

Por Ella, Por Ellos, y Por Los Que Siguen

Ashley Garcia

Abstract: Ashley Garcia is a first-generation student at Cal State Los Angeles. She started off her college journey during a pandemic. The pandemic took a mental toll on people of all ages, but especially on students. The obstacles life has thrown at her have not been easy to overcome. But she continues to break boundaries and achieve her goals. In this narrative, Garcia reflects on her mother's sacrifices and how her early childhood experiences have shaped her.

Throughout my early education, I remember looking forward to being a senior in high school. All of the activities like grad night, prom, and graduation seemed like an amazing way to commemorate twelve years of schooling. Like many 2020 graduates, I wanted to cross the stage, hear the crowd cheer, and to see the happiness in my mother's eyes. This was supposed to be a celebration of accomplishment and mark a new beginning in my educational journey. After all, the college applications had been sent out, reviewed, accepted, and others rejected. Graduating from high school and going straight into a four-year university was an accomplishment.

I always knew that I would one day attend college. I thank the schools I attended because they made it seem like an attainable goal if I worked hard in school. At the age of twelve, I would go with my mother to help her clean houses when I would have breaks during the school year or during the weekends. My mother would always tell me "Estudia para que nunca tengas que hacer esto en un futuro," meaning she wanted me to further my education and obtain a higher-paying profession. I genuinely thank her for saying this to me and at such a young age because I would always have this in my mind whenever I would start to feel discouraged. I always felt there was an additional added stress because I was the eldest. In Mexican culture, when you are the eldest child you are setting the example for your siblings and future generations. Being the eldest daughter, I was given the responsibility of setting the example for my younger sibling as well as my cousins.

I started my first year of college at California State University, Los Angeles in August 2020. COVID-19 was still at its peak and everything was still unknown. School has always been my escape, so when the pandemic started and I was forced out of my "safe place" it took a mental toll on me. Not only did I feel like I left high school with projects and events unfinished, I felt lost and everything felt unfamiliar as I was trying to begin this new part of my journey as a college student during this time of uncertainty.

Thankfully my family wasn't impacted financially by the pandemic, but it was an anxious time for all of us. I started working in a fast-food restaurant during the pandemic because I had so much free time and I was not used to it. I did not enjoy it but I learned so much. I learned that I wouldn't be able to work a job like that my entire life. This experience served as a motivation to want my degree even more. My classes during my first semester of college, like many other students, were online and it was difficult to truly gain the "college experience."

There were many times during that semester where it was challenging to stay motivated. However, remembering all the sacrifices my mother had to go through, and remembering exactly who my degree was going to benefit in the future kept me going. I would find motivation wherever I could. Although I know I will earn my degree, it will always be dedicated to my mother, my brother, and my family. Without their constant support I know it wouldn't be possible. I know they truly don't understand how college really works. The tuition, payments,

books, schedules, and the number of hours it consumes out of your day. Regardless of their knowledge, they have continued to support me through my mental breakdowns, my anxiety attacks, and all of my stress, which is why my degree will be dedicated to each and every one of my family members.

I am majoring in English with a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, to become a high school English teacher. However, I do plan on obtaining my Master's in Education Administration. I hope to open up doors and to show younger people that you can achieve anything in life, if you just try. I have had different teachers and professors throughout my educational journey who have inspired me and shaped me into the student I am today. A special recognition to Monica Macias (Durfee School), Rebecca Herrera (Arroyo High School), and Tatiana Magana (Arroyo High School). Because of these three dedicated educators, I am able to continue my own journey as a future educator. Within their own stories, I was able to identify myself with at least one thing. Seeing them and their love for education served as motivation to strive for my dreams and continue despite the obstacles. Even though life has thrown at me many different obstacles such as growing up with an absent father, family pressure, and a virus that scarred my senior year of high school, I continue to do my best in every possible aspect.

Regardless of the circumstances you may find yourself in, know that there is always more out there. Things happen for a reason. Credit yourself that despite the family pressures or not knowing how to maneuver through college and everything that comes with it, you are doing it.