

La Historia De Esperanza / The Story of Hope

When Donald Trump was elected as the President of the United States I did not know exactly how to feel. I was angry at first, and soon when that anger dissipated I became disappointed, finally settling into a state of fear and confusion; resulting in a roller coaster of emotions that my adolescent hormones could not even compare to. It was then that I realized that in my nineteen years of life, I had never felt as lost or as powerless as I was in that moment. And even though I felt completely numb inside, I knew that telling someone how I felt would not make me feel any better. Instead I desperately wanted to know that I was not alone. Then I talked to *her*, and suddenly the world didn't feel broken anymore. In respect to her wishes I will not use her real name, but instead for the purpose of this essay I will refer to her as Esperanza, meaning "hope" in Spanish. I've known Esperanza ever since I was a little kid, and if I didn't have so many wonderful women in my family that already filled the role, I would consider her to be a second mother. When I talked to Esperanza through the phone, I felt as if the woman that I had known for most of my life had disappeared. No longer did she portray the image of an unbreakable and independent woman, but for the first time in my life I noticed that she was scared, and ironically for the first time since the election, I began to feel safe.

Esperanza immigrated illegally to America from Colombia as a single mother with her two children in December of 2004, hoping to provide them with a better future where their dreams could be more than just dreams. When her family got here, she constantly heard talks about an immigration reform that was promised to be just beyond the horizon, an innocent fantasy that gave her the strength to keep going. When Barack Obama was elected in 2008, he made big promises for immigrants, most of which did not come true. But what he did deliver on was a future for Esperanza's children in the form of D.A.C.A (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and that was really all that mattered to her. Then when Hillary Clinton decided to run for president in 2016, she thought that maybe it would be Clinton who would deliver on the promises Obama made, and as she found poll after poll that guaranteed a woman would be our next president she finally let herself be happy again. She found herself even more pleased to see both her kids going off to college and starting their own life, an opportunity she could never have provided for

them in her old country. She even started dating again, knowing that her children would be okay if she decided to focus on herself for once. Her life had become her wildest dream, even her boss of 10 years finally decided she was valuable enough to promote, but then came November 8th, 2016 : election day.

Thinking that Hillary would win, Esperanza called her children and told them to pay close attention to the news. “Today, you will see history being made”, she eagerly told her children in their native tongue, never thinking for a second that she would be making them watch their own future fall apart. When I asked her how she felt after the election, for a second I believed that the call had ended. The deafening silence that followed my question was more than the answer I hoped to receive , and when she finally spoke again I couldn’t help but feel as though her world had suddenly become my own.. She described to me the nights following the election in which she could not sleep; how she would lay in bed thinking about how stupid she was to believe that she would ever be welcome in a country that had so clearly, and in so many ways, spelled out its hatred for her. Esperanza could not understand it, and I did not even know where I myself would begin to look for answers. We talked a lot about how depressed she felt after the election, but when I moved the conversation towards the topic of her children I could tell that she was falling apart internally, highlighted by the cracks in her voice. She explained to me how she thought that bringing her kids to this country would be a gift, but the more time that passed, the more it was beginning to look like a curse. She told me about a conversation she had with her son that still haunts her to this day. In this conversation, Esperanza hoped to introduce the idea of deportation to her six-year-old son, who is now in college, by telling him that they might be forced to go back to their country. Unexpectedly, her son’s following response brought her to tears, and even as she told me the story, despite many years having gone by, I could tell that the pain had not gotten any easier to bear. Her son’s response was, “If we weren’t part of this country, why did you make me come here? Why did you have to ruin my life?”, and I’m not sure that even after all these years Esperanza has found an answer.

