

“Culturally Curious”

Moving from one country to the other can have a drastic change in someone's personality. Soon enough, the memories of living in that other country become distant and blurry. We get preoccupied with the society that we currently settle in and forget about the place and people we loved. Yet, Once brought back to that one place, it's just as we remembered it to be, but now, you feel as if you don't belong. Everything seems unchanged, its scenery, the people, and the smells but it no longer has the same meaning as it did ten years ago.

The city that I grew up in was the city of Juarez, Mexico. Now famous for its increasing rate of violence, it was once the safe nest, or as I thought, in which I played in. I remember running the streets, playing with my friends, and going to the neighborhood corner store to get a small bag of chips for five pesos; the smells of dinner filling the alleys reminded me that my mother too was making dinner.

Being a young child, I was oblivious to the dangers of the city. To me everyone was my friend and there wasn't anything out there that wanted to hurt me, except the big scary dogs that were jumping on rooftops. Everyone looked the same, and curiously didn't strike me when I saw girls my age dressing a lot differently and keeping their hands out begging for money. It wasn't strange to me, because I used to ask my uncle for money too. Yet, when I left and returned ten years later, curiosity got the best of me.

Returning to Mexico was definitely not the experience that I expected. What first struck me was the scenery. The same graffitied walls, old patchy paint, beat up buildings, and houses that seemed as if they were set on fire a thousand years ago, just as I remembered it. But now, it was disturbing. I couldn't stop thinking to myself, “why

wouldn't anyone want to help fix these neighborhoods up?" It made me want to take a big jug of paint and just start fixing the houses. Then, we passed the little girls that dressed differently; these are the indigenous people. They make a living off of handmade crafts; sadly they are very poor. I saw the same hands weakly stretched out, begging for money. It broke my heart, not only do I now understand why they were asking for money, but I sympathize for having a pocket filled with pesos. I gave them every last coin. The scary dogs were still on rooftops, but instead of running for my life, I stood in front of them, and waited until they came to me; I graciously petting their multicolored heads of gray, black, and white.

Out of all these moments, one in particular made me realize that I have changed. This happened at a restaurant that uncle treated the family to. As I walked in through the doors, I knew that I was in for it. The smell of deep fried beef filled the air. I ordered some 'Chile rellenos'. That didn't really stir up any doubts, but when my uncle was serving me a large plate of hunky beef, I dropped the bomb "I'm a Vegetarian now". This is when I was rudely called an American. The entire half an hour was dedicated to my decision of a new life style, and how my "americanized" self wouldn't survive a day in Mexico any longer.

In conclusion, I realized that I have matured into a compassionate person. I was intrigued by my new findings, and was ready to use them to my advantage. I became more culturally curious, and even though my family won't agree, I felt more Mexican than ever. I have dedicated my life to changing the world, and helping everyone I meet along my journeys.