in my notebook. Now that the door to writing has been opened to me, I doubt I will be closing it any time soon. There is this sense of relief of having my thoughts and experiences put to paper that I didn't have before. Overcoming my fears of my writing not being good enough was a lot less nerve-wrecking than I thought it would be.

I am grateful that this class activity gave me the opportunity to change the way I see my writing as a whole.