



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

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## The Unseen and Unheard: Details of a True Love Story

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## Deployment #1

There is not one item left in the room, but the bed and dressers. Everything looks so plain and sad. The feeling is finally settling in. He is all packed and ready to head to Afghanistan in the morning. As people say, it felt like we had just met the night before, and now we were about to embark on this journey led by uncertainty and, most of all, distance. I had never experienced and could never put into words the feelings I had for this Marine but there he was, attempting to be humorous to lighten the mood. The ride back to Los Angeles seemed to take longer than usual and the car was dead silent. I pretended to be sleeping and overheard his conversation with his mother. She's pleading for him to stay and to come home to Egypt to see her. Not understanding that there is nothing that can be done to reverse the orders given. Plus if he didn't have to leave, he would stay here with me not go home- a selfish thought but I could not resist myself. He remains dead silent, I can tell he is running out of patience and is becoming frustrated because deep down inside he doesn't want to go either. The days leading up to all of this, he mentioned that he had a bad feeling about this deployment, he felt like he wouldn't be coming back. Those words begin to sink in and I breathe out loud and hold back the tears.

This relationship is so new and fresh and we both have no clue what we are getting ourselves into. Something we thought would be a summer fling turns into this intense energy that is indescribable. After our first date on July 4th, I told myself, "He's is the one!"

It is 4:00am and his alarm goes off. I barely got any sleep since I stayed up watching TV and washing his clothes. My mother makes breakfast meant for a hero: scramble eggs, pancakes, turkey sausage, and fresh orange juice; I can barely touch my food. The tears begin pouring down and it remains that way until half way to base. We begin talking about politics and the stereotypes that go with being in the military and being at a community college. Life already seems to be going by so fast, never enough time, and here we are counting down the minutes until he is on a bus headed to the middle of nowhere.

07:00 hundred and all the CEB Marines are lined up with wives, children, girlfriends, and families all gathered around them to watch roll call. The last name is finally called and then silence, "Marines, you have ten minutes!" The sun has not shown itself, and the streams of tears begin to pour. Mohamed very slowly walks over and hugs me tight. "I love you beautiful and I will see you soon," he says. Finally on the bus and the last picture is snapped. He's holding up seven fingers with a big smile on his face. One picture, one moment, so telling. Seven months will be the biggest hurdle in our relationship yet. As if that day was not stressful enough, I would soon be sitting through morning traffic on the 5

Freeway drinking a red bull and attempting to make it home in time for a nap and then a job interview. All I could think is that this was going to be a long seven months.

As the months pass, things appear to be getting worse in our relationship; I begin to feel that I was way in over my head because I hardly knew this man. The trust on his behalf was extremely low, but I mean think about it. If you were surrounded by men in an isolated desert and hearing breaking news about whose wife or girlfriend cheated and with whom, you would probably begin to doubt many things yourself. Part of me completely understood the stress and negativity Mohamed was going through but then again being accused of lying is not the easiest thing to handle.

*Dear Mohamed,*

*I have decided to join Sigma Lambda Gamma National sorority Inc. the group of women I have met has provided me with so much support. One of the girls has a boyfriend who is also in the Marine Corps and we talk about you guys all the time. My classes are going well and I am making lots new friends at LMU. Hope to hear from you soon!*

*Love you, always and forever*

Break up number one: this lasted all but a few hours. It was messy, it was loud, and it obviously did not last very long.

*Dear Mohamed,*

*I am feeling so lonely and stressed. No one truly comprehends what I am going through with you not being here and we have been arguing so much, I feel like we are more than distant. I miss you but I am also highly irritable. Keep your spirits up and hope you are enjoying all the bags of Hot Cheetos, Top Ramen, and Red Bulls I sent you. Make sure to share with your friends.*

*Love you, always and forever*

Break up number two: I remember this one specifically because it was in the afternoon and we usually spoke around five or six in the morning. Oh the sacrifices of sleep! Again this was messy and yet this one lasted, about less than a day and this was only because I refused to answer the phone, Facebook messages, and emails.

