

Mis Orígenes No Me Limitan

Lys Huerta

Abstract: Lys Huerta is a first-generation undergraduate student at Cal State LA. When she was growing up, she learned Spanish as a first language because her parents' English was limited at the time. Throughout her elementary school years, Huerta's ESL background seemed to mean that her English was not at the same level of her peers, making her feel less than adequate. Now as an adult, Huerta realizes that being bilingual has allowed her to help others both at work and in everyday life.

Being first-gen is being told that I can't read the books I like,
because my English is not good enough for you.
It's hating the name my mother gifted me,
because no one can pronounce it,
To hear my classmates and teachers alike struggle
to string together the three letters of my name.

I am put in a box,
While others dictate what my potential could be.
A friend once told me,
"I would never work a mediocre job"
while my "mediocre job" gets me through university.

I try to compensate for my parents' dreams that were never realized,
Dreams that never came to be because they had us.

Faraway dreams of a woman,
who's heart is so big she would have been a cardiologist,
and a man who could have been a fútbol player in his country,
But instead made his home in a foreign country.

Being first-gen is trying to be perfect, when I know I never will be.
Striving to get the perfect grades to prove to everyone
they were wrong about me—

I had just started school a wide eyed little kid,
when my teacher told my parents "Do not speak Spanish at home"
As if that would somehow impede my ability to learn English.

Yet when a new student from México arrived at school
it was I, who was asked to be the welcome committee,
By the very people who did not want me speaking Spanish at home,
The same people who could not communicate with the newly arrived pupil.

Yet at six, I was expected to.
My “impediment” was now of use to you

As an adult, I continue to play the translator
to strangers whose lips can't seem to remember
how to form a sentence in English,
these strangers who remind me of my parents,
who once struggled too.

Mamá y Papá nunca me dejaron de hablar Español,
Y ahora puedo ayudar a gente cómo tú.

Saber dos idiomas no me limita,
Si no demuestra toda la capacidad que siempre he tenido,
Que a pesar de lo que la gente creía de mi,
Mis orígenes me han llevado más lejos de lo que veían.