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## Community: A Journey of Healing

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# Community: A Journey of Healing

By Esmeralda Hurtado

My community is and always will be my family. My parents came to the United States in 1993 during a difficult time in history. Because of the heavy climate of Los Angeles, they traveled farther north and settled in Bakersfield, California. Things weren't any different there as there was still violence, segregation, and discrimination infiltrating every community. Nonetheless, they did their best to find a place to call home and did what they could to survive. Even though we grew up in a Latinx neighborhood, there was a lot of animosity between the families. There were instances where one person would threaten another with calling the police because they didn't have papers knowing the consequences of that action. My parents decided to keep to themselves because they carried a lot of fear of being deported and leaving their kids behind.

One of my most cherished memories with my family happened in 2003 when my parents, my older brother, and sister got their residency cards. I was 5 years old, but still recall the joy everyone in the apartment felt knowing that there was one less obstacle in their way of existing. It had been years since both of my parents had seen their families so they planned a trip to Mexico so we could go and meet them. The happiness I felt in my heart was indescribable. I felt complete. I have a slight memory of all of us cramped in a van with our suitcases for 3 days. It was a bonding experience and showed me the beauty of my community. It's been over 12 years since I last got to see my extended family and it has left me feeling as if I've lost a sense of my identity. I no longer remember their voices, what their energies felt like, or who they were as individuals. Nonetheless, my immediate family does their best to keep some of the teachings that we learned in the short visits to Mexico.

The recession of 2008 was a difficult time for my community. My parents are field workers and weren't making enough money to make ends meet. My brother had also joined the military so it felt like the balance of the family was off as we were missing one of our links. Food had always been a way that we all connected. Thankfully my parents were able to get EBT to provide good meals. It was through these difficult times that we learned the importance of unity and resiliency. When my brother was sent to Iraq for over a year, he would often write to us about how much he missed my mother's cooking. There were some dishes he had tried while stationed in Iraq that reminded him of my mother's, but it was never the same. My mother began to cook his favorite meals on the weekend as a way to honor him. When he came back, it became a tradition for us to have one of his favorite dishes after church. It has been a bit difficult with the pandemic. Before COVID I would go back home once a month to see my family and share a meal with them. We would rotate who got to pick the dish for the month and would make a variety of options to fit everyone's dietary needs. We've only been able to do this twice for the holidays, but once the pandemic begins to ease we hope to do it consistently again.

My father has always enjoyed documenting our lives through video and photographs. We had a family camcorder that we would take everywhere just to record a clip of a particular moment. He also had a polaroid that was reserved for special occasions. Even now, we take pictures at family gatherings to have something to look back on. I also have a camcorder and camera to continue the tradition of videos and photographs. My family even has a group chat where we send each other any memories that we come across and would like to share. Our youngest sister has also begun digitizing old photos so we can all have access to the memories of our childhood. My father was an alcoholic for 21 years due to an overload of the trauma he experienced in his adolescent years. A lot of it carried over into our lives. A part of me believes he documented certain events so he could have a physical memory of something he mentally couldn't remember. As I've gotten older, I've learned to heal by going through the photographs and highlighting all

the good things I could remember instead of harboring the bad and unpleasant memories. My siblings have done the same. We usually sit around the dining table and voice what we felt in that moment, what our train of thoughts were, and how far we have come as individuals as well as a unit. We discuss the resiliency that has helped us overcome all the obstacles the world has put in our paths. All four of my siblings and I have also done journaling individually. It's our way of healing as well as documenting any life-changing event that we might want to revisit in the future.

For me, a community is a group of people who have a shared purpose and support each other in that goal. Our goal is to live unapologetically to who we are and embrace where we come from. I often describe my family as my soul tribe as there is a connection between all of us that goes far beyond what we have gone through. In moments where one of us has made a mistake, we keep one another accountable, but still love first. I've never been around a group of people who have made me feel as safe, loved, and seen as my family has. There have been moments while living in Humboldt where I have felt alone and my community has done their best to support me. They've made impromptu visits where my mother makes pozole and tamales or she sometimes just FaceTimes me for hours to reconnect. I'm grateful to have been blessed with a community that happens to be my family.