

Andy Mejía

Mr. Anders

Period 2

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El orgullo que se ocultaba



Me: *Can you give me a brief introduction of yourself?*

Galia: My name is Galia-Alarcon Gonzalez, I'm thirty years old and I am a mother of two. I was born in Guadalajara, México. I came here as a one-year-old, "illegally" and became naturalized about 2-3 years ago.

Me: *Did you ever feel a difference becoming a naturalized citizen from other people in your community? What was that process for you like?*

Galia: It was a very emotional process because as an adult, I always felt different, I didn't realize I was an illegal immigrant until I was in high school. My own parents said that they did that so I would feel the opposite, "normal". When I figured it out, it bent my whole story of how I got here. I did feel different, so when I became naturalized through that ceremony it was very emotional. Other adults like me were naturalized at that moment. We could all connect, and we shared a similar feeling. It felt like for once, *you* are a part of this country.

When I heard her talk about this process I immediately dialed in on my own experience. I was a citizen by birth, but my mother and oldest sister, 22 years later in America, are still undergoing this process. I felt privileged at this moment, and my heart ached for all the people that are still fighting through it.

Me: *When you realized that you were an immigrant, and what your parents kept from you, how did that feel?*

Galia: I was never angry, but a lot of things started clicking. When I was younger there were a lot of racist comments towards me. I had no idea what they meant. For example, I heard the word "wetback" a lot, I had to ask my cousin at the time about its meaning. He said, "well you know, they say that to illegal immigrants." I had thought that had nothing to do with me initially. I never cared too much about that word until my parents had conversations with me. I wasn't upset with them; I was just upset with how other people viewed people of color.

Me: I connect with that because I would hear those racist comments, connect them and internalize them. At such a young age, or when you're new to the concept of being "other", it can be saddening and disappointing, because you question if you belong or not.

Me: *With that, what were your own experiences with racism? If you have any specific experiences, you can remember.*

Galia: The one I remember the most was elementary school. I had no idea what any of this meant. I believe I was in fourth grade, and someone had called me a "spick." Since I didn't know what it meant, I wasn't upset, nor did I cry about it. I couldn't ask my parents about it because they weren't from here, so they knew just as much as me. So, I ended up asking my cousin, and he said the same thing from earlier. It was very upsetting, but again I didn't care until I got older. I still didn't know about

my illegal status. I used to play soccer, and I had a very diverse team, we would play against mostly white teams, and I remember being called a “beaner.” That had started a fight, mostly because her entire team was laughing at me.

For me, racism at times was overt through the same comments Galia talked about. Except, Galia is older than me, so that language was often normalized. Throughout my adolescence, racism had become hidden and covert; it was the body language and cold hard stares when you entered certain areas. It was the stigma attached to your school’s name because everyone knew it was diverse and low-income.

Me: *Were there any experiences where you faced discrimination within the “Latino” community or bubble?*

Galia: Yeah, I recall this one time with a Latino club at my high school. Thinking I would feel safe there, which for much of the time it was. Overall, it was super fun. I remember, one time I went to the group, and I had done my hair curly, and this guy was like, “Wow, you finally look Mexican!” And it shocked me because what does a Mexican look like to you? We’re all different. I was sad and upset, and I ended up not going back. I had a very diverse friend group, and for some reason, I always was made fun of because I never just hung out with Latinos.

I also feel ostracized sometimes from labels such as being “Mexican” or “Latino”, not only because of my darker skin and short stature that associates me with “Oaxaca” or “Guerrero” as an insult but added my Latino experience was out of the ordinary. Most people had what I lacked, a Latino father that was a pinnacle of many boys my age.

Me: *As an adult, have you dealt with racism, and sexism if you have seen it explicitly?*

Galia: Not necessarily, any time I have a conversation about who I am and my identity, I always make it clear that I don’t tolerate disrespect about different cultures or women in general. Even within my own family when there could be small comments about being a lighter-skinned Latino with blue eyes. It’s comments like these that are ignorant and don’t make sense.

I always wondered where comments like these stem from, maybe the colonial era? My mother has lighter skin than me and during my childhood would refer to me as “Indian”, because it was normalized throughout her generation. I never felt insulted, because just as Galia didn’t know what certain words meant, it was the same feeling with my brown skin. It was my identity in part.

Me: Yeah, I agree. When we get to the point where we've matured a bit more with these topics, we tend to call it out. For example, both of us work here, with majority white employees where we have called out problematic remarks in the past.

Me: *When you were around my age, or younger, did you have anyone that represented your identity?*

Galia: *She took a deep breath almost to reconcile what she lost.*

I didn't, but as an adult when I see myself represented, it makes me happy and emotional. I wish I had that to feel proud because it always seemed like my culture was looked down upon. I didn't want to feel that way, even to say my name, I felt embarrassed. In the media, it was always "cholos", "cholas", "criminals", and "Narcos / drug dealers". It was never something you should feel proud of, something to share with the entire world.

