

Yesenia Macias

Changing the Ways

When I was in the 3rd grade attending 112th Elementary School right outside the Nickerson Gardens in Watts's projects, I won a scholarship to attend a music school in the city of Pasadena, but I lost it because my mom was receiving welfare. To stop receiving welfare wasn't an option for my family, so I decided to quit playing piano right after I finished 3 grade. I think that receiving public help affected not only me but the rest of my family: Daniel, Moises, Miguel, my chubby baby brother Juan and my older sister Esmeralda. I am not complaining because that money put food on the table, paid the bills, put clothes on our backs, a roof over our heads even though bullets flew in our windows, but I just think that my mom could have made better decisions regarding our financials. All of these experiences and a combination of my culture, family, and the goals I have set for myself make me the woman I am today.

First of all, my family had the most influence on the kind of woman I turned out to be. My mom Alicia a loud, short, dark skinned, always in a bad mood lady left her house at the age of fifteen in the 1980's. Continuing making bad decisions, in 1982 she crossed the border from Mexico to the United States being pregnant of my oldest sister Esmeralda. When she arrived in the United States both of my mother's sisters close the doors on her. She ended up homeless and living in a country she hardly knew at the age of seventeen. In 1983 she had three children, all from different fathers; we were sharing a one bedroom apartment with another family. In the year of 1993 we settled in the projects of Watts Nickerson Gardens, a town known as the most violent, with drug dealing in every corner, full of crack heads behind of every building, dirty, with graffiti on every end of a building, drive bys almost every day, and SWAT teams busting down doors looking for drug dealers. In other words, it was a dangerous place to live. To make

matters worse, we were still receiving welfare and now we were a family of seven in a three bedroom apartment. My oldest sister Esmeralda a skinny, violent, and wanting to be always right teenage girl, followed my mother footsteps, without having children. Esmeralda got married at the age of sixteen with a much older man Carlos, twelve years older to be exact. Esmeralda gave my mom a rough time since she was in the 5th grade. She was always getting in trouble with school faculty or with the police. Esmeralda has gotten married three times and divorce twice. I would just see my mother cry and ask God why my sister has giving her so much battle, not knowing it would just get worst over the years.

In addition to my family, my culture defines who I am. Value ourselves and our family, my mom would always say to us. Consequently of where we lived, looking out for each other was our first priority, my mom would say to us almost every morning before leaving to school. On the contrary, we would say to each other. "You're on your own foo!" In retrospect our behavior was ridiculous. Then one hot afternoon in the middle of Alvaro Street right outside of our building in the projects, my scrawny little brother Moises weighting about fifty pounds was surrounded by our neighbors twice his size, wanting to hit him. All of five of us went outside thinking we were tough and would scare them us, and we did. In comparison, sadly in Hispanic families there is a lot of comparison flooding around through our families. In our family my aunts Lupe a short, light skinned, and overweight lady and Felix a tall, dark skinned, and illiterate person because she rather party than go to school, were too busy worrying about whose daughter or son was doing better or worse, as if they enjoyed and were entertained by the unfortunate lives of others. Even my mother would sometimes act that way; too bad she had to learn the hard way. In the year 2002 at the age of fifteen I got pregnant. That broke her heart as if I grabbed her heart and ripped it in a million pieces. I felt like crap because her only daughter let

her down on the dreams, hopes, plans she had for me.

Lastly, my background motivates me to achieve the millions of goals I have and not give up. As a result of my early pregnancy no one expects anything from me, but I have proven them wrong. Not following my mother's footsteps is one of my goals. Transferring to a university either UCLA or USC in the next two years and continuing my career in criminal justice is one of my goal and priority right now. I want to cut the chain of failing, ending up with tons of kids, no dreams, no hopes, and nothing to look forward to. So far I have made a difference and every day I wake up I feel like an eagle flying over the dark blue sea. Also, being an example for my five year old boy Ricardo and my cousins makes me feel like the first lady of the United States.

Analyzing my family, culture, and my goals, I came to a conclusion that I want to be different and I want to change our beliefs. I don't want my children and my grandchildren to grow up with all of the negative ways, myths, beliefs or traditions I grew up with. Changing the ways and the environment where my children grow up, go to school, play in the park, even who they hang around with while growing up will make a difference in their life and future. Change is all I want for the people I love and for myself.