

Topic: Growing up as an indigenous person.

Abstract: My parents were born in Oaxaca, Mexico so I am part indigenous. I grew up being embarrassed of my heritage and I never told people who I really was. I denied my native side. I heard a lot of discrimination towards Oaxaca people that I couldn't be a part of that. As I grew older I realize how wrong I was and how proud I felt of my heritage, traditions, and customs. It didn't matter how people felt about me, I felt proud of myself.

Keywords: Embarrassment and isolation, Language, Discrimination, Mexican people towards Mexican people, Denial of their real identity, Facing reality and the truth.

My Proud Heritage

As I grew up I felt really apart of everybody else in school. I knew I was different because of where my parents were from. My parents were born in Oaxaca, Mexico and other than Spanish they knew another language known as "dialect". My parents were really traditional and they always celebrated their customs and follow up with family. They celebrated with traditional music and wore costumes for dances. No one in school knew what that was so I never told what we did in holidays. I grew up being embarrassed of my heritage and from the place that my parents were from, but I grew out of it and in the process I learned how wrong I was. I learned how beautiful and amazing Oaxaca is.

When I was in school I heard really awful comments towards Oaxaca and their people. Kids will call them "Oaxaquita" and that everybody was dark and short. I'll hear people referring to them as "Indios." At school some people will be really mean to them and look at them as weirdoes, even in public. I remember my parents going to the store and my mother talking in her language and people will look at her weird even though those people were Mexicans too. My mother was always proud of herself and she never cared

about those people and every time she saw that she ignored them or gave them a dirty look, but I wanted to be isolated from that so I really didn't say much or do.

I grew up hearing my moms "dialect" and I loved it. The pronunciation was so different from Spanish and English. I couldn't speak it but I understood everything because my mom always manage to speak it to me. With my family I always enjoy hearing it, but in front of other people I didn't.

The most negative attitude that I remember seeing was my cousins denying their country because they were born there, but brought in the U.S when they were young. People will ask them where they were from and they will say another place in Mexico. Some didn't even assist in family reunions or parties. Most of my cousins spoke "dialect" but they always said they didn't. I grew up hearing that language so I understood everything. In my family I felt comfortable, but with other people I acted like if I wasn't part of that. Sometimes I felt that my cousins and I were failing our people. We were failures at some point, but we were afraid that others would hate us.

When it came to holidays, my family got really traditional. In Halloween which to my family is "El dia de los muertos", we celebrate it with a lot of customs. My mom cooks traditional food like "mole and totopos". She decorates a table and fills it out with candy, fruit, drinks, and food. We do this because the saying is that the dead will come to your house and eat the food that they once like so we need to make sure that everything is sitting on the table. It's a believe that we celebrate every year.

When it came to parties, my family made it big. We played traditional music called "Chilenas" and we danced to "Zapatiadas", but there is always someone that hates the music and normally it's one of my cousins. They brag so much about the traditions

and that they are an embarrassment and that we look so crazy dancing to the music. At family parties I never spoke out like that because I loved the parties although I was afraid to show it to other people. But my cousins really hated it and they were mad at my family because they couldn't hide their real identity like they did. That day I learn that it was never good to speak like that in a family party because they will not view you the same way and they will call you a traitor. In this case my cousins were never welcome to anymore parties.

I was tired of hiding my self and in school I decided to open up to people and be proud of who I really was. So I was in a group with Mexican students or so I thought. They were asking to each other where they were from and I heard "Zacatecas" "Michoacan", and "Sinaloa" and then they ask me. I said I was from "Oaxaca" my heart sank, I was expecting the worst. They all looked at me and said "You don't look like those people, I thought you were from another part of Mexico." I heard the same thing at work every time and follow up by a negative comment towards my people. To be honest for the first time in my life I felt complete and proud of myself. I felt that I made my family proud for not denying them anymore. I was different and unique from other people and that was a blessing to me.

Throughout high school I heard the same thing, but this time I sat those people in their place by expressing my feeling towards them. When I heard negative comments either in school, at work, or in public I always had positive things to add to their conversation. Sometimes I heard them talk smack and I would leave them with a different view of Oaxaca. I stood up for myself and my family every time I spoke out.

The saddest thing was hearing Mexican people talk about Oaxaca people like if they were nothing even though they were both Mexicans. My uncle once told me that he was working in a power plant and his co-workers were Mexicans too. He felt really comfortable working with his own race until they started talking smack about indigenous people and their native country. They said that as people they were failures to Mexico and that they didn't do anything to civilize themselves. My uncle felt really discriminated, no body new that he was indigenous until he spoke out. My uncle told them that as an indigenous person he still had more education then them. He told them that they needed to go back to school to learn the Mexican history and the different kinds of people that their country owns. My uncle told me, that we as Mexican people think that other races discriminate us, but that's not the case. We trash each other and that there is no mutual respect whatsoever. I felt so proud of how he stood up for himself he made me feel more confident. He made it easier for me to accept myself and my origin. It's so sad how much discrimination and prejudice people are willing to go to make themselves superior and better than others.

In the fall of 2005, I went to Mexico for the first time. I saw true beauty. The pueblos and churches had so much detail and joy. People were so friendly. Anywhere I went they always greeted me. I felt that part of me belong there because I already knew the customs and the language. I loved it there. I couldn't hate something so beautiful like Oaxaca. It had so much to offer to me. It open my eyes to reality and how wrong I was of denying an amazing country.

The hardest part of all was telling my parents how I felt being part indigenous I never did I tell them how I felt. I was just waiting for the worst, but they deserved to

know the truth. I always kept it to myself because I was scared of how they were going to react. My family was really hard in judging people that denied their native country so that made it worst for me to speak out. Once I had the power to tell them about my situation I was surprised that they understood. They told me that at one point in their life they were cross with that instinct, but that it really didn't work for them because family was stronger than judgment. I never knew that my parents had a similar thought as I did. I guess that they went to similar situations when they came to the U.S. Never did I spoke about that anymore it was clear to me that my parents were proud of me and I was proud of them.

I went through a lot as a kid, but I grew out of it. I can happily say to people that I'm part indigenous and never will I deny my heritage and origin. I learn that people that like to discriminate have no education and they need to go back to school. My experiences and my relatives showed me reality and the beauty of my family's country. I learn how to appreciate my family's traditions and customs. They are so valuable to me that loosing it will be like loosing part of my identity. I can know say to those people that, "I'm India and I'm proud of it!" "I have it in my blood and no one will take it from me!" "I'm free!"