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Chileno in Humboldt

Benicio Benivides-Garb

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Chileno in Humboldt

My name is Benicio. I am a Chileno who was born and raised in Humboldt County. I was born in Fieldbrook and went to elementary school there, and then went to McKinleyville High School. My dad is from Santiago, Chile. He moved to the US in the 80s during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. He first moved to Oregon and worked and finished University there. My mom is a white American born in Australia.

To me, being Latino in Humboldt County was an interesting experience. Going to PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions) and very small schools, everyone was friends and knew each other, yet I felt I was in between two different worlds. School and home culture was very different. I was lucky that I got cultura from both parents because even though my mom is white, she is a Spanish teacher, has lived in Chile, and has done exchange programs in Oaxaca. I grew up speaking Spanish and was getting culture from both sides in my household, but it would be different when I went outside and I would often not be able to relate to my peers. I didn't think much of it growing up, but I guess I slowly assimilated into the (predominantly white) culture here in Humboldt. I wasn't flaunting my culture because I didn't have those spaces, but being born here, I didn't even notice what I was missing until I became older and started actively seeking people like me. Specifically, when I went to McKinleyville High, there was a lot of nationalism and patriotism, which was in stark contrast to how I was raised. I welcome different perspectives, but it was hard being one of the only Latinos at McKinleyville High. It did, however, make me more politically aware, and I wanted to be conscious of imperialism and how it affects the United States. It shifted how I think about myself and view the world around me. Also, doing a study abroad really made me feel secure and confident in my Chileno identity. I was able to connect to my family and walk where my ancestors walked. I talked and ate food how Chilenos do, and I felt united and proud of my Chileno identity.

I love living in Humboldt because of the beautiful nature

like the beach and the forest. I find my safe places in playing pick-up soccer where many Latinos can come together and feel our cultura. I've always connected to the Yurok and other Indigenous communities around here because we can relate to the same struggles and experiences of living in Humboldt and our experiences of the United States as a whole.

I don't believe I've experienced direct racism, but I know there is a lot that goes on. I would love to see Humboldt be more welcoming and inclusive, from teaching more Latino history in grade school to having more diverse events for marginalized communities and immigrants and having more initiatives like the diverse male scholar initiative, which I was a part of. I would like to see more diversity in the community instead of just on the Cal Poly campus.