*Hey Beautiful,*

*Why aren't you picking up my calls or text messages? I love you so much beautiful and I'm sorry for not being more understanding. I know school is*

*stressful and you have a lot going on, I promise I will try to be more understanding. I will try to call you later.*

*I love you habibi*

Marines, they are some funny people, always thinking the worse but hoping for the best. I would call most of them dreamers, Mohamed definitely was one of them, hoping I was the one, that wifey type of girl, but on deployment their worst fears become a reality because there is NO possible way a woman can stay faithful for such a long period of time.... Please!!! We made it though; we remained faithful to one another. It's very sad for me to know that many women are not capable of doing so, especially the wives.

Moving forward, May 8th 2011, Mohamed is on his way home. Hair curled, black stilettos, and a white mini- Victoria Secret dress. Too overdressed for the occasion, as it was 50 degrees outside. Mom and dad are becoming anxious and sleepy. The adrenaline is building and one of the wives yells, "They will be marching out soon!" With American flags being waved high, mothers, wives, and children all gather around the parking lot to greet the men. A red and yellow banner reads, "Welcome Home CEB." Then, there is a slight glimmer in the distant, a tune is being played and all you hear is step, step, step. As the men get closer, you can't help but notice their attempt to hide their smiles, four columns full of dull green and dull beige camis, a steady pace; the march is powerful on sight. "Marines dismissed!" All chaos breaks loose. I find Richie, JB, and Trent. Where the heck is Mohamed? Then all of sudden I feel him; he's staring at me. I turn around and there he is smiling and all I do is run, scream, and jump in his arms. Finally together, after 7 long months, I know now more than ever that he is the one for me.

I am out for summer but not really, oh! The great pleasures of having to go to summer school, but we make the best of it. Our summer is full of relaxation poolside in Vegas to ridiculously beating him on the Buzz Light Year ride at Disneyland. Life is perfect and our love continues to flourish. Nothing but happiness. July 16th is right around the corner, and Mohamed is the best at planning special occasions. Our anniversary has always been a significant day for us, not because it is the day we asked me to be his girlfriend but because without that day we would not be in the place we are now. A day full of love and what we do best, EAT! Decadent Italian food and a fire pit—an evening dedicated to reminiscing about how this all began.

The end of July arrives quickly and I leave on my family vacation to El Salvador. This trip is a life- changer. Mohamed is nervous on Skype. It's raining outside so the Internet connection comes in and out. He very causally shows me a picture of a beautiful ring—it looks like a flower with crystal pedals all over the center. Very casually, he asks me if I like it and if I would wear it. I say yes, but

what does that mean? Then he pops the question, “Remember love has no timeline and will you marry me?” I begin to cry and my cousin walks in and gives me that face... O-M-G! It’s only been a week, get a hold of yourself look. I am engaged via Skype and could not be any happier. I return from my trip and decide that we will tell my mother first and my father about three months later. Being the only girl and a daddy’s girl, it tends to complicate most reactions from my father.

## **Deployment #2**

Mohamed is given word that he will be deploying in four months again. The original thought was that he was going to sell back some of his leave to finish his active duty early. Change of plans, I guess. I am back at LMU and Mohamed is too at this point. My mother is worried because she knows he has been spending a lot of time coming down to visit me, but as far as she knows he sleeps in the car at night. (Shh! this is a secret). We talk about how hard this deployment is going to be because we have been spending so much time together. Lesson learned: no accusations of being unfaithful and no assuming things. Deployment number two is set up for success. This will be the last challenge we face in our relationship that will be telling of our future. Our wedding date has been set for March 2013. Deployment is smooth; emails are sweet, sending him boxes upon boxes of all his favorites.

