

Lupita Garcia

Who am I?

Latina.

Proud Mexican American.

Born and raised in Salinas, Ca.

A woman of color born into a world prepared

to make her life as hard as it can possibly be.

I am a tia, sister, a daughter, student, a future teacher and mother.

I am me.

My awesome childhood, my family, my friendships, my academic experiences have all shaped the way I think about many things, especially education. In this papelito guardado, I will describe my not so interesting life that is filled with different events which have caused some type of effect and/or change within the way I think or do things.

Growing up in a home where my parents raised us to speak spanish at home and english at school, was a great way to balance out both of these languages that played a huge role in my culture. My mom didn't really have the option to teach english or any other language besides spanish since Spanish was and continues to be the only language she speaks. She has shared that even if she did know how to speak english, she would have still chosen spanish over english because she was certain that I would learn how to speak, read, and write in english once I started going to school. From what I remember, the only class that was taught in spanish was my preschool class. After that, I was finally fully exposed to english once I was in kindergarten, this is when my bilingual education¹ began.

As I get older, I constantly recall many memories from my amazing childhood in Salinas, those memories that hopefully I will never forget.

¹ In the reading "Voices in Dialogue", Jennifer Ayala states "Home and school voices were both allowed in the classroom"(p.26). If I understood correctly, her classmates were allowed to speak English and Spanish at school without feeling as if they were doing something wrong.

My childhood smells like fresh cut grass,
Tortillas de maiz recién hechas, beans freshly cooked
And sounds like the inside of an animal shelter,
Dogs barking & howling throughout the day,
El canto de los pájaros and
The familiar sound of the ambulance, police, or the fire department.
Tastes of delicious mole and flan
And of pan calentito and elotes.
My childhood smells like fresh cut grass
where I lived following my brother's commands
And had many babysitters due to my 'bad behavior'
Nobody wanted to take care of a '*niña traviesa*' like me.
During the day my parents worked
While I spent the entire day at school.
At school I was a maniac,
But at home I was '*angel*'
I didn't have my friends to mess around with.
At home where my mom yells '*Guadalupe*'
when I get into trouble,
Where I smell my mom's delicious food
And the local news or the telenovelas are always on.
My childhood smells like fresh cut grass
Where I dreamed and imagined²,
And I slowly began to mature into a teenager
And eventually into an adult
Who began to create realistic goals
And thought about the future.

I was lucky enough to have parents that had stable jobs and did not have to move around from city to city like many other families do. I was able to go to the same elementary school since preschool all the way to sixth grade, where the majority of the students were hispanic.

² Ayala also mentions how "I guess you could say I was in the habit of using my imagination, as children do, to create my own alternate spaces of wonder and possibility"(p.27) I can relate to Ayala in this statement because sometimes I also just like to spend time wondering of how I can do things in the future even if don't end up doing them that particular way, at least I was able to visualize how it would look if I did. Whenever I have a problem, I immediately begin to think about the possibilities on how to solve the problem.

Lupita Garcia

Once I was introduced to English, teachers often encouraged us to speak only English during class, but they didn't prohibit Spanish. Teachers were aware that the majority of the students were Spanish speakers therefore, they couldn't prohibit students from speaking the only language that would help them communicate with others. I never really felt out of place at school, elementary, middle school or high school, since the majority of the students were Latino/Hispanic and we related to one another. Growing up in East Salinas³ made it a bit easier for me to have an education where I felt comfortable, for most of the time, and made me appreciate my culture. The first obstacle that I faced was the 'state testing' that was used to determine a student's English level, every time I took them I received a very low score which is why I was placed in English classes for 'beginners' even though I felt I deserved to be in the class for 'intermediate' students because I was able to speak, write, and read English effectively. The activities that were completed during class were not exactly the best for me to improve my English skills, which is why I would spend more time reading English books to keep on practicing rather than simply depend on the useless activities we had to complete during class.

