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From Porterville to Humboldt

Lizet Santiago

Humboldt State University

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From Porterville to Humboldt

By Lizet Santiago

Hola, me llamo Loren, y nací en Porterville, California. My mom and stepdad are US citizens, they were born in Tulare, Ca. My mom's family origin is Puerto Rico and my stepdad's family origin is Mexico. My dad was born in Guerrero, Mexico and grew up in Acapulco, Mexico until he was 13. When he was 14, he came to the U.S and started a new and better life here.

Porterville was a dry little town. I grew up in a little 3-bedroom house that was falling apart in a neighborhood that felt unsafe, because there was a lot of drug abuse and gang violence. Growing up here, my first language was Spanish but my mom told me "Necesitas empezar aprender inglés." When I was in school I had an accent trying to learn English, just like my dad. While learning English, I slowly started to forget Spanish. I remember entering kindergarten, my dad told my younger sister and I "Si empiezas a hablar Inglés más te agarrare un quad." So with my dad's incentive, going to school and making an effort to learn another language became a lot easier. When I finished first grade, my teacher had a parent conference with my mom. They both agreed that I should do another year of first grade because that would prepare me for second grade.

Other than school growing up was a struggle, we were living paycheck to paycheck. When I was five years old my dad got into legal problems, so he left. He was not always in the picture, my siblings and I would visit him a couple times when we could, sometimes it got to the point where I didn't want to go because I would cry. My uncle did live with us at the time, and he always reminded me about how my dad missed us and said, "Vas a verlo, es tu papa, vas estar bien." I've always been daddy's little girl, so it would hurt me every time I saw him. So every time my uncle came to pick up my sister and I to see my dad, I would hide behind my couch. There is a little space there where they wouldn't find me. I always told my mom I didn't want to see him or that I didn't want to see him for an hour or two. I wanted to be around him all the time and wanted him to come home with me, sometimes it just hurt more to leave more than it did to go with them to visit. We didn't always see my dad but he tried his best to call us and send us things for the holidays. Even then, later when my dad wasn't around it was only my older brother, my younger sister and myself. My mom was going to school and working at a propane facility so she wasn't always around. When

she had work early in the morning she would take us to a babysitter who babysat my sister and I every morning till midday because my mom always worked and studied. On the weekends when my sister and I didn't have school she would take us with her to her work and my mom always told us "vayanse al otro cuarto arriba" so we would go upstairs and play like we were teachers or running around trying to waste time while my mom was in her office working. Not only was my mom overworking herself for us but also studying to be an LVN (Licensed Vocational Nurse). I don't know what it's like to be a single mom but my mom was definitely doing it.

It was always the same every day, but I did have a neighbor. Her name was Anisha and her little sister's name is Damary's. We met because my dad was putting up a fence but the neighbors had to go half with us because it was on their side too. Anisha and I met at a really young age, we didn't go to the same school but we lived next to each other. Her grandma didn't always let her come over and play with my sister and I. In our backyard there was a space where we could get to each other's house because the fence was not far back so, nos apretamos a través de la cerca para ir a la casa de mi vecina y jugar con las muñecas. Siempre encontrábamos una manera de pasar el rato y si no había forma, traíamos sillas y nos sentamos al otro lado de la cerca y platicamos. I always played with the same toys over and over again because I never got new ones, it was rare to get brand new toys so we would go outside and play near the tree or with dirt because that's all my sister and I had. One day Anisha told me "you should come to Santa Fe" and I ended up convincing my mom to transfer us since it was closer from where I lived. My sister and I ended up switching schools, so we didn't need someone to watch us either, we would walk to school and back every day.

Mi mamá conoció a mi padrastro, no vivía con nosotros pero a veces andaba por ahí. When I was in 7th grade, my stepdad talked to my mom about this place named Humboldt. Ninguno de nosotros sabía lo que era Humboldt o dónde era. Todo lo que sabía era que no quería dejar a mi familia y a mis amigas y empezar de nuevo. My stepdad came to Humboldt in September and we came right behind him late December 2017. We had no house when we first came. Everything was in storage and we stayed in a small brown cabin near Scotia in a trailer park for 3 months. At first I did not like it here at all because we weren't living in a house, it was always raining and so cold. I was so used to the weather back home and being in a home, that I told my mom that I hated it and that I wanted to go

back home. My mom always told me “te aguantas hija, no siempre va hacer así.” We ended up not staying there long because we needed a house, we ended up finding an apartment here in Fortuna. I got enrolled into Toddy Thomas Middle School. It was so different, like coming into un mundo diferente. We started in the middle of 7th grade. I did have my sister so I did not enter school by myself because we are in the same grade. It wasn't too bad but I was always homesick. Even though we would go visit, visiting took a while because it's so far away. It takes 8-9 hours to get there and visit family and friends. I still just wanted to move back home. I did start to make new friends. Toddy Thomas is a very small school so there weren't many kids there which was a different environment for me. Everybody knew everybody, it wasn't very hard making friends. I had a group of friends and it was nice having a friend group like them; I had them all of 8th grade too. Don't get me wrong, there are quite a few things that I enjoy about living here in Humboldt. I love the beaches and the hiking trails. It's very different here compared to my hometown in Porterville. I also started to get used to the weather that when I go down south over the summer I hate being in the heat, casi se siente como si me fuera a morir si me quedo en el calor por más tiempo. Now It's been about 4 years since I've been in Humboldt. Todavía hay muchas más cosas que aprender y explorar aquí en este hermoso lugar pequeño.