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# First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First- Generation College Experience

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## Mi Tierra Natal

Anonymous

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## Forty-Four Years of Confusion

My grandfather has light blue eyes. His skin is white, his light brown hair graying, and his hearing fading. He is alone, feels alone, and doesn't want to be. My grandmother has dark, chocolate brown eyes. Her skin is dark and her jet-black hair re-dyed. She is loved, feels love, and loves back. My dad has those same brown eyes, that same dark shade of chocolate. His skin dark, his hair black, but when you look at him, you see his father. The one person he refuses to look like, and the one person he cannot forgive. Forty-four years of confusion— that's what Edgar, my father, calls it.

I asked my father if he loved his dad. His answer was simple—he simply nodded his head. He said nothing more, but as his eyes looked up to the ceiling, he began murmuring a prayer asking for patience, asking for answers. And after what felt like hours, he repeated the one thing I now repeat when I look into my father's eyes, "I don't understand, nunca he entendido." "It's confusion," he said; and it was confusion I felt.

For the past forty-four years, my papa has been confused as to why his father became an alcoholic, as to why his mother was physically and verbally abused, and as to why his mother left him for *El Norte* at the age of seven with two younger siblings. Edgar, does not know what to feel about his father— all he recognizes is his confusion because that is all Natividad, his pops, has provided for him. This emotion resurfaces from time to time in my father's life; because his "guidance" became an alcoholic for reasons my father does not understand. He cannot grasp why his "role-model" did not own up to his responsibilities of being both a father and a husband, but instead relied on infidelities and empty cantinas. My lifeline, my dad, couldn't understand why his childhood became objectified under his "lifeline's" neglect.

My father's confusion is the product of experience. His childhood allowed him room for good memories, but like he said and continues saying, "there were a lot more bad memories than good." Because he was placed into his grandparent's care, my father and his siblings broke many of the ties they had with their father; but being with their grandparents wasn't any better. My great-grandparents have cruel forms of discipline, the type that my father vowed never to employ, and for years he lived under the care of his grandparents. Because they were left under this care, my father cannot come to full-circle with his emotions; in its place, he prefers to push away the environment he lived in, and instead, calls himself an American and his daughter Lexie. He does so because it's easy, because it means privilege.

Now, my father calls *mi papa*, my grandfather, about four times a year. I have spoken and seen my grandfather, who lives in Guatemala, more than my father has in his entire lifetime. The Natividad I know is full of love and want of

redemption. Those blue eyes and graying head want love, but his children refuse to give it to him because doing so would humanize anger. Would revive old memories that were meant to be forgotten. If my *pappy* were to decode his confusion, his emotion would turn into a kind of pain that would lead him to pointing fingers. That's not my father, that's not Edgar; so instead, he says that he'll simply keep wishing for the blue eyes and the graying-head of hair that he'll never have, and will never accept if he had the chance.

After that, he walked away, leaned on a counter, popped open a beer and prayed.