



Fighting to Be Heard

“ They are aware of the stereotypes that society places on them, and they are speaking back in powerful ways. ”

by Tracey Flores

On an evening in June, four Latina girls entering ninth and tenth grade, along with their mothers and fathers, gathered at the university for an evening of drawing, writing, and sharing. Sitting side-by-side at tables, girls and their parents busily sketched, in pencil and crayon, a drawing in response to the question, *De dónde eres?* (Where are you from?).

Walking around the room, I noticed many different sketches. Rocky sketched a fat saguaro cactus. With a blue crayon, her father, Valente, sketched the flag of Honduras. Alma showed her daughter her sketch of the world with México at the center, as her daughter, Blanca, sketched a house with two girls smiling in front of it. Rose colored the hair on her stick figure black, while her daughter, Elizabeth, drew a girl putting makeup on her face. Samuel finished his sketch of the U.S. flag and the flag of México intersecting in the shape of a heart, and his daughter, Reyna, colored the red tongue of the dog that she had sketched.

As families finished and began sharing, the room became alive with stories. The stories they told were of family trips,

challenges of being the eldest sibling, cherished moments spent with *abuelitos* (grandparents), inside jokes shared between sisters, and fond memories of childhoods growing up in another country. Listening to one another, they nodded in agreement, asked questions, and connected through the telling of their stories.

That was the first night that girls and their parents came together to write and draw stories from their lived experiences. Over the next 5 weeks, as they participated in *Somos Escritoras* (We Are Writers), they continued to meet, to explore their lives through drawing, writing, and oral storytelling, while learning about the powerful potential of their voices and writing to change their worlds.

As a facilitator and as a writer alongside these girls and their parents, I have the honor of listening to and bearing witness to their stories. In this process of listening with my entire heart, I learn, from their own words, about who these girls and their parents truly are, what matters to them, and what they envision for their future.

I learn that these Latina girls are fighting to be heard. They are aware of the stereotypes that society places on them, and they are speaking back in powerful ways. They are speaking back to society by excelling in school, cultivating their many passions, and setting goals for their future selves. These girls are not passively living their lives but are critically aware of their world and are concerned with racism,

climate change, immigration, and the hateful rhetoric and policies of the current president, while working to be the change, the voice this world needs.

I learn that their parents are courageous, supportive, and loving mothers and fathers who work tirelessly to provide their daughters with lives they never could have imagined for themselves at that age. Although these parents come from different economic backgrounds, formal education experiences, and immigrant statuses, they refuse to allow these labels to define or silence them. They are seeking opportunities to support their daughters by reaching deep within themselves and their social networks for support and strength.

In this space, working alongside girls and their parents, I learn so much from their stories. I learn about the deep wisdom, love, and strength in each family. I learn about the fight in each writer. I learn the importance of sharing our stories. Most importantly, I learn how sharing our stories can bridge generational divides, create a sense of community, and amplify voices in powerful ways. ■



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