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The Border Between Us

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The most heartbreaking place in America is called Friendship Park. It is the place where dreams come to clash and two different worlds collide. As a little girl, I had always heard about the infamous US/Mexico border wall. Witnessing it with my own eyes, however, is a different story that will remain one of the most vivid memories of my life.

It was the second semester of my first year at Loyola Marymount University. Though I was learning a lot in my classes, my decision to commute from home every day made it difficult for me to get involved within the university. As a first generation student, I didn't feel good enough or capable enough compared to my classmates. As a commuter, I felt out of touch with "the true college experience" and thought I was missing out on building lifelong friendships. I would come to class in the mornings and eventually have to return home where my role as a student was minimized by my obligations as a daughter and sister. Eager to make the best out of my freshman year, I decided to sign up for a weekend long service trip to Tijuana, Mexico called De Colores. To my understanding, De Colores was about going down to Tijuana to serve the El Florido community and connect with the humble families living there. When I was told we would be visiting Friendship Park, I was not aware that it would be standing right in front of the border that divides the land of opportunities from the land of broken dreams.

Stepping off the De Colores van, I was welcomed with opened arms by the sun's burning light. It was such a beautiful day that for a second I had forgotten where I was about to walk into. In Friendship Park, the border wall wasn't as intimidating as I had imagined it. The heavy metal bars were painted a sky blue so clear it gave the illusion that the wall was not there at all. From an unknown place came the sound of lively Latin music. I could hear the contagious laugh of children playing by the shore and could almost taste the savory food of the shops down the street. How ironic that the place everyone wants to leave behind was filled with so much culture and life while the American side was so dry and deserted. As I walked along the park and got around to read the messages of hope and suffering written on the wall, my heart sank into the bottom of a pit. Immigration is a topic I had always heard about throughout my life, but this was the first time I was coming face to face with the harsh realities of it. The air suddenly felt thick upon my skin, and the roaring waves of the ocean rushed into a loud silence as the people around me retreated into personal reflection. Inside I was an emotional wreck with thoughts of frustration, anger, appreciation and despair all bottled up and running wild through my mind. The image of separated families reaching out their hands through the wall with the desperate need of human contact crossed my head. Families who, like prisoners, are incarcerated. Families who are torn apart for the sake of a promising future.

So selfishly yet inevitably I remembered my own family's experience with immigration. I held back my tears and swallowed back the aching pain in my throat as I cherished and appreciated my parent's sacrifice to get me to where I am now. As I approached the end of the wall where it meets the Pacific Ocean, the whistle of the wind took me back into my childhood in El Salvador. I thought about the birthdays and holidays my parents and I were separated from each other because I did not have the papers to come live with them in the United States. But despite the distance, they always made sure I had food on my plate and was being well cared for. If not for my parents' immense love and persistent fight for me, I'd still be living in my home country where English would be foreign to me and God only knows if a college education would have been a possibility.

Suddenly, as I stood appreciating my parent's battle for my future, I couldn't help but feel a sentiment of guilt creep into my conscious mind as I began to think of my cousin Jenny, who was not as fortunate as I was. Being only a month apart, Jenny and I grew up to be more like sisters than cousins. We share the same childhood memories, yet our lives turned out so differently. There I was with the privilege to travel and study at an American university while Jenny was restricted from attending her classes because of the gang violence and dangers back in El Salvador. Biting my tongue, I held back my anger and frustration as I thought about how unfair life was to those who deserve the world. If not for my parents, my life could have easily turned out like Jenny's. But as much as I empathize with Jenny, her positivity and resistance is the source of my great admiration for her. Thanks to my parents, I was given the tools to build a better life for myself.

Now, as a first generation college student, I face new challenges, but my motivation and commitment remain the same. My fight for success will not be complete until I am able to compensate my family and Jenny for all they deserve. If not for their constant support every step of the way, I would not be going anywhere. Standing in front of the immense border I realize that there is no wall that can't be broken down as long the dream remains.