I was always aware of the 'social status' of my family, but that was never something that caught my attention, growing up all I had to focus on was my education and nothing else. I knew that my parents were hardworking people that worked extremely hard to provide the necessary supplements for our family, we had everything to live a happy life. My mom often reminded us that being bilingual was a privilege that would help open doors in the future when we became

³ Anaya also mentions how she has fond and vivid memories of her childhood in Queens. (Anaya 2008, 26) She is proud of growing up in Queens, a neighborhood where she lived very happily even though it's not necessarily the best city to grow up in, but in her case it was. From a very young age I noticed that Salinas had many negative stereotypes, but as I got older I began to feel proud of the city I grew up in. I didn't allow the violence get in the way of having a wonderful and happy life as I could possibly have in my hometown.

Lupita Garcia

adults. She didn't want her children to forget about their native language which is why she forced us to speak only Spanish at home, even if it was just between my brother and I, we all had to talk in Spanish to each other at home. I'm very thankful that my mom 'forced' us to speak Spanish with one another at home because I'm absolutely sure that if she didn't do that, my Spanish would not be as good as it is now.

Something that really annoyed me while I was growing up was how my mom raised my brother differently than me. I assumed that her ideas came from her experiences when she was young, she was much more strict to me when it came to going out and the responsibilities that were taught to me. My brother had more freedom when he was a teenager and was not really expected to be as responsible as me. When it was time for dinner, my mom would serve the plates of food for my dad and my brother first, then it was her and she would always tell me that I had to serve my own plate of food. I never understood and I still don't understand why she does that, just because they're men⁴ it doesn't mean we have to do things for them when they can do it themselves. My mom once told me "una señorita decente no debe de andar sola hasta la madrugada" and "una señorita primero tiene que aprender a cocinar y luego puede tener novio". Back then, I truly believed she was being unfair with me, but now I'm thankful that she raised me the way she did because I look around and see girls my age who still rely on their parents for simple things they can do on their own such as: laundry, cook, clean, etc. I've always been independent and now even more, thanks to my mom I am truly happy with the person I turned out to be after all these years.

⁴ In *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*, Gloria Anzaldúa, states "the culture and the church insist that women are subservient to males". (Anzaldúa, 1999, p.39) At this point, people shouldn't be so traditional and accept that we live in a different time, therefore these ridiculous ideas should not even be considered when you raise your children. Children should be raised where both genders are respected and valued equally.

Lupita Garcia

One of the reasons why I didn't want to attend Hartnell College was because I knew that many students struggle to transfer out of Hartnell into a 4 year university. Some students take several years to choose a major, others are no longer motivated to continue their education, others simply don't have the support of family or friends to pursue a degree. I was afraid that when I decided to stay at Hartnell, that I would be part of that percentage of students who simply struggle to transfer to a university. Fortunately, I was part of the AVID program from 7th grade up until my senior year of high school and my parents always told me that I only had two choices: 1) go to college and have a great career or 2) get a dead-end job right after high school. Right from a very young age, I was taught about the importance of education, no matter the path I took or how long it took me, as long as I worked hard to obtain a degree and have a successful career which I would definitely enjoy. While I was in this program, sometimes I would think about the students who weren't in AVID or GATE, how were they academically supported, if they were, did the teachers make no effort of talking to them about college? Specifically the students who were in ESL classes, did the teachers follow some type of curriculum that was only designed to teach the students and make sure they graduated high school because deep down they(teachers) didn't really believe those particular students had any potential or motivation to go to college and continue their education. Then, I thought shouldn't all the teachers talk about college to their students regardless of what they thought of them, after all teachers are responsible for preparing students for the 'real-world' after high school. I feel like some teachers lack passion and ambition of wanting to really make an impact on their students, one simple conversation can help light a spark in a student and ultimately begin their journey for success.

Lupita Garcia

Ultimately, everything I've been through and continue to experience has shaped the way I think and helped me to simply have an open mind to anything that may occur. I continue to learn from my mistakes and really take into consideration the lessons learned from my mistakes in order to completely feel happy with who I am and the ideas/beliefs right now, and for the rest of my life.

References

Lupita Garcia

Anzaldúa, G. (1987, 1999). *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan* (Chapter 2). In G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza (4th ed.)*, pp. 37-46. SF: Aunt Lute Books.

Ayala, J. (2008). Voices in dialogue: What is our work in the academy? In K.P. González & R. V. Padilla (Eds.), *Doing the public good: Latina/o scholars engage civic participation*, pp. 25-37. Sterling, VA: Stylus.