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| El fin | del Camino

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Spring denotes the end of an era and is often the harbinger of change. The transition ushered in by this season serves as a bridge between what was and what will be. The alpha and the omega. Rejuvenation of nature comes with this beautiful season; leaves and grass turn green and flowers blossom all around, representing that the pain and gloom of yesterday will wash away alongside winter's frost. New life is breathed into this world by the blooming seeds, eager to reveal themselves from the confines of the soil and feel the sun's warm embrace. Shedding the remnants of their past they look forward to reaching brighter days while still keeping their roots intact.

Although their roots remain as a connection to their present and past, Spring allows for the separation of old routines that no longer serve the plants on their newfound paths. For this is a time of rebirth and renewal, a chance for all to experience individual and collective transformation.

As nature awakens, so do our spirits which absorb the energy and vibrations these new beginnings have

to offer. Every spring, thousands of students at UCLA graduate and among this diverse crowd of students are thousands of unique experiences. Experiences which have shaped our time at the number-one public university in the nation, and experiences that will continue to shape how we continue to give back to the world post-grad. Thousands of Latine students have shaped this campus over the last few decades. Many have created Latine spaces on campus and many others have helped contribute to the representation of Latine students and leadership in general spaces around campus.

However, just like mother nature intended, when Springtime comes so does change. Hundreds of Latine students will be graduating this June and will soon be entering the realm of professionalism. As we enter these predominantly white spaces it is important to remember the communities that helped shape us on our journeys and never forget where we came from and who got us to where we are. Our families, our friends, our neighbors, our service workers, our teachers and so many more of our community members have gotten each of us to where we are today. Those roots represent eternal bonds forged through love, resilience, and shared experiences that will forever serve

as the foundations that ground us as we embark into new territories. As we enter these spaces many of our families have not, it is important to continuously advocate for the equitable opportunities for all, represent your respective communities and to never lose sight of your roots.

As we celebrate our accomplishments and venture on new endeavors, let us not forget the responsibility we bear as agents of change. As the seasons change and so do the phases of our lives, let us carry the wisdom, spirit and compassion of those who walked before us and set the stage for where we are now. Let us honor our pasts, embrace the present, and fight for a future that will give the next generation a better upbringing than our own.

Welcome to El Fin del Camino, where we remember the pain and sorrows of our struggles and celebrate the end of an era, the fruits of our labor and embrace the boundless opportunities that we will soon encounter.

*El Camino Sigue,
Karim Isaac Hyderali | Editor in
Chief 2022-2023*



“Snowballing”

by Laysha Macedo

Artwork by Melissa Morales

Experiencing my first taste of independence during my freshman year of college was terrifying. Halfway through my first winter quarter was when I finally started to find my place. I joined a few organizations and made some friends along the way. Although it was a slow start for me,

I still felt like I found my footing which would hopefully make my next few years in school easier and more enjoyable. However, all of that was taken away as the COVID-19 pandemic came and my first year in college was cut short.

During the pandemic, I experienced peaks and valleys in how I felt. While I was away indefinitely from friends I had just made, I started off by taking it upon myself to make the effort to plan virtual events within organizations or venture into new ones to make up for this time away. As the months passed, I felt the weight of the isolation more and more, and as much as I tried to distract myself through writing or focusing on school, all I wanted to do was just move back to LA and see everyone I missed again.

The news of the return to in-person classes for Fall 2021 was music to my ears. I was beyond ecstatic about being able to see my friends and even live with some of them. I spent the summer right before that quarter, making all kinds of plans and researching, since I was going from living in the dorms to moving back home with my parents to finally moving into an apartment. That was a milestone for me at the time because it felt like, for the first time, I was being an adult and doing things that up until that point, I saw myself as too young to be able to do. Along with the big move into an apartment, I had lined up leadership positions in organizations on campus and found a

job as well as an internship. I thought I was beyond set for finally living as and actively being an adult.

