

THE UNLIVED LIFE: AN EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

I oftentimes find myself resisting my own potential, even when it could lead me to be the person I so desperately want to be. The following thesis includes a series of short essays detailing a lifelong struggle with resistance, as it is referred to in Steven Pressfield's *War of Art*. When I addressed the issue of resistance, I noticed it was most present in my journey to developing my identity. By identifying the seductive, yet detrimental forces of resistance, I can shed the limitations I have placed on myself and be happier for it. This is especially important to address in places of higher education, where students develop behaviors with which they conduct their lives and form their own identities.

INTRODUCTION

Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art* is an aide for those within the arts community. Pressfield describes an immeasurable force that works against your every move when a life in the arts is chosen. This force is resistance. Pressfield writes, "most of us have two lives. The life we live and the unlived life within us. Between the two stands Resistance" (Pressfield, X). After reading *The War of Art* my sophomore year of college, I was determined to face the resistance in my life.

At the time, I was pursuing a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre at Texas State University. Although my goal was to pursue a career in the arts, there was nothing that scared me more than performing. I was an extremely nervous and insecure performer. My fears were beginning to take control of my work. I had great difficulty applying myself to my work in classes and on stage. I became extremely judgmental of actors around me and their work. I became a toxic presence. It took Pressfield's words to understand that I wasn't a bad person, but had just given into resistance. It made me realize I had to be deliberate when fighting resistance. I needed to decide my identity before resistance defined it for me.

Part of my identity had been predetermined based on my parent's and grandparent's history. My parents influenced my identity, but as I grew older, the development shifted to my control. I discovered that race and ethnicity were at the core of my fight with resistance. To determine my identity, I would need to address the presence of race and ethnicity within my life and my family's history.

MY FATHER

My father was born to Luis and Narcissa Estrada, two Latino immigrants from Mexico, who settled in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. My grandfather, who my dad is named after, came to the U.S. in the late 1920s when he was a teenager. He was a World War II veteran and a longtime employee of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, working as a cross guard watchman. He returned to Michoacán, Mexico in the 1950s, where he met my grandma. She too was a teenager when she immigrated to the U.S., though it was decades after her husband's first trip across the border. My grandfather's line of work brought him to Ambridge, a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania known for its steel jobs. The town was populated with working class families, many of whom were of Italian, Polish, and Greek backgrounds. My father's family was one of only a handful of Mexican families in the area. In fact, the Latino population of the area was virtually nonexistent.

We call my dad's mother Grandma Abby, a short, Americanized variation of abuela. I don't know that we call my grandpa anything. My grandfather passed away when my dad was in college and long before I was born. He was well into his 50s when my dad was born in 1966. My dad tells me my grandfather didn't talk a lot. Perhaps that is why, aside from my grandma's occasional reference to her late husband, I have no stories to tell or memories passed down about my grandpa. Of course, that doesn't mean they didn't happen, but they're seldom shared. There are black and white photos of my grandpa, when he was young, scattered around my family's apartment and on the walls of my grandma's home. He was an extremely handsome young man, with dark features and a strong jaw. All I have of him is his portrait. I didn't know my grandfather, but I think I have his nose.

The word I hear most often to describe my grandma is stubborn. Never unwavering, iron-willed, or unyielding, but stubborn. She never backed down when asked not to taunt the opposing side at her children's sporting events. She even lost her job as a school cook because she refused to follow pre-determined recipes. While everyone and everything around her became Americanized, she held on to the traditions and emotions that were revered in her home country. To this day, she maintains her Mexican citizenship.

As a proud Mexican woman living in the U.S., she worked to preserve her culture for her five children. Through food, music, and language, her children would know her Mexico. Meals would include tamales, tostadas, Spanish rice, frijoles, homemade salsas, and much more. The music from my grandma's records filled my dad's childhood home. My grandma's love for music is palpable. Recently, we introduced her to the app, Spotify. She knew all the words and sang along to her old favorites. My grandma spoke to all her children in Spanish throughout their childhood. This cultural aspect however, was not embraced by her children to the extent of her food and music. Her children chose to speak English. My grandma learned English by listening to her children and her children learned Spanish by listening to their mother. In the end, however, all parties felt uncomfortable and unprepared to fully embrace their second language.

