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Never One Place

By Julian-Lenin Contreras

A sense of community is something that I've struggled with having and finding. Early on, my living situation changed between being with my mom and being with my dad. For this reason, making friends with kids from the neighborhood was very difficult. Up until I was nine, I had been going to the same school. When I turned nine, I moved in with my mom, and I no longer felt like I had a community. Kids knew each other for far longer than I had, and it made me feel like an outsider. I ended up being content with this. I felt OK with being friends with these new folks throughout the rest of my life, but then, at thirteen years old, I moved back in with my dad and changed schools again. The good thing was that I was back at one of the houses I used to live in. The kids in my father's neighborhood ended up becoming my friends in school. Once again, I thought that was it. This would be my community. I had a place to call home. Things change quickly and unexpectedly. We moved again when I was fifteen. That's where I ended up finishing school before coming to HSU. I've changed and grown, and in retrospect, community isn't really about the place where you live; it's about the people and culture. That epiphany is because of this class and retrospect.

Though Oxnard is no longer where I live, I still feel like Oxnard is my home, and there is a lot about the town that I love, regardless of whether other people think the love is warranted. I always felt safe, and felt like, for all its flaws and all its little issues, it was the town I belonged to. It's where I was raised and where I made my dearest friends. Oxnard is wonderful; the weather is almost always flawless, and the people are welcoming. I don't think I ever felt afraid walking the streets of Oxnard, it was home for me. Oxnard will always be regarded as my hometown and part of my identity. The contrast between living there and living in Woodland, where I went to high school, was always obvious to me since there is a much smaller Latino community here. That

didn't change how I felt about it, or who I made friends with; I always made friends with good people over people most akin to me, but it always felt strange. I had grown accustomed to being around Latinos, even when visiting family in San Diego. Community comes from the people, though. No matter where I've lived, I've loved the people; all the friends I've made are held very close to my heart. This class gave me many pieces of media that I felt helped me learn about community and the Latinx experience. The film *Mosquita y Mari* and the article "Finding Sequins in the Rubble" resonated with me the most. I found myself relating to Mari. The film does a good job with her character. She seems defensive and reclusive early on but comes to warm up to Yolanda. I really felt like this was a good projection of how I felt every time I moved. She acts like a teen the whole time, still anxious for the future but like a teen, free and youthful. I appreciated the film as I felt like Mari's character is a good representation of what it's like to move around, find friends, and eventually settle in. In that same way, I found my home and where I felt I belonged.

Home is where the heart is. My heart is with the people who love me, my friends and family. While Oxnard is my hometown, it doesn't mean that's where I feel the safest. I feel the safest when I'm with my friends and family. My friends have proven to me constantly that I am loved. They are probably some of the best people. In a way, they are my home. It doesn't even matter how far away they are; we're connected through technology, and even if we weren't, we'd still be friends. I enjoy their company to the fullest and I can be myself with them. That doesn't mean I don't reminisce about Oxnard; it is my hometown, after all. I know my way around most of the town, and revisiting is always so much fun. I never feel out of place, like I used to. After leaving, I realized how much I belong and that I'm going to find judgment no matter where I go. It's just the way people are. Most recently, discovering my sexuality has given me another place to explore. I've received so much love from those in the LGBTQ+ community. For once, in my life I feel I belong somewhere right away. It's a new sort of home for me. If no one else is there for me, I know that I will find some respite from queer folks.

The issues Woodland and Oxnard face are the same issues seen all over America. Those issues consist of homelessness and hate. I don't think there was a single day in Oxnard where I wouldn't see a homeless person on my ride home from school. I could say the exact same for Woodland. The comment Yolanda's father made on poverty not being exclusive to Mexico (53:40) shows that the issue is truly universal. It doesn't matter where you go; it's something most, if not all, communities share. For Oxnard, the hate was blatant. I remember that a few of the Oaxacan students were harassed and made fun of at school for being Oaxacan. It was especially confusing since most of the harassment came from other Latinos. It's just racism, plain and simple. In both Woodland and Oxnard, I've seen queer folks harassed for who they are or made to feel unsafe, mostly by their own families. They rebel, like L. J. Roberts, or Cristobal, as described in "Finding Sequins in Rubble" by Francisco Alvarez, through aesthetics, art, and expression. The issue persists. It's a prominent issue, and it's not exclusive to Latinx folks, but I have many more closeted Latinx friends than anyone else. The internet is something that I think has come to the benefit of all queer folks. They're given a discreet place to be themselves, and it's something we take for granted. The movement behind the article and what it's titled after, "Finding sequins in the rubble," is described as an "...emancipatory mode of being and belonging in the midst of the rubble, literal and metaphorical, of their lives," (Alvarez 620). It has become more generational in my eyes. Millennials and Gen Z feel like they have to pick up where the Baby Boomers left us, in a world of hate and panic, but these foundational environments where queer folks have lived this whole time have sprouted into who we are today. In that way, the effort to create a framework for Latinx queer folk was successful, and we have our predecessors to thank. In a sense, their history is our own and gives me inspiration to build my own history.

Most of the history I know about Oxnard was given to me by my grandparents. Most of which has been about how the town has physically changed and how the people have generally been kind folk. It's mostly verbal, and I don't know the majority of it. Most of my friends are first generation, so even from them I

couldn't get a good grasp on Oxnard's history. As for Woodland, my step-grandparents and stepmom mostly speak about physical changes to the town, and not too often about the community, so I assume the history is passed down verbally as well.

Finding my sexual identity has contributed to this, feeling loved by those who support how I live and who I love has helped. Classes like Ethnic Studies 107 have helped me identify my community and the place where I belong, which is to say, with those who will love me. I never saw myself as anything other than me, but I think saying I belong wherever I am is becoming a comforting thought to me.

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