Something I did not account for was how unprepared I would be to cope with new feelings and experiences while keeping up with being a student at a rigorous institution. About halfway through the fall quarter, I had a falling out with a roommate that I thought was my friend. While I wasn't surprised at the circumstances, I had never been in such conflict with anyone. My handling of the situation was only the beginning of a snowball effect.

Their constant presence in my personal space and home weighed heavily on me as I felt spikes in my anxiety by merely sharing the four walls of the apartment with them.

The sound of doors closing and keys clinking made my stomach turn and while I did everything to convince myself not to worry, I couldn't control how the anxiety and stress manifested in my body and my mental health. By the end of the quarter, my final grades made my distress tangible.

It goes without saying that the stress carried over to the rest of the school year. With all of the work I had signed up for among organizations, classes, and jobs, I felt like I was drowning. I am no stranger to anxiety, it has been a part of me as early as the third grade when I'd cry during morning recesses dreading the bell ringing to start school. Before this past year, I had been able to deal

with the agony of living with anxiety, but there was something about this time around that just felt like it was way over my head.

Previous experiences that I believed to be burnout were nothing compared to how I was living. My studies became an afterthought, it didn't matter anymore to me. The mental work I had to do to force myself to do just one assignment took all the energy out of me. Those last two quarters of the year felt like a prolonged, never-ending blackout. A period of time I remember in snippets tainted by disappointments and hurt feelings; a ball of negative energy that could only grow.

Following a winter visit back home, calls home became sparse and then nonexistent. After navigating a friendship fallout, I found myself only holding onto the negative comments I heard when I was at home. Like in many Latinx households, body shame and sexuality are often starting points for comments made toward children in the family, especially girls. During my visit, I found myself back to a place where I was dressing to hide and taking comments from my mom about my body and how I expressed myself to heart. These comments came with me when I went back to Westwood; coupled with existing pessimism, I isolated myself from my family.

This was when it all unraveled. While trying to protect one part of myself, I drew a significant line between myself and my family,

specifically my mom. Although at the moment it felt right to stay away, it only augmented the stress on me and my family. With so many unanswered calls and texts, the only person I was willing to communicate with was my youngest brother, who has always been who I feel safest with. Any time I would hear my mom in the background of a call with my brother, I'd run. My isolation had gotten so far that finally talking to my mom would mean reliving and confronting my reality in order to explain myself. I didn't want to do that. The shame from my academic failures and my inability to cope with my anxieties was too much for me to have anyone in my family know.

As the spring quarter was approaching the lingering feelings from my issues during the fall quarter served as the starting point for everything else that came up. Academic pressure, complicated feelings about my family, and even my relationship with myself all piled on top of one another. Feeling lost doesn't even scratch the surface of what was going on. I had experienced feeling frozen from my fears of impending doom and panic. In this situation, I found myself truly unable to even leave my room for stretches of time.

I wouldn't see the sun for days, not even through my window. My room was such a visual embodiment of my mind. Mountains of trash and clothes scattered on my side of the room. Assignments on class websites in red for lateness or sim-

ply never submitted. Textbooks and novels never opened. Hours would go by with me just staring at the ceiling or oversharing with friends or trying to write out everything I was feeling. Before I knew it, it would already be dark and I had missed an entire day which then turned into days that then became weeks. I'd look at posts online of people enjoying campus or sitting outside and I'd feel horrible for missing out on the time that I had left of my undergraduate career. The time I could have spent somewhere else that wasn't trapped in my bedroom. As much as I knew that I should have been in class or merely stepped out of my apartment, I was stuck. I couldn't move.

In the times that I did make the effort to do something or go out to escape my feelings, I ended up falling into patterns of excess to the degree that I'd end the nights worse than I started. Once the noise from the music or the sound of my friends was gone, it was over for me.

My entire third year of college slipped right by me. Instead of savoring the moments I had left here with people I love, I felt like I wasted them. Looking back, I did as much as I could in the circumstances that I was dealt with. Despite knowing the extent of my anxiety at that time, I still sometimes blame myself for not doing enough. Comparing myself to others: if they have felt exactly as I did and still went to work and went on with their day, why couldn't I? Am I just inept? Incapable? These ques-

tions have flooded my mind as I have tried to make sense of it all.

