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A Letter to Her

Abstract

Lauren Caylee Griego is an undergraduate student at CSULA studying English Literature and Language, but there's more to her than her education. She is Chicana, a daughter, sister, cousin, and friend. Although she was a hardworking, diligent, and dedicated girl in all areas of her life during her younger years, she had failures. As an adolescent, Griego struggled to find meaning in herself and searched constantly for an explanation to help her better understand the negative, overwhelming challenges in her life and their relationship to more positive, uplifting experiences. Now, with a deeper awareness of the world and herself, Griego travels back in time to soothe the fears, anxieties, and emotions that once controlled her, painting a portrait of real adolescent emotions. There is nothing that can stop a young Chicana woman from receiving what she wants and needs in this life, especially the knowledge that she is powerful and worthy of belonging. Exploring hard definitions of first-gen experiences alongside her own identity, Griego helps her younger self to finally discover the purpose of it all.

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LAUREN CAYLEE GRIEGO

A Letter to Her

To my dearest Lauren,

Born with love, and a loud voice. From the moment you left the womb, you made your mark. “Oh we got a yeller,” the nurse exclaimed to mom from across the delivery room.

Do you remember?

We left the womb and entered a world that we already knew would be...

Painful.
Unforgiving.
Wretched.

Carrying pain from the ones before us, not knowing where it would lead, but we lead. Always leading, with our heart, and often not our mind. I know we have some chaos up there, so let me ease your mind, babygirl.

All those feelings and thoughts, not “belonging” wherever we stood, and the pressures adding weight on your shoulders to go harder than you did the day before, seems as if it wasn’t enough. All those hard hours you’ve put into your work, and then reaching that goal, yet feeling like it was worth nothing, is something called (what I’ve learned now) *imposter syndrome*. Interesting term right, but doesn’t it make sense?

All that you have achieved, the basketball trophies, the academic awards, the scholarships, and even the unnoticeable, don’t and never will define YOU! Those successes, small or big achievements, created you, molded you, and were supposed to boost you. The anxieties, fears, uncertainties we planted in our own head, because the external factors influenced this “less than” mindset. Don’t listen. You’re worthy of it all.

Remember when you went from a small public school to a little bigger Catholic private school, and the difference you saw? A new environment, new teachers, different learning styles, the mandatory uniform—all the many changes we tried our best to get accustomed to. We define this as *culture shock*, when a new way of life is being presented to you, totally out of your normality, and you have to step into it, unable to fully grasp what is being presented, but moving along. I know—masses every week, mandatory confessions to the priest in order to be free of sin, all of this was a drastically different experience from what school was like for you. Although it was a challenge to adapt to this lifestyle, to make friends, to “fit the expectations,” you got through it.

Didn't feel like you did though, right? Those anxieties and fears came weighing down on you— heavier than you expected. Did you meet their standards? Did you meet our families' standards? Did you ever stop, and think for a moment, whether you met your own?

July 26th, 2016, the day we decided to leave it all behind, no desire to be a part of it anymore. The overwhelming guilt and fear of failure, the weight of the constant pressures implanted in your mind, was just too much for your 13-year-old self. You, I mean WE, decided to pack it all up, leave everything, and everyone, unapologetically. We chose the easy way out, but was it? The white flag was not raised yet. The strongest endure the hardest, so God or the universe, was not finished with you, us. We have more work to do, great plans, preeminent ideas, a world to explore and experience.

I know—it was a cry for help. For one person to understand, hear, feel, and hold you. Momma did, Cj did, Dad did, but it did not feel as though it was enough. Yet, what we didn't see was that was really all you needed to keep you going.

Let me tell you this again and remind you that I am here to ease the chaos, not erase it. I'm not here to tell you it will go away. It lingers from time to time. I am here to help blur what you once thought was the truth of yourself and paint you the true meaning of all of what makes you, you. The loud voice that you use to proclaim to the world that you're present—it's a gift. The enormous heart you protect and present to the ones around you—that's how love really feels. Your mind, oh my darling, your precious mind, can hold all the knowledge, values, and power you attain to be the Lauren you need.

I've learned now that there will always be an imposter in our mind. The cultures of life will continue to shock you, and the subconscious guilt will always be in the back of your head, but don't be scared. You're not alone. Here is a poem to remind you of the gift.

From sea to sea
A new world with no belief
In self, in others.
Despair, where is the relief?
Take one moment to breathe,
Take it all in, every day, moment, hour, and second.
Pause and just feel.
Never a need or speed to heal, but
Understand that this, what was made
Is real.
A love, no desire to search or decision it's time to find
It comes, never with a warning a sign
Nor design, it somehow
Always aligns.
With great minds combined
Comes to life what is mine Yours, his and hers,
They and them, we all complete each other.

With words unspoken, but placed with each
Other.
Like a game, allowed with many multiplayer.
Hold on, be strong
With all your might, greatness is to be conquered.
Unlike the Roman wall, this won't fall.
Give a shout or call, and be LOUD
Lead with grace, embrace, maybe retaliate?
For what we have,
Is beauty, an ocean full of living beings
From sea to sea.
—L.G.