Growing up, my father's family had very little money. My grandfather worked constantly until he retired when my Father was still young. Then, the family of seven lived off my grandfather's pension from the railroad company and supplemented by renting out all the rooms in their townhouse. The family would sleep in the living room, while their tenants slept in the rooms above. My dad's wardrobe consisted of previously

owned and passed down clothing. Their townhouse was in the middle of a poverty-stricken neighborhood, which increasingly deteriorated as more and more steel jobs went overseas.

My father was not surrounded by an academic environment in Ambridge. My dad's school was not especially academically rigorous. It was less common for students to pursue a college degree and dropout rates were above average. Academics were not stressed in his household either. There was a language barrier between my grandparents and their children, which made helping with schoolwork very difficult. My grandma had finished high school in Mexico, but my grandpa had left to work in the U.S. before reaching high school. Their inexperience in the academic world caused them to withdraw when it came to their children's education. The pressure to aid in academic success was placed on the oldest child, my Aunt Rose. Although she had schoolwork of her own, especially as she pursued her college degree at the University of Pittsburgh, she provided her siblings with the help that was not available to her when she was growing up.

My dad and his siblings assimilated extremely well into American culture. Their assimilation process was aided by the race relations of Ambridge at the time. Most racial distinctions were made to separate the white and black communities. Because the Latino population of Ambridge was so small, it was difficult for many to identify whether an individual was Latino. Although my dad experienced instances of discrimination and uninformed comments about Latinos, he maintains there was greater discrimination towards the black community. For that reason, my father felt disconnected from any racial struggle. He was a third party to all racial battles and thought best to maintain that status.

My father's childhood was defined by his environment. Growing up in a working-class suburb of Pittsburgh in the 1960s and 70s, surrounded by a majority white population, he had a difficult time identifying with any Latino experience. Had my father grown up anywhere else in the country, his experience would have been entirely different. Had he grown up in San Marcos, Texas, the town I've called home for four years, his Mexican heritage would have been in the forefront of his life. The growing Mexican population of San Marcos in the 1970's would have engulfed my father and his family. Along with community though, he would have also experienced the vast discrimination and racism towards the Latino community, that is embedded in the history of Texas.

MY MOTHER

My mother was born in Denver, Colorado to Fred and Cheryl Wegener, two white Americans of distant German ancestry. In Denver, my grandpa worked as a police officer and my grandma worked in a juvenile detention center, later becoming a stay-at-home-mom when their first son was born. Because of my grandpa's line of work, he and my grandma are referred to, by my family, as Grandma and Grandpa Chief. My mom was the middle child of three, including one older brother and one younger brother. Following a bad car accident, which resulted in Grandpa Chief losing all his front teeth, my grandma pushed him to make a major career change.

My mom's family moved to Indiana, Pennsylvania, where my Grandpa Chief taught Criminology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He would go on to create the Criminology department at the university. Indiana was a small college town, most known

for being the hometown of actor, Jimmy Stewart. When my mother moved there in the early 1970s, the population was roughly 16,000 and it was populated predominately with white, middle class families. Like most Pennsylvania towns in the 70's, Indiana was in the midst of desegregation, and racial discrimination, however subtle, was a byproduct of that major shift.

My mother's household regularly entertained her father's high achieving students. My mother remembers one such visit from Clarence, a young black student of my grandpa's. As she sat underneath the dinner table, she could hear their laughs as they joked about sending Clarence down the street to inquire about a house for sale. They laughed to think about the look on the neighbor's faces to meet a young black man intent on joining their cul-de-sac.

People can talk for hours about my Grandpa Chief. He was an incredible professor, mentor, father, husband, and friend. I was only a few years old when my grandpa died from cancer. My parents tell me a story of one of his last moments. Like many young relationships, my parents had a rocky beginning and had broken each other's hearts on a handful of occasions. When my family and I had come to say goodbye to my grandpa, he asked to speak to my father alone. He told my father that he trusted him. He could see the man my father was becoming and had faith that he would care for and protect his daughter and granddaughters. My mother describes my grandfather as a true egalitarian. He had seen many injustices in his life, especially in his line of work, and truly believed in equality and justice for all, a belief passed down to my mother.

Only after the fact did my mother realize she attended school during desegregation. A handful of black students were bussed to her predominately white

school from a neighborhood known as Chevy Chase. The lower socioeconomic, majority black neighborhood was named after the well-known, affluent suburb of Washington D.C. as a joke. As my mom recalls, not all the students bussed to her high school were black. Some may have been Latinos of darker complexions, though the distinction was never addressed. The contrast of race and socioeconomic status resulted in an ‘us vs. them’ complex. The students of color were considered the ‘others.’