The optimism I had at the beginning of that school year was challenged head-first by the issues that arose as the year went on. Having gone through so many firsts was too much for me to handle; I did not have the tools to cope with or approach any of them. It was as if I was rushed to give a speech in front of the class without cue cards, preparation, or any notice that I was even supposed to speak. While stomach-turning, it jump started my growth as a person.

I wish so much that things would've been different. That I could've just forced myself to be productive and go places, but all of these wishes are pointless. What happened is already in the past and all I can do is look forward. I have been taking this current school year as a chance to move on and do things for myself that prioritize my wellness and make up for the lost time by grounding myself in the present.

I am the one person that I know I am going to be with for the rest of my life, so I should make the effort to acknowledge when I feel myself falling into past patterns and try in every way possible to be there for myself.

Getting Back on

by Isabela Zavala

As I ate my lunch during my 9-5 job on October 5th, 2020 – my deadline to somehow have my whole life miraculously figured out – I sought a great meaning to the day. I never enjoyed my birthdays, as I’m sure is clear by my decision to spend it at a job I despised. But for so long, and a reason I can’t explain, my 18th was different.

For as long as I could remember, I dreamed of finally being 18. Growing up, 18 was the magic number that signified the beginning of independence, adventure, confidence and a life beyond the city I spent years too scared to explore. So, why didn’t 18 feel magical?

As I let days go by in an isolation brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, doing nothing but listening to music while laying in my bed that was full of Takis crumbs, I questioned myself, my purpose in life, and most of all: the looming concept of time. Days began to mesh together and feel the same, with slight variances; and

even though days seemed to go by slowly, weeks passed by and before I knew it, I had done nothing but lay in my bed.

Falling into what seemed like an existential crisis: “What am I doing with my life?” became a question that I asked myself all throughout quarantine. For years, I had the fear of time passing by and being disappointed in how I used it. Admittedly, a large part of this came from a combination of post-traumatic stress disorder that confined me to the walls of my purple bedroom and the ever-present pressure I felt to work hard to someday graduate from college and provide for my family – a pressure I’m sure many first-generation students feel. I felt disappointed in myself for spending my teenage years succumbing to my anxieties dreaming that I was 18 and now that I finally was, I couldn’t go back. Despite my obvious privilege to just be alive and going to school during these times, I couldn’t help but fall into a hole of thinking that I

was wasting even more time. This, along with the royal rejection I received from my dream school in the beginning months of quarantine, was enough to convince me that my childhood and future were somehow over.

I desperately looked for something – movies, doodling, anything – to help me feel better, to help me calm my intrusive thoughts. As I thought back to the things that have helped me cope with difficult situations in the past, I realized that the answer was simple: music. For months, I stayed up until 4 a.m. trying to soak up every minute of the 24 hours that society has accepted to make up a day. I scavenged all music platforms – Spotify, Youtube Music, Soundcloud – in hopes of relieving my worries about my ending childhood, my future, and how I had been utilizing my time for so long. After months of searching, I compiled a playlist that perfectly resonated with my thoughts and had the concept of time embedded within its lyrics.

The beginning songs of my playlist, I’ll admit, are rather melancholic – an exact representation of how I was feeling when I first started curating the playlist. In track 4, titled Wandering, I, Sunbeam Sound Machine poses some of the same questions that I was asking myself: “What if this takes the rest of my life? What if it’s just a moment in time? What if this takes a part of me? What if it’s just a waste of my time?”. These lyrics resonated with me in particular because I had been, while admittedly selfishly, questioning for months if the pandemic was going to take the rest of my life, if it was going to take a part of me, and if it was going to waste all of my time. Hearing someone else have the same questions about life validated my feelings and made me feel less alone, despite the anxiety-ridden months of isolation I endured.