*To my love,*

*I did not want to tell you before you left about the difficulty I have been experiencing in my Statistical Methods class, but my professor basically told me to not bother taking the final because even if I received an A, nothing much could be done. I have officially failed my first course in the history of my education! I feel like such a loser and I will never amount to anything. I do not blame you but I guess I did not handle you leaving that well. SLG is keeping my mind busy and I miss you so much! Hope to hear from you soon.*

*Love you, always and forever*

There it is, I have managed to keep my attention on something other than school and that is not necessarily a good thing. I’m lost and I hate feeling so lonely. My greatest battle while he is away is finding someone who understands. The Marine Corps, girlfriends/ fiancés club is small and deceiving. These women unfortunately care about being comforted by other men when their partners are away. That fact is something I could never be ok with and this is why, I chose to keep my distance. I do not want to associate myself with them. My sorority sisters are amazing and are wonderfully supportive, but that hole remains. I attempt to fill it with small activities and work, but it remains. I begin to plan our wedding.

I soon after begin to feel overwhelmed with all this planning. If you know me well, you know that I hate when things are over- the- top. I am all about the simple and neat. That is exactly how my wedding is going to be. I began by picking a date and notifying all-important parties, i.e. my parents and his family. Does a year and a half sound like enough time? Ok, well, my maid of honor and I go in search of a venue, Palos Verdes, Glendale, and El Segundo. The ones we visit are too small, too ugly, too far, or way too expensive. My mother convinces me to consider the location where we once attended a wedding. I personally did not like the idea that someone else had already had their wedding there, but I gave it a chance. The price and the size were perfect! With a gazebo and beautiful pond right outside, this was the way I pictured the celebration of our love. The reception would be simple with white and red flowers everywhere. And just like that, it is booked. I sent Mohamed an email listing the amount of money I needed to make the deposit and preliminary expenses.

*Dear Mohamed,*

*Our wedding venue has been set! I need your guest list and can you please remind your parents of what we have planned! What color scheme would you like? I like red. Are you going to wear your dress blues? Do you want your groomsmen to wear them too? What about alcohol? Yes? No? Maybe? I think chicken is our best bet? Everyone eats chicken! Do you want anything specific for the wedding? Belly dancers? A camel? Just kidding! Oh by the way, I think we should postpone the wedding!*

*Love you, always and forever*

Yes! I said it, POSTPONE our wedding. Originally it was because of school but as time progressed I wasn't so sure about how I felt. My father was not all that happy. He wanted me to graduate first and then get married. My father unknowingly put this expectation on me to be the change in the family. To be the one that did everything in the right order: school, marriage, and then family. I mean at this point all my cousins had kids, half married and half not. Couldn't he understand that our decision to get marry was out of love?

Regardless, I understood his expectations and a small part of me did want to be that change. Then it just so happened that Mohamed and I began to see a distance between ourselves, during the end of his deployment and I became afraid that he was the one getting cold feet.

I decided to discuss this once he was back, just a few more weeks and I was sure he would understand. As great as things were, there is always that point when you have to ask yourself, "Is this something I am truly ready for?" We both have agreed that divorce is not an option, yet we admitted that if it wasn't meant to be and everything possible was done to mend things, then saying goodbye is

our only other option. That is mature, right? I mean thinking about things like this before we are getting married.

The date has been set! July 20th, 2013 we will be celebrating our union. I should probably mention at this time that we eloped with only 2 of my girlfriends as witnesses on July 3rd, 2012. My parents were in El Salvador and that news was not taken too lightly. The main reason for this decision was because I did not want this ceremony to be the highlight of my marriage, signing a paper is significant but our true celebration would be with all of our loved ones gathered around.

Marriage

It is July 19th, 2013 we have a full house and high tensions. I breakdown! Tears, yelling, the wedding is called off! My mom comes in yelling, and in perfect English says, "Both of you need to get your act together because I can easily begin making calls to cancel this event but if you no longer want this then we need to stop playing games and give the proper respect to those who are here to join us."

Sorry! Kiss! The end!