NOT SO BLACK AND WHITE

My parents met at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Even though my dad’s parents didn’t have college degrees, they were able to provide their children with the opportunity to attend college. IUP was an hour and forty-five-minute drive away from Ambridge. This was the first time my dad moved away from home, and it would be for good. My mother wanted to leave Pennsylvania for school. She had been accepted to a university in Washington, D.C., but was convinced by her parents to stay in Indiana. Her education would be free since her father taught at the university, and she could live at home for part of her schooling.

Both my mom and dad noted a serious lack of diversity at their university. Like her high school experience with the students from Chevy Chase, there was a clear racial divide between the white students and the black students. The black student population seemed to be a part of a tight knit group that was difficult to permeate, if you were not black. My mom’s friends and classmates thought it strange when my mother befriended several black students. The taboo was not lost on my mother. She was fully aware of the

racial divide. The black students were still considered ‘others,’ but she was developing an understanding of how little that mattered to her.

My father and his siblings spent their life trapping their culture within the four walls of their family townhouse. When my dad went away to college, he left much of that culture back in Ambridge. There were no Hispanic societies, Latino fraternities, or Chicano clubs to invite my father to celebrate his Mexican heritage. Although his environment and resources were expanding past Ambridge, they primarily broadened his understanding of white America. My father enrolled in a Spanish class at IUP. The class was made up of mostly white students and no one had a background quite like my father, who could understand Spanish well, but had difficulty speaking it. My father remembers an instance when his Spanish teacher, a white woman who had studied in Spain, insinuated to the class that Latino men were lascivious. My dad didn’t speak up, but was astounded that a teacher would make such a ridiculous generalization about a population he was a part of.

When my parents met, there were several discernable differences between them, most notably class and education level. They came from two different worlds, but my mother never considered my father as an ‘other’ in the same way she was taught to think of black students. Although my dad had slightly tinted skin and dark features, he dressed and acted like any other Western Pennsylvania born man. Like many young men in the 80s, my dad and his friends had a fondness for mullets and cropped sleeveless t-shirts. I suppose my parents had an unspoken understanding, because my dad never saw himself as an ‘other’ either.

My dad recalls a jolting moment with a previous girlfriend in college. She had gone to the doctor's office and they requested the ethnicity of her current partner. She told the doctor her current partner was Mexican. When recounting the experience with my dad, the thought that ran through his head was one of 'oh, right! I'm Mexican.' By the time my dad met my mom, there were less and less instances to remind him of his ethnic identity.

My dad didn't fit into my mom's definition or society's definition of 'other.' This is most likely because this distinction is based primarily on race. At the time, my father was gaining an understanding of his racial identity. Many Latinos living in the U.S. racially identify as white. My dad was discovering that racial identity, especially among Latinos in America, has many layers.

Race has played a crucial role in the history of the United States. Race has been behind wars, social movements, identity crises, etc. Race, as it pertains to the U.S., is a government system of categorization. The United States Census Bureau states, "the racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically" (Department of Commerce). It is impossible to complete an accurate and definite account of race. Race is, after all, ultimately "based on self-identification" (Department of Commerce).

Latinos can be of any race. Many Latinos identify as white. When a question regarding race is present, it is usually followed by a question about ethnicity. The ethnic identifications include Hispanic or Latino, and in some instances, Chicano or Mexican-American. My dad, like many others in this country, will put white for his race and

Latino for his ethnicity. Admittedly, he feels strange whenever he answers ‘white,’ and he is not alone. A 2015 Pew Research study showed, “two thirds of Hispanic adults say being Hispanic is part of their racial background” (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2015). Although this is a belief held by most Hispanic adults, the question of race on all documents does not include a Hispanic or Latino option.

My father was left to pick between white and other when answering the question of race. Choosing other wasn’t an option for him because it was accompanied by mystery. He would rather provide partially correct information than no information at all.

MY BUBBLE

In 1994 my parents chose start a family in Falls Church, Virginia. The location was decided on primarily because of the quality of education available. Falls Church is a tiny, 2.2 square mile suburb of Washington, DC. Within its town lines, it contains one school system, one grocery store, and many quaint, yet elegant houses. With a population of just under 14,000 and a median household income of \$110,000, it stood as one of the most exclusive towns in Northern Virginia. A market profile on Falls Church, created by Jonathan Hunolt and Stewart Commercial Realty Services, LLC states, 96% of its citizens above the age of 16 are employed and over 78% of those jobs are considered white collar. I affectionately refer to Falls Church City as the bubble. Even when I was a child, I could recognize that my environment was not a reflection of the rest of the country. The resources, the community, and the privilege we lived in at times felt like living in a bubble.

