

## Cultural Appreciation

As a kid (that had parents that weren't from here), did you ever wonder why your family celebrated certain holidays, while your neighbors didn't do the same? When I was around the age of 6, I never did, I was completely uninterested in knowing what was going on around me, culturally. I wanted to be 100% American, which is truly embarrassing to say in the sense that the meaning of being American to me when I was younger was neglecting my culture and ancestors. I would often tell my mom, "You have to learn English you're in America," truly embarrassing and I am so constantly ashamed that I would say this to my mom where now I am all for talking back to people who tell my people (Latinos) this in public. I'm forever grateful that my family and family friends finally got it through my small hard head that I had to embrace and acknowledge the fact that I come from a beautiful country filled with many meaningful Traditions.

When I was in middle school, my parents started to tell me more about my background and their childhood experiences and memories. I would constantly ask questions whenever I was with my family and family friends (mainly those who are Mexican because I knew we shared the same traditions), "Why are they ...?", "What's that for?", "How did ... start?", "Why do we...?", so much that it started to annoy my siblings. I just wanted to be informed. So many teenagers (and sometimes teachers) in high school (mostly Mexican) would claim that they know the story behind a holiday but completely blank out when asked. For example, Cinco de Mayo, many Mexicans think that this is Mexico's Independence Day when in fact it is not. Cinco de Mayo is the battle between the French Empire and the Mexican Army in 1862, where Mexico took victory. I never really have celebrated Cinco De Mayo since it is more something that is only celebrated in Mexico, most specifically Puebla. Thus, making it a challenge to keep up with the history since it is not taught much in middle school nor high school, we had to learn these on our own. Which can be a good thing in the sense that we are instead taught by those who have experienced everything but it is kind of a setback for those who have parents that are constantly working.

Around two years ago I went to Mexico for winter break, I had gone a few days before Christmas so I was able to experience the Posadas my parents would always talk about. It was December 22nd, 2018 my grandma had asked if I wanted to go out and see what a Posada is really about and of course I said yes, while we were going house to house I tended to stay in the back since I was still not an expert on what was happening. Posadas usually start around the 16th of December and lead up to the 24th where they reenact the journey that Mary and Joseph had to take to Bethlehem in hopes of looking for a safe spot for Mary to give birth to baby Jesus.

On the 24th, we go door to door in the small rancho looking at everyone's Nacimiento (Nativity scene) we say a prayer and then get candy (I don't understand the candy part, but it was still so much fun). Many kids as well get fireworks to add onto the celebrations. They are the type you throw on the ground and pop they're not harmful, but they are very loud. I had gotten so scared when they threw one at me while the little boys playing with them were just laughing, but I didn't mind it as much since they are just having fun. I constantly think of this trip and how if I would have kept the same mentality as when I was 6, I would have never gotten to experience this along with never having learned about this and many more traditions. My grandma and aunt would as well tell me of other holidays/traditions they celebrated that aren't often celebrated here in America. They would tell me their stories and try telling me how these came to be, with the little to no education they had they always tried their best.

I started to realize that I knew more about my culture and traditions when I was able to talk to adults who got to experience all of this growing up. I would get excited when adults would tell me about their memories with certain holidays/traditions and I would be able to say that I got to see and experience something similar. I know a fair amount as far as traditions go but I am certainly not where I want to be just yet, I still have lots to learn especially in the ancestor department. Learning about my ancestor is more of a hard topic to learn from family members due to many not being able to afford school. Currently I am taking two Chicano and Latino studies classes because I want to expand my knowledge. I hope to come out with a better and bigger understanding behind Latinos.

I am proud of myself. Proud to be able to have conversations with older people who grew up with these traditions and holidays. Proud to be able to let people know when they're wrong about a tradition's backstory, it is truly one of the best feelings one could ever have. My mom constantly reminds me of how I never wanted to learn Spanish or how I never wanted anything associated with that, now look at me. I refer to myself as a Chicana not American, I am constantly wanting to go to Mexico and always look forward to learning more about this beautiful culture. Till this day I still ask my parents questions about historical people or anything else I am not aware of.