I also shared this moment with her, I did not have anyone even within Latino media that represented my dark features. I felt different all the time, even from other Latinos that were taller than me and had lighter skin. I never wanted these features, I just wanted to be acknowledged just as they were in the media that surrounded me. We are depicted as poverty-stricken, maids, cooks, farmers, and "the help". It is always bittersweet now as a teenager watching these television shows and movies as they never shy away from using these caricatures.

Me: *How would you describe your own identity now as an adult?*

Galia: *She smiled and looked around, free.*

I see myself as Mexican before Latino. The way I describe my own culture, is being proud. I wasn't proud enough. Not being afraid to speak my language and helping others that need it. Getting to know my own country more since there's so much history. Visiting and giving back. I'm going in a few weeks, and I was telling my dad and brother that I want to give back by buying food from the señora next door and helping my own family down there. Overall, being proud, because looking around there's no one way to be Mexican, losing that fear of showing who you are and where you're from; Standing up for what you believe in.

It was beautiful to see this passion included in her reflections. I'm glad that at my age I thankfully get to be proud of my identity, something that was not the same for her throughout high

school. I realized at this moment that I have so many years to reconcile what was lost just as she did, but also to give back as she put it.

Me: *Do you think there has been progress in tackling conversations about race and colorism within our community?*

Galia: Yeah, for sure, I see it a lot more. It is something I appreciate about the younger generation. One thing about them is that they're not afraid to have uncomfortable conversations with people my age and older. The internet in some ways has helped a lot. There's so much more knowledge and access, which makes it easier to learn about these things.

Education in some parts. I became more educated and so did she to unlearn the hate we were taught about ourselves and the diverse communities we share a world with.

Me: *Added, what do you think someone like Tenoch Huerta Mejía has done for tackling such conversations?*

Galia: We shared a glare and put on a big smile.

He's done a lot. I recently downloaded his audiobook, and it's opened my eyes like I would've never imagined. It was shocking. For example, I have lighter skin than other people may have, and there are Afro-Latinos and indigenous people that are looked down upon. I never thought about those things until he brought them to light. The fact that they chose him for such a huge role in Black Panther, is great. I'm certain that other people like me have woken up to have serious conversations at home or with friends.

I still remember what Tenoch's role played for us. We both cried when we had conversations about the movie and his character. For days we discussed and analyzed different parts of it, Tenoch, just every aspect of it. For both of us, it was about being proud of the indigeneity that was always hidden from us. We both saw someone who reflected our physical characteristics on the big screen, not another white Latino attempting to pass as such.

Me: *How do you want your kids to grow up, culturally?*

Galia: She looked up towards the sky, to visualize the generations of her family.

I want them to be proud that they have Mexican family, and are Mexican, simply born here. Proud of their parents and grandparents' country. Visiting is a huge goal of ours. For example, my daughter's friends are mostly white, and they question her a lot. I always have to make sure she is okay with the girls asking her questions. They've asked her, "were you born there?", she's always okay but I always have to check in on her she isn't white passing but brown. For her, there's no hiding it since her dad is also brown. I never want her to feel uncomfortable. She's young now, but earlier in her life she wished for blonde hair and blue eyes. I have to remind her that she's beautiful and that many people would love to look like her.

Me: *And with your son, is there anything you want to teach him or have him do, to almost stop the cycle of "machismo"?*

Galia: Well, in my household we don't tolerate that. For example, my husband washes and cleans alongside my son and daughter. Everything starts at home. Whatever I teach and show him will depend on and hope he can learn something. One thing is that no matter who you are always help no matter who it is, in whatever they may need.

I was glad to hear she plans to do such simple things that a generation ago were not normal for sons to do. My father is the epitome of machismo, I learned the hard way what not to do, as I saw it eat him alive. The reality here is that with the new generation of Latinos there are many small ways to reduce machismo and harmful ways of thinking.

Me: *To tie it together, what other conversations need to be had, to stop some of these cycles?*

Galia: I think our parents need to hear out newer opinions, newer representations such as the Black Panther movie. Certain older people, I would say my grandma, she is also morena, and she'll say really bad things about certain groups, and I don't understand why. I also have to correct her. There still are a lot of older conservative Latinos that need to have their eyes opened in general.

Me: Thank you once again for your thoughtful responses, and for sharing your personal experiences with me.

Galia: I'm glad we had this conversation.

It felt like yet another natural conversation moments after we hugged, and it was the reassuring kind. We are only two people, two Latinos attempting to make a change in such a big world. She has truly supported me through this one year since I met her, she makes me believe such a grand change is possible. I have taught her many things to return the favor of the wisdom she passes on. In retrospect, she has taught me to be proud of who I am, my story which at one point was not her reality.