Hunolt's market profile also describes the education attainment of Falls Church. Roughly 30% of the population above the age of 25 have attained a Bachelor's Degree and a whopping 40% have attained a Graduate or Professional Degree. Studies have shown an essential key to academic success is exposure; the more people you know with a college degree, the more likely you are to pursue higher education. Certainly, with the environment I was surrounded by in Falls Church, a college degree was the bare minimum of what was expected of me and my classmates

It was a point of pride how hard we were pushed by our teachers in our school system. Even as I struggled through difficult subjects and my academics fell to the middle of the class, I kept telling myself that an average student in Falls Church was an above average student anywhere else. And it was true. I received a fantastic education in Falls Church. My parent's plan to provide the best for their child was successful, and yet, I left George Mason feeling incomplete and unprepared to face the world in front of me. What could be missing from a town that promises it all?

The privilege of an extraordinary education came at the expense of diversity. When I was growing up in Falls Church, it was extremely racially homogenous. At 77%, the white population completely dominated all aspects of my hometown; the school system, local government, sports. My parents offered me wonderful opportunities to expand my knowledge of my ethnic heritage. We had weekend Spanish lessons, partook in some Mexican traditions, and even traveled to Mexico for two summers to study Spanish at a language school in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Although I cherished those connections, my identity was being shaped by the environment around me, an environment that mirrored that of my father's assimilated upbringing.

After spending one summer in Mexico, I returned to Falls Church with a new mindset. I had experienced complete immersion. I returned with more Latino friends, a better understanding of Mexico's traditions, and a killer Spanish accent. I had also brought back my new favorite t-shirt, which featured the words "Hecho in Mexico" on the front. I knew I was born in the U.S., but to me, the shirt represented my deep ancestral ties to Mexico. I was incredibly proud of that shirt and the connections I had made over the summer.

When I returned to school, I donned my new shirt and prepared myself for the barrage of questions I would have to field from my classmates. I was sure they would want to know about my exotic summer in a different country. Instead however, I was teased mercilessly. Not only were crude remarks made about the country I had just begun to feel a deep love and respect for, but the taunts became personal. The children questioned my connection to Mexican culture and ultimately made me feel I didn't belong in that t-shirt.

I learned a lesson that day, which stuck with me for far too long. The t-shirt I had brought home was a representation of a community I had a new connection to. However, when I brought it into another community I belonged to, it was rejected. I thought being different would make me more interesting within my Falls Church community, but instead I felt isolated. From that moment on, my Mexico t-shirt was no longer my favorite. I chose, very strategically, what scenarios would be appropriate for me to wear the shirt and when I should leave it at home. I was protecting myself from being hurt again by kids who feared what they were not familiar with. However, what I resorted to, was a behavior of shaming myself. Once I realized my shirt did not belong in Falls

Church, I discarded it. I chose to fit in over standing out and my journey towards finding my identity had rerouted.

I would catch glimpses of that freshly tanned Julia in her “Hecho in Mexico” shirt throughout middle school. It felt as though I spent most of my time mixing in with the crowd, but there were moments I would be yanked out of that world and made to feel different. Intolerant comments would be made about immigrants that would sting me to my core or personal remarks about my dark arm hair would make me cower in the shadows. It took one instance for me to finally speak up. In this scenario, however, I was speaking up for someone else.

My middle school bus driver was a kind woman with beautiful, long, black hair. She drove with her young son, who couldn’t have been older than three years old, strapped into a car seat a few seats behind her. She and I never said more than our morning greetings to each other, but I enjoyed her company. Oftentimes, I would sit and gawk at her adorable son.

When the taunts that were sometimes aimed at me turned towards her direction, I was furious. I remember a specific group of three or four boys would say comments to or about her. They would talk about her legal status, about the apparent language barrier between her and them, and about her son. I was outraged that kids I knew, some of whom I called my friends, would act so deliberately malicious to someone, especially in front of her child. One day I’d had enough. I decided to tell my parents about the now daily occurrence of jokes focused on the bus driver.