## The Good Loser

We as people have this idea that each and everyone of us is “good” at something. Dictionaries have many different definitions for the word “good”, but the most important place to find a definition is within yourself. I always believed that I was “good” at playing my favorite sport, soccer. In my head I placed the idea of reaching a respectable level of play until I had deep reflections sitting on the bench. Within about a year I came up with an idea of what being “good” at something meant. The day I found within my thoughts this idea for the word “good” I felt like a complete soccer player.

The bell rings and I pick up my heavy backpack from the stained classroom floor. My honors english teacher reminds the class that the paper assignment will be due on Monday. I am so fed up with so much school work I can no longer bear another hour and a half of class. Lucky for me it was fifth period and the next class is my favorite of them all, soccer. Today’s class is not like any other because today is game day. The idea of game day fills me up with excitement and impatience because I cannot wait to put on my cleats and hit the pitch.

I gather up with my teammates at the men's locker room. I get dressed with my twenty year old Santa Ana High soccer kit. This kit fits me so loose I could say I look like a firefighter. Coach Mikey walks in with his full two hundred plus pounds and tells us to start walking to the second field, where the freshman play. I get up rapidly and am the first one out the door.

Reaching the field my eyes are captivated by the very green and well kept grass. The sky is clear and the sun is fully free from any cloud in its way so that it can shine bright on my team and I. I step on the sacred Santa Ana soccer field where many great players have stepped before me including my two uncles. The rest of the team catches up to me and we proceed with our casual stretches and warmups. Our opponents, Segerstrom High show up and we are told by Coach mikey to focus on our business.

The previous games I have been watching from the bench. I believe it is just a matter of time before the team will need my static energy and vision of the game. Well that is what my uncles and Coach Mikey say makes me “good”. Today will be the perfect game to be given the opportunity to share my talent with the team because my parents and friends will be here to see the game.

The final school bell echoes through the buildings and the noise reaches the field. I look over and see a world of students leaving the buildings and a few hundred walk towards the field. My parents are walking their way to the field. I think to myself “today is the day”. Coach Mikey

gives us the lineup, one where I am not starting on the field but on the bench. We say our chant "SAINTS ON THREE. ONE TWO THREE. Saints!". I walk towards the bench annoyingly and look over to see my parents give me a look of acceptance as if saying "it is okay". They understand my situation of playing time, but today is the first time they have come to see a game.

The referee blows the whistle and I am then filled with upset because I will not start. The game is in progress and we receive 2 goals in the first thirty minutes. Every goal I see against my teammates is a dagger to heart I am not allowed to take out. The half ends and Coach Mikey calls us together. At this point he begins to tell us calmly "what the hell is going on this is not like you guys". He gives us more words or encouragement. His words do not encourage me because I am not a player on the field or of the team apparently. I have hopes that he will at least put me in the second half so my parents can see me play. Every minute that goes by feels like a spit in the face. I look over and see my parents with worry. I look over at Coach Mikey's back for countless minutes, while he does not look over at me.. My level of worry and frustration rises greatly as the minutes pass by. Will I play 10 minutes ? Will I even play at all? What will my parents think of me? Do I really suck this much?

The final whistle blows and the noise cancels out. I feel my heart drop and a feeling of anger and sadness takes control of me. Another game goes by with no playing time. This is not like any other game. My family is here. My friends are here. Unfortunately I am not. That specific game and the day I was cut from the team and program I became a new man. I trained every misty morning. My training ground was not an actual field, but rather a street I risked getting ran over on. I practiced my passing, shooting, and ball control, but most importantly I trained my mentality and vision. I created visions in my head of different scenarios and what I would do in them. Before I had the mentality of passing the ball to the better player to score. Now I am the better player and I must score.

I had finally realized that I did not have to depend on others to make me "good". I had to rely on myself. I had thought that I was "good" through what others told me. A hint was always there that I was not truly "good". I accepted that I was a loser. I had successfully come to the conclusion that being "good" at something is when you accept that you are not capable of great things before a transformation. That very acceptance drove me to evolve and better myself to become a complete soccer player.