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What Keeps Me Going

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In Latino culture, family is something that is greatly emphasized. As I look back on my life, I can say that I had an amazing childhood, and I owe it nearly all to my family. From the birthday parties and holidays spent with them to playing and watching soccer to going shopping or visiting theme parks with them. Some of my favorite moments and best memories are because of my family.

It was August of 2014. Pretty soon, I would be moving out to go to school at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles. My mom's birthday was on the 25th and unfortunately, I wasn't going to be home for it since that would be the first day of classes. My family decided to throw her a party before I left and in doing so, it also became my unofficial going away party. I'm sure everyone knows that no family is perfect, and ours is definitely no different. We've had our history of conflicts and some were pretty severe. However, this night was something special. The whole family came together. All of my cousins, tios, and tias, and we had a great time. It was such a nostalgic feeling, reminding me of the good old times. This was the night that it first hit me—the idea that I was growing up, that I was leaving home and going to college. I had been extremely excited, but after that night, it became more bittersweet.

In my entire family, I was the very first one to leave home for college. I had family who attended community college or went to Cal State Northridge (CSUN), but it is a different experience. CSUN is a great four year university. However, for people in the San Fernando Valley, it isn't the most competitive; you are practically guaranteed admission as long as you aren't completely failing high school, and you are more than likely to commute. I was stepping into new territory at LMU. My first year was definitely a learning experience. For the very first time, I was independent and didn't have to ask my parents for permission when I wanted to go out with friends or let someone know every single thing I was up to every moment of the day. The valley is only 30-40 minutes away from LMU when there is no traffic, but, in case you don't know, the 405 freeway can be absolute hell. So I was far enough away where I could be on my own, but still close enough to go home if I really needed to.

Since I was close enough, I felt a slight push from my family to go home often, especially from my dad. He texted me every single day, and still does, and asks the same questions:

“How was your day?”

“Good.”

“Do you have a lot of homework?”

“More or less.”

“Have you eaten?”

“Yes.”

“Are you coming home this weekend?”

“Maybe. I don't know yet.”

This exact conversation has repeated itself every day that I have been away for the last two years. At first I didn't mind it and replied with more details. As time passed, and this happened over and over and over again, my patience grew thin and my answers devolved into the brief exchange you just saw. I loved being at LMU and quickly found it was becoming home. I wanted to avoid going back home to the valley as I enjoyed being on my own. However, for one reason or another, I constantly felt pulled back and found myself going home one or two weekends a month.

After freshman year ended, my family wanted to go on vacation and we decided to go back to Orlando and visit all the theme parks again. Going to theme parks has always been my family's thing. We had annual passes almost every year to go to Universal Studios Hollywood and we would go to Disneyland and Six Flags Magic Mountain whenever we could. Orlando is essentially theme park heaven. My family had visited twice before, once when I was two and again when I was fifteen. I don't remember the first trip and the second trip, as fun as it was, had a lot of negativity involved, which was mainly my fault. This trip, on the other hand, was something truly special, something beyond words. It was, without a doubt, the perfect family vacation filled with laughter, love, innocence, joy, and tons and tons of fun. We explored the Wizarding World of Harry Potter by flying on broomsticks. My mom and I nerded out with Darth Vader and Chewbacca at Disney's Hollywood Studios as the park transformed for Star Wars Weekends. We traveled continents, discovered cultures, and saw exotic animals at Busch Gardens while enduring heavy rain. We rode through the Everglades on an airboat going 65 mph. This adventure with my family was eye-opening. It made me realize just how special they really are. I saw how they were able to make this incredible experience happen. I reflected on my life and saw just how much my parents sacrificed for me and my sister.

My parents are everything to me. They are the reason my sister and I are where we are today and the reason we are the people we are today. They instilled in us crucial values and morals of life. They both came to this country from practically nothing and busted their asses to build something beautiful for their children. My dad showed us the importance of hard work in whatever we were involved in. My mom really emphasized the importance of education and always made sure we were on top of our school work. They instilled in us compassion, faith in God, determination, humbleness, and a drive that is propelling us to the stars above. They gave up so much for us so that we could be where we are today. Whether it was related to school, soccer, or simply for the sake of spoiling us, if we wanted something, it was always possible. They are now putting me through college and LMU is not a cheap school. I have to take out fairly large loans; however, my family was willing to make the sacrifice because it was something I wanted and would open the door to countless opportunities.

Sophomore year of college came and went in the blink of an eye. I found myself extremely occupied as I dove into the college experience with maximum units (even exceeding them in one semester), and engineering is no easy task. I also got involved in multiple clubs, sports, a job, and more. With all that I had to do, I found myself with little to no free time. I was going home less. I began to talk to my family less, not replying to their texts. I told myself I was too busy and tried to focus on my school work. I felt a little guilty but continued to do so. Whenever I did go home, they wouldn't bug me about me not replying. They understood and were just happy to have me home. Throughout the year, I faced a constant struggle of whether I'd be able to make it. My motivation was dropping and I entered a slump. But the reason I am still going, the reason that I haven't given up and am fighting to make it, is my family. I have this desire to repay them for everything they've done for me. I want to repay them for all that they have sacrificed for me. I am not going to let it all go to waste. Because of the wonderful childhood they provided me, I know that I am going to be a theme park engineer and design rides and attractions so that I can create memories and magic the way my family did for me. I can't wait for the moment that I get that degree and can hug my parents and say it was all for them.