As I began to feel less lonely through the words of my favorite artists, the songs in my playlist gradually became more hopeful. By

Track

the time I added track 21, Nostalgic Feel by Bedroom, I was finally in the acceptance stage of the grieving process of my childhood. As I sang along to the lyric “I know the future is looking good but I’d still love to go back if only I could,” I thought back to the normal days: the days of my childhood. A part of me wanted to go back and relive some of these days. But a bigger part of me just felt appreciative of those times because this song convinced me that the future was truly “looking good.”

By the end of the playlist, the songs catered to an optimistic dreamer, which I had become as a result. Track 26, the final song, was the most instrumental in overcoming all of my worries. It’s called On Track by Tame Impala. The lyrics “More than a minor setback. But strictly speaking, I’m still on track. And all of my dreams are still in sight, ‘cause strictly speaking, I’ve got my whole life,” triggered me to think back to when I was 14 wishing I was 18, away from my hometown. Seeing someone be optimistic about their future despite the obstacles they’ve faced inspired me to try and feel the same. I realized that I could still achieve my dreams without this school. My dreams are still “in sight.” I’ve still got my whole life to chase after them. I am still on track. Though the process of looking for music proved to be therapeutic in itself, I now realize why listening to these songs brought me so much comfort and resonated with me so

much. My favorite artists and bands such as Sunbeam Sound Machine, Bedroom and Tame Impala put my thoughts into words better than I ever could, and in such a beautiful manner. Their thoughts on life and time related so much to my own. They made me feel heard.

I’d be lying if I said that all my anxieties about my childhood coming to an end and not living up to the expectations I had set for myself have disappeared completely. But when those moments of anxiety come, I just press the play button. Music has brought me closer and closer to getting over these anxiety ridden thoughts.

My 18th might have marked the end of my childhood. But it also marked the beginning of the rest of my life. Although recognizing this meant I had to let my childhood go and enter the real world – one consisting of facing hardships, I was able to make this transition much less painful through music. It allowed me to recognize that I am 18, grateful to be alive and I’ve got a long life ahead of me. In the case that you ever feel like you’re floating away in your own intrusive thoughts, I’d suggest getting to something that will ground you back to Earth – just like music did for me.

by Renée Grange

Music transitions

Throughout life, we’re constantly experiencing transitions. Of all these changes, there are a few that stand out, as they have shaped us to become who we are today. Whether it be overcoming a difficult period or learning how to make a new place feel like home, these growing pains are what have helped us develop. I talked to a few members of the La Gente staff to learn more about the transitions they have experienced and what overcoming these periods has taught them.



Imaged: Jacky Barragán

Sometimes, big transitions can come at a young age. When Jacky Barragán’s older brother was going through a difficult time, her parents had to dedicate most of their attention to him. Consequently, Jacky, who was around nine years old at the time, was forced to grow up quickly. Although Jacky understood why her parents were unable to spend as much time with her, she often felt neglected and pressured not to be a burden. Jacky emphasizes the role that hardships can play in teaching us life lessons, as this experience is what kickstarted her desire to focus on school and work towards building a career for herself. This experience taught Jacky how to turn hardships into positive

experiences, a lesson she keeps with her today and as she says,

“... you come out such a better person from every single little bump in the road that you have... every bump in the road helps you grow into the person you are meant to be.”



Imaged: Carol Martinez

For Carol Martinez, a transition that stands out was moving away from her home of Boyle Heights to Downey when she was 16. Although she wasn't moving too far away, she felt like the move was “the end of the world.” Carol was scared of what it might mean to physically leave her community, her friends, neighbors, and the familiar walk to school. She wondered if she would still be able to claim her neighborhood if she no longer lived there. Looking back on this period, Carol describes that this experience taught her that even though she

no longer lived in her community, she could still maintain a connection to her home. Carol describes that by “...finding pockets of yourself or your life pretransition and allowing those things to stick around. . . [in] your new phase of life you can carry home with you, no matter where you are.”

When Tommy Correa was 16, he also experienced a transition, as joining the Associated Student Body allowed him to find a place that felt like home in high school after feeling like an outsider for a long time. Starting UCLA was a difficult transition for Tommy, as he felt like he was starting all over again. Tommy describes that at home, he was celebrated for the things that made him different, but at UCLA, the things