When I asked Esperanza if she had any profound experiences with racism, I expected a stereotypical story of discrimination from her past, but what followed showed me a part of humanity that I did not know existed. She explained how the company she works for hires a lot of undocumented

immigrants, and how throughout the years the employees there have become a second family to her. Although not all of the employees are undocumented, a large majority of the ones that aren't undocumented share a history of immigration either through family or self-experience. These workers in particular are the ones that torment Esperanza every day at work. They harass her by repeating anti-immigration rhetoric from the news, they blame “her people” for taking their jobs, and they undermine her intelligence because she cannot speak English properly. She described the experience by saying (translated from Spanish),

While Donald Trump was first running for president, the people that were documented made us listen to his words, they made us fear that our days in this country were numbered and that we were not welcome. They echoed his words in our workplace and they made us feel like our own people were betraying us. This hurts me the most because I would expect some Americans to act this way, but I would never expect that my friends would act this way towards me. (Esperanza)

The way she was describing the events, it seemed as if the campaign of Donald Trump had played a larger part within the Hispanic community than originally anticipated. Suddenly the people that previously called immigrants their friends or even family, now turned to them in disgust, believing that they were to blame for their problems. This loss of identity was something that deeply affected Esperanza and was now the unspoken side-effect of Trump's uncensored tongue.

This then posed the question of why people waited until Donald Trump ran for president to remove their guise of friendship and compassion. Was he to blame for their awakening? Certainly believing that America is or could ever be a ticking time bomb full of internalized racism and xenophobia is ridiculous considering its rich history of immigration, but when you look in the right places you cannot help but think that it could be a possibility. The fact is that Donald Trump, according to the exit polls, won the election with 8% of the Black vote, 29% of the Latino vote, and 42% of the women vote (CNN). These are the people that he targeted in his speeches, people that Trump allowed his supporters to discriminate against, and the very same people that should be voting against him. But yet the numbers do not lie. These people that voted for Donald Trump exhibit some severe self-destructive tendencies, referred to as

“Stockholm-Trump Syndrome”, which is “characterized (as) a person’s positive feelings towards Donald Trump despite his verbal abuse of that person” (Josselynn). The theory behind this concept of “Stockholm-Trump Syndrome”

[S]uggests that a victim’s ego identifies with Donald Trump and decides to vote for him in order to not feel insulted by his mean comments directed toward them. In this way, the victim’s ego isn’t damaged by the slight. In supporting Donald Trump, the victims cease to view him as a threat and their egos remain intact. (Josselynn)

These people are deciding to vote for the man that has created a movement has specifically targeted and degraded them as inferiors, yet they do not feel any remorse for their decision because they have isolated themselves completely from who they are. No longer do they view themselves as part of the whole, but as an exception to their unsatisfying, and certainly unwanted, affiliations via gender or race.

Perhaps the worst part about this loss of self-identity is that America has seen it happen before, and it is it even encouraged in our culture as the race for higher education continues across the country. In his essay “The Shock of Education: How College Corrupts”, *Alfred Lubrano related that* often when people from working-class families go to college, they abandon the formalities and way of thinking they learned from home and instead adopt society’s views of aristocracy, causing them to forget that they were once like the people they now strive not to be (Lubrano). They get caught-up in the battle between wealth and poverty, striving to have the former but forgetting that deep down all they have ever known is the latter. Eventually, when they successfully escape the working-class they no longer affiliate themselves with their past, and it creates what Americans would recognize as the battle between the social classes. For immigrants, a very similar phenomenon occurs. When immigrants become naturalized citizens, some no longer identify with their immigrant roots or even to their own past as immigrants, they begin to lose touch with the other side. They forget that they are part of the lucky few that can pretend that the life they lived before they were citizens was only a nightmare. They don’t care about what happens to immigrants anymore because it would no longer concern them. This is the reason why Esperanza’s co-workers do not

acknowledge themselves as part of her battle as an immigrant, because in their eyes it is “us” versus “them”.

This divide that Donald Trump’s campaign has made apparent in America is something that can no longer be ignored. For far too long this country has sat idly by as it has lulled itself to sleep inside a fantasy world of peace, despite all the evidence that pointed towards a much darker reality. If anything good can be said about the election of Trump, is that perhaps he will be the wakeup call that causes America to notice that it is quietly falling apart. Although in these challenging times, it seems much easier to fall into the temptation of defeat, but we must continue fighting for what we believe in our hearts to be right and to prevent the victory of hatred. When I found myself lost, I needed esperanza (hope) to find my way back. I needed a reason to believe that I should continue fighting against my adversity, and then I found it. And all it took was remembering that I was not alone, that this was *our* battle and that I would *never* be alone.

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