The day is finally here. I wake up and again argue a bit with Mohamed because he apparently needs to go to the gym. Everyone is running late, because someone decided to close down the 405 Freeway. Out of all days, I begin to feel anxious, no sign of my father, the groom, or the photographer. Vows are exchanged, the rose ceremony, my favorite part of the whole day. The minister states, "The roses you are holding will represent that apology you do not want to say; leave a rose for one another as a sign for peace." The night is going perfect; Mohamed is having a great time and dancing like there is no tomorrow. I am so happy. The next two days are amazing; I see a change in him, almost as though he is taking his role as a husband to a different level. He begins to pack and with that he is off to New Jersey. The plan is, I will finish school, apply to City Year, New York and we will stay in New Jersey near his family for 3 to 4 years.

I begin school and I am feeling really different, almost as if I don't belong. I am married now but I am also in my last year of college, I want to make sure I don't miss out on anything. Mohamed and I have yet to be on good terms and this distance is becoming too much. I have no intention of doing homework or studying and my grades begin to suffer once again. It's like deployment no. 3, only this time, it's by choice and I feel alone and abandoned. He left me, 5 days after our wedding and it seemed like it was such an easy decision for him. We continue to argue and fight, I fall deeper and deeper into my hole of darkness and then suddenly I feel like disappearing. I felt as though no one would notice me being gone and it's taken me this long to finish school why not just take a break and deal with my issues. I slowly begin to realize I need help and a self- diagnosis of depression gives me the courage to seek Student Psychological Services. This is where I meet Jeff, my psychologist, he was great! As they say, we were here!

He understood the craziness my life was made up of and he began to prepare me for my trip to New Jersey during Thanksgiving break. This was going to be the trip that would decide the fate of this relationship.

I'm off and once I land, I call Mohamed to let him know, no answer. I call him 20 times before he picks up and he's still sleeping, at home. I try to keep my cool but I am absolutely enraged. He forgot about me! What the fuck? I begin to think this was the worst decision and clearly this trip was not going to end well. He finally arrives and everything is forgotten. I am here to get my man back and bring him home with me. The week has gone by way too fast, and it is decided that he will be coming back home at the end of his semester. I explain that not being accepted to City Year was a sign that it would be really hard for me to find work in NJ, that I don't have the connections that I have here in Los Angeles there and plus he always wanted to transfer to the University of Southern California, so regardless we would end up back in LA sooner than planned for. I just could not stand the idea of not having a secure job and moving in to his parents' home. I wanted my own place, if I wanted to continue living with people, I might as well stay home.

December could not come any sooner, it's the end of the semester and I once again I have to change my schedule because I received a C minus in one of my courses. Mohamed is preparing to come back in Los Angeles and I begin working at T.G.I Friday's, I am about to begin school and so we focus on spending as much time together as possible. I once again promise that I will be less busy this semester than the last but that never seems to be the case. Work begins to take its toll on my life, not only do I have a lot of studying and homework but once I get home from school, I go straight into house- wife mode. Cooking can take me anywhere from two to three hours every night or every other day if I'm lucky. I stay up "late" to get some work done, and sleep. After a long conversation with him, it is decided that I will no longer work. He will begin to work, resulting in the same issue.

As I reflect on this period in my life, I come to realize that academics were never of top priority for me because I am comforted by the idea of comforting. The responsibilities I carry can get in the way of my studies but regardless I enjoy doing them. Cooking for hours on end, washing clothes, and supporting Mohamed at the gym with my simple presence is how I am able to display my love for him and all of his passions. His support comes in the "Good morning beautiful," text messages I receive every morning or an invite to Pho Show. His insane support for my weight loss goal, staying up late with me so I can finish my homework and rubbing my feet and back, is all I need to know that what I'm doing is all worth it. I never managed to receive better grades in my time at LMU and yes that does worry me because I do wish to continue my higher education. My GPA will be my set back in this component of my future. Nonetheless, I am happy to have



faced so many challenges and struggles with balance because now I can truly appreciate what is directly in front of me. I wouldn't have wanted to experience LMU in any other way- as crazy as that may sound. I have found my Egyptian pharaoh; I am on the verge of accomplishing a significant goal, and am ready to take on the next challenge. My fairy tale has not ended but as of now, my happily ever after- well you will have to wait for the next chapter to find out.