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HUM2020 Honors
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The individual I chose to interview is one of my best friends, Andrea H. We have known each other since our freshman year of high school. However, it was not up until the end of sophomore year that we became really close friends. From just having a few classes together to pushing past the awkward, acquaintance stage of friendship, we became more like “partners in crime.” Our interests brought us together such as our appreciation for literature and writing, a strong passion for community service, and we even underwent similar friend and family situations so we picked each other up whenever one was in need of a hand. From time to time, we would engage in casual conversations regarding our Latino background, but after the interview, I was really surprised because I felt as if I did not know her as much as I thought I did! I genuinely learned so much from her and about her. It also made me realize how little I appreciated my Latino background and in general. I grew up in Miami, a city known for its Latino diversity, and so, I became accustomed to the “capital of Latin America.” But the city itself was not the source of my issue—nothing surprised me anymore and that was because I stopped paying attention.

I am grateful I had this opportunity to reflect on this while also learning more about one of my closest friends. Throughout the interview, it is evident that she is proud of who she is, and her passion serves as a reminder that embracing our differences is what unifies us as the active society my generation has fostered.



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My name is Andrea. I was born in Miami, Florida on November 20, 1996, but the rest of my family is from Cuba.

My parents actually arrived to the United States in 1994. Whenever I question them as to why they came to America in the first place, they mostly talk about the harsh conditions they had to endure while in Cuba. The poor living conditions were tolerable up until they had my brother, Abraham. They wanted him to have a better life and they were aware that America promised this. He was really young when they moved. According to my parents, he was about three years old, and I can't imagine how confusing the transition might have been for his little, toddler self!

There is not one moment I ever believe that parents don't care about me or my brother because of this. And it's just insane how I know I'm not alone. I'm one of the many people out there with parents that put their own lives at risk in order to provide us the opportunities they never had.

The very first time my parents told me about how they got to America....I was about eleven years old, I think...but anyway, I was honestly trembling. I was shaking because I was shocked at how much effort and sacrifice my parents did just for me and my brother.

When my parents fled the country, they did so on a small boat with 13 other people. It was suuuuper cluttered, and they had to paddle non-stop. Unfortunately, the Coast Guard stopped them before they could reach American soil and sent them to Guantanamo Bay. They were forced to stay there for approximately 9 months before they were allowed to come to the United States.

For nine months...it was sort of just like they were waiting? They told me they lived in tents and they built like, a community there, but I don't think there was any kind of structure. Then, they were flown to Miami and they have been there ever since. I'm actually not too sure how they managed to get flown to Miami though. They just knew people and they managed to survive and they left when the time felt right to them.

My family's immigration stories have been told to me by my parents, grandmother and by my godparents, who were on the boat with my family when they fled the country. The funny ones are the best, though. One of my favorite stories is about the time that my godparents' then teenage son offered to give my brother a haircut when they were in Guantanamo Bay. Instead of a haircut, they ended up shaving all of my brother's hair off, which freaked my parents out. They were upset for a whiiiiile but it's turned into one of the lighter memories they have of that time. My parents dealt with a lot of difficult moments in those nine months, and to hear them reminisce on something so seemingly trivial so fondly makes me appreciate the hardships they endured before coming to this country.

It's just strange to think about these things whenever I talk about them with anyone because it makes me realize that "Hey! My parents actually did this thing, did that, all to get where they are now." The fact that they managed to create a community with other strangers, managed to live on their own from scratch, and still reach their destination is ridiculously amazing.

Even when they got to Miami, they adjusted pretty quickly! There's a large population of Cuban-Americans in Miami, so it was fairly easy for them to adjust to life there. Of course, my parents only spoke Spanish when they first arrived but they went to a local community college where they took English courses.

The neighborhood that I grew up in, which is predominantly Cuban, is appropriately named Little Havana. In the last couple of years, it has attracted a lot of tourism which has boosted our local economy. There are more restaurants, more art galleries, and even monthly events that have gone on to draw crowds beyond tourists to people from neighboring areas. It's become somewhat of a Hotspot in South Florida for art and live music, and its history attracts many different kinds of people. Because of this, construction of condominiums has begun in our small neighborhood. People with incomes much higher than the average for my community are beginning to move in, which is scaring a lot of the people in the neighborhood into thinking that we may be moved out soon.

Everyone should look into their roots if the opportunity is there. I think learning about my roots helps me appreciate my heritage even more. Like for instance, the holidays are one of the best parts about being Cuban because of our family traditions and yes, the food wins me over too, ha!

Every year on Christmas Eve, my dad makes lechon, which is roasted pig, and we invite all of our family and friends to the house. Then we're like this one, huge family of loud, energetic Cubans, haha. It's great! I never take those moments for granted. But, there have been some cases that I was treated differently because of my heritage. My biggest problem has been with the fact that I've come to know many people here who romanticize Cuba and don't understand many of the struggles people like my family have faced.

Right now, I'm attending a small women's college in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Generally, I communicated in English at school and with friends, and even though my parents speak English, we primarily speak Spanish at home. Since moving out of state, I've found myself speaking Spanish with my Spanish-speaking friends more than I speak English.

Miami is very diverse culturally. It is a predominantly Latino/Hispanic community but there are so many countries that fall within these that it's incredible. Anywhere you walk in, you're just as likely to find someone who greets you with an "Hola" as you are a "Hello" so the transition has been definitely been a difficult one. Although it is a relatively diverse campus, much of the diversity does not include Latina students, so it's different in a lot of ways from home. When I can connect with Latina students, however, it's usually incredibly powerful! In a lot of ways, I think that I have been able to explore what it means to me to be a Latina, how it truly affects me, and how it has shaped my experiences in relation to my peers. I believe Latino/Hispanic cultures

are much more affectionate with their friends and family whereas that is not as common to see here.

I opted to live on the “Spanish Floor” this year which has a goal of bringing together students of all proficiencies together. In working to achieve this, we’ve watched many films by directors of many Latino and Hispanic cultures and we’ve learned about their traditions. On a heavier note, students of Latino or Hispanic heritage often gather on campus to participate in conversations about different struggles that we face as students of color. There is a lot of bonding that goes on in our cultural house!

I identify myself Hispanic, but I usually just call myself a Cuban-American. I believe it best combines my Cuban roots and heritage to the country in which my family was born and raised. It links my past and my present in a way that explains, in a lot of ways, who I am. To me, it means that I am just as much of my family’s culture as I am the culture in which I grew up. I also think being Latino means being part of a larger community with similar culture and values. In general, family and unity is extremely important.

I feel that I best express my Latino identity through the activities I engage with or create on campus, and my obsession with Spanish literature. I’ve been reading more Spanish books and poetry than English. Even the classes I take offered to take it bilingual so I did to expand my knowledge of the Spanish language while also assimilating the English language. I wasn’t always active about expressing my identity, but now it’s something I do on a daily basis. I am very proud of who I am. I’m more than just a name, student, adolescent...you name it! I know that nothing would ever interfere with how I identify myself, and I will continue to share what I learned from my family with the next generations including my future family.