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Personal Essay

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Change

Anticipation and exhilaration disperse in every inch of my body as I move up the subway stairs to my old neighborhood. I think to myself, “How does it look now?”, “Are there any changes?” As I climb up the stairs into the bright daylight, a sudden rush of nerves begin to kick in. I haven’t visited my neighborhood in years since I moved to Las Vegas in 2004. I am blinded by the sudden change of light and begin to fixate my eyes to the familiar view. My neighborhood looks the same! It had the same stores, restaurants, and even the same familiar sights and sounds! I couldn’t help but smile as I begin to feel nostalgia in every inch of my body. In Nelson Mandela’s autobiography *A Long Walk to Freedom*, he writes, “there is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered”. The moment I stepped outside and looked at the familiar environment of Jackson Heights, I realized that there was nothing like the compelling feeling of returning to an unchanged place and looking at your changed self.

I grew up in Jackson Heights, New York- An urban neighborhood in Queens, one of the five boroughs of New York City. Although Manhattan was my playground, Jackson Heights was my home. There was nothing so familiar than the scent of Latino Food lingering in the air and the sight of common restaurants and stores. One restaurant in particular gave me a surreal feeling just by eating there again. It was my favorite restaurant in the world- Natives; pronounced nat-

ee-vahs. Every single thing I remembered about that place remained the same. It felt so homey to me because I would also dine there with my family when I was younger. I loved the plush booths and the enticing aroma that filled the air, while the lively band played in the main room. I loved their delicious Columbian food. I always ordered the combo meal which included a skirt steak, beans, plantains, and my favorite Columbian rice. After dining at Natives, I visited the same stores and areas I used to go to when I was a kid.

Even though five years is not that big of a difference, it felt like ten years to me. And knowing that a neighborhood can remain authentic in a changing world just gave me a sense of reflection. I went through massive and drastic changes. I did not picture myself looking or acting like I do now when I was younger. I would say living in Las Vegas was a total culture shock to me and is responsible for this change. But, this so called change is not negative to me because it is only natural to revamp yourself the moment you become a teenager. It just felt so outlandish returning to a familiar and unchanged place completely a changed person. And to think that I was going to accomplish the things I accomplish today five years ago! There are just so many ways in which I changed that I cannot possibly list them all. One obvious answer is appearance and age, and of course my mentality. But, I cannot believe I don't have my New York swag and lingo embodying me anymore!

I agree with Mandela when he states that there really is nothing like returning to a place than remains unchanged to find myself altered. It's like fashion- it remains the same while style changes. Maybe that is the impact childhood neighborhoods put upon its returning residents. I can now emulate the feeling that older adults feel when they return to their neighborhoods, and I'm just a teenager! Other than reflection, returning made me realize a few things. First, it made me realize my hometown roots and how proud I am of it. And lastly, it showed me that we

always have to remain true to who we are. In a changing and persuasive society like we have today, we must maintain our true selves and protect our authenticity with all we have.