My parents took this issue to the principal’s office of my middle school. In a discussion with my vice principal, they explained what had been happening on my bus

rides to and from school. My parents at the time, were nervous as to how this complaint would be come across. No one in Falls Church would promote intolerance, however they feared a ‘boys will be boys’ response. Instead, the vice principal affirmed this was a serious issue and one that must be dealt with. He said issues, such as these, are near to his heart because he too is Latino. When my parents told me about their meeting, I was shocked. My vice principal, a stout, bald man with a red beard, was Mexican American. It challenged our understanding of what a Chicano looks like.

These instances were important in shaping my identity. I developed an empathy and connection to people of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds as myself. That connection would only grow as I got older.

HELP ME FRIDA

As I aged, my quest to develop my identity as a Latina and Chicana became deliberate. I looked for a role model in Frida Kahlo. Frida Kahlo was a world-famous artist, known for her daring portraits and Mexican pride. During her lifetime, she constantly criticized American imperialism and challenged the double standards within the artistic community.

There is something downright sexy about Frida Kahlo. I’ve poured over photographs of Kahlo standing in her beautiful garden at ‘La Casa Azul,’ with her Mexican Hairless dogs or embracing her husband, lover, and fellow artist, Diego Rivera. In most photos, she is wearing a traditional Mexican dress, her dark hair is braided up in a flower crown, and she is sporting her signature facial hair. Her appearance though, was simply a representation of what I found to be her most attractive quality; Frida Kahlo

knew who she was. In all her photos, she exudes confidence as she embraces her many identities. I saw her as a woman, a Latina, a Mexican nationalist, an artist, an activist, a queer individual, and much more. Drawing a connection between her identities and mine, I saw her as my goal. I believed one day, if I explored each of my determined identities to the nth degree, I could be just like Frida Kahlo.

The summer after my sophomore year of college, I saw an exhibit on Frida Kahlo at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. Although the exhibit featured much of Kahlo's artwork, its focus was on her beloved garden. While living at her home in Mexico, affectionately named 'La Casa Azul,' she cultivated a beautiful garden filled with the most vibrant colors the Mexican soil could offer. At first glance, the garden looks chaotic, with bursts of color and vines everywhere. However, look closer and you will find, much like other aspects of Kahlo's life, the garden was extremely deliberate.

I learned something about Frida Kahlo that day. She was mixed. Her mother was a Mexican woman, primarily of indigenous and Spanish descent, and her father was a German immigrant. Although I had seen Kahlo's painting, many of which express her feelings about mixed identity, it had never hit me that this was another facet of Kahlo's identity that I shared with her.

Kahlo's racial and ethnic identities were the focus of the exhibit. Kahlo used them as the impetus for her garden. In Kahlo's garden, there were various plants, including flowers, vines, and gourds native to Mexico, and plants native to European lands. I was shocked to see how she embraced her mixed identity. I saw her as fully embodying the identity of a Mexican Nationalist. It puzzled me how she could embrace both Mexican

and European pride, while knowing that European imperialism caused the destruction of indigenous culture in Mexico

As of 2000, the U.S. Census has allowed individuals to mark two boxes to answer the question of race. Mixed race, multiracial, and biracial individuals have inhabited this country, and others, for centuries, however our government census is just now beginning to recognize their full racial identities. One can imagine what subliminal messages might accompany a regulation to pick one race. As a child, had I been asked to identify my race, I believe I would have said white. Then, as I matured and began to deeply care for my Mexican heritage, perhaps I would identify as other. Only recently have I thought about striking a balance between the two races and marking two boxes.

The summer I visited the New York Botanical Garden, I was also enrolled in an online history class. The class, a Mexican American history class, was to replace American History at my university. I knew I would enjoy the assigned textbook for the class when I read the intro, which was titled “The Border Crossed Us.” The reading took a definite pro-Latino stance, as it promised to educate on everything regarding Latinos that the American history textbooks leave out. I did have to take it with a grain of salt, as I was already suspicious of all textbooks and the possible bias behind the information they provide.

I soaked up every word of that textbook. After educating myself on the history of Mexico, I developed a complex regarding the conquerors vs. the conquered, as it pertains to Mexico. In my textbook, los conquistadores, or the Spanish conquerors, were depicted as heartless invaders and bloodthirsty thieves. I recall a section discussing the engineering advancements made by the Mayan people. The Mayans were well before

their time and the textbook asked the question of where our modern-day engineering would be if the Spanish hadn't pillaged and destroyed Mayan artifacts, not knowing how valuable they were.

