

# I rise

FOR THOSE WHO ARE SILENCED IN OUR SOCIETY...



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What does this mean? Who is actually silenced? Of course, everyone can speak up... right? Not necessarily. Growing up was interesting for me. I was born in the United States (Arlington, Virginia to be exact) and I definitely pride myself on my nationality... and yes I will still do an internal eye roll whenever I get the question “So, where are you from?” as if my brown skin was somehow not “American”. But don’t get me wrong, I am just as proud about my “Americanness” as much as I am about my Mestizo Salvadoran heritage.

But the funny thing is that I was only given this opportunity to experience this pridefulness because of the hard work and dedication of my parents taking the risk of crossing the border and trying to create a better life for my sister and me. Can you imagine having one decision like this having such a dramatic effect on everything that defines you as a person? The accessibility to a public education, to feel safe while queer, to be anglophone, to have a more solid roof over your head, to even be able to have a small chance of getting a higher ed degree and to not go hungry.

It’s scary to think that if things went just a tad different, I would be a stranger to myself - which makes me have a “Man in the Mirror” moment.

These were some of the things my parents could only dream about when they were children. They were living in an environment where the social infrastructure was failing them and they had no opportunity whatsoever to experience any socioeconomic mobility where they were living. My parents didn’t meet until they got to the United States but this just shows the prevalence of these social problems in their country of origin. So my parents “added” the undocumented immigrant identity to their roster of other identities despite them knowing the challenges they may have encountered once entering the United States.

So why did I just share this vulnerable piece about my family’s identity? Well first off, it is a reminder to myself that I should think constantly of where I come from and to not have shame in it! Society somehow socializes us to not share our vulnerability with one another because you don’t want to be perceived as the perpetual victim or even worse; having others blame you for your misfortunes, as if anyone has any real power over when, where and what family they’re born into. As a social scientist NOTHING is concrete, clear or absolute, we must look into all the details! Second, I think we need to become mindful of when we all say blanket statements about groups of people. I will admit, I am

triggered when I hear people speaking badly of immigrants, because that is not only where I come from but because I know the amount of hard work my parents have put in every day of their lives to be able to get naturalized. We were fortunate that my sister and I were brought up comfortably enough that they were never concerned about the same issues their parents thought about when they were children.

Although my parents came to the States during the time of war in El Salvador, the country is still healing from the scars the war left on Salvadoran society. Unfortunately both young and older generations are paying for it. I also know El Salvador is not the only country experiencing this which is why we have people from all over entering this country. Newer immigrants have continuously come into this country and will continue to do so. It is never really a “choice” for anyone to make the difficult decision to leave family without knowing when you will see them again. So to demonize them is a complete dismissal of their stories.

I acknowledge the privilege my parents “gifted” me upon my birth and whenever possible challenge those who have a negative view of the communities where I come from. So I Rise to get voices similar to my parents heard in a place where it’s not too common, particularly in higher ed, where Hispanic immigrants make up a minority on a national level due to the various levels of stratification that affect the community. I would like for others to not only listen to my second hand account of this story, but to sit down and do the uncomfortable research of hearing what stories other immigrants have to share with us. My hope is that through this, immigrants not only feel heard but validated for making the decision to come to this country.