My birthday following my enrollment in the course, I asked my parents for a DNA test. I told them I wanted to know what percentage indigenous Mexican I was and what percentage conquistador. DNA tests, however helpful, are dangerous if they are conducted for the wrong reasons. I knew what I wanted from the test. I wanted to know that my dad was majority indigenous. If this was true, I believed I would have more of a connection to the history and struggle of the indigenous population of Mexico that I had just learned so much about. I was right. The results came back forty percent indigenous, meaning my father is more than three quarters indigenous.

The approach I was taking to my DNA results is less common among the Latino community. Many people, especially those of older generations, still engage in colorism. They talk about lighter complexions and European features, as if they are the ideal. My grandma always tells me that her mother was mostly of European descent because she was a 'very pretty woman.' Whenever I would hear people engaging in colorism, I viewed their opinion as uninformed and simply wrong. However, by taking the opposite approach, I was no better. Although I wasn't basing my opinion on appearance necessarily, I was still valuing one identity over the other.

As a bi-racial individual, my opinion regarding my Latino background also reflected my feelings, at the time, towards being half white. The more I identified as a Latina and a Chicana, the less I identified as being half white and of European descent. Feelings of shame began to develop. It took some time for me to realize, this shame was

affecting my relationship with my mother. My desire to be as Latina as possible was evident as I explored my father's family history, but brushed over my mother's family history. I almost missed out on half of my history, all because of a warped view of developing identity.

After my visit to the New York Botanical Garden, I saw Frida Kahlo's work through a different lens. Kahlo's famous work, 'The Two Fridas,' which features one Frida with a lighter complexion, wearing European dress, sitting next to a second, darker skinned Frida in traditional Mexican clothing. The two hearts of the Fridas are visible and connecting them is one vein. The vein ends where the Frida in European dress has cut it with a silver pair of scissors, spewing blood across her white dress. I now interpret this painting as a depiction of Kahlo's struggle with her mixed identity. The journey was plagued by pain and loss. But Kahlo's garden, one of her most beloved creations, represents the balance that can be struck with a mixed identity. All plants in her garden, regardless of their origin, were treated with care and lived in harmony.

IDENTIFICATION PLEASE

As the daughter of a Mexican Catholic man and a white woman, both from Western Pennsylvania, parts of my identity had already been decided for me when I came into this world. My father's past was dominated by assimilation. Inevitably he would bring that into my childhood. My mother's past was governed by egalitarian values. In her search for justice and equality, she would help her mixed-race child fit in, even when she was ready to stand out.

When I was open to further developing my identity outside of my relationship to my parents, I found it extremely difficult. My immediate reaction was to create an identity opposite of that of my childhood. I decided I wasn't white. I was Chicana. I wasn't heterosexual. I was a lesbian. I wasn't an academic. I was an artist. I began to look up to individuals who seemed firm in their identities. At the time, I believed the strength of one's identity lied in the individual's ability to fully embody all their chosen identifications.

My immediate reaction to addressing resistance in my life was, in fact, another form of resistance. Instead of challenging myself to explore the possibilities of my identity, I moved from the comfort of one box to another. This resulted in a considerable amount of shame regarding my past identities, and a lack of wiggle room within my new identities.

When I began to identify myself as a Latina and a Chicana, I aspired to become more and more Latina every day. That included immersing myself in Latino communities, listening to Latin music, trying to speak the language, etc. I was trying to achieve an impossible standard. I was trying to become a woman who would be unrecognizable from the child growing up in the privileged, majority white suburb of D.C. If I'm unrecognizable though, who was going to show young children growing up with similar backgrounds to my own, that they too can have a connection to their Latino identity?

I needed to reanalyze my approach to developing my identity. I had built an identity out of fear. I feared not knowing who I was. I looked upon my childhood as a

time of loss and confusion. However, I did have an identity as a child. Growing up, I was not confused about who I was. I was simply living my truth at that time.

Our identity is not a fixed set of descriptors. Our lives move on a trajectory; we are constantly moving forward, while carrying our past with us. Just how we can never live in one moment forever, we do not live with one identity forever. I've allowed myself the freedom to develop a multitude of identities that will ebb and flow with my life. I've come to understand the strength of one's identity lies in that individual's willingness to change.

If I am lucky enough to live a long life I hope to embody many identities, possibly including wife, mother, teacher, mentor, gender non-conforming, mixed, and many more. I am happy to live in a world and in a time where endless possibilities are available for my identity. I am grateful for this discovery to allow myself to move in and around many identities. It is a gracious action to do for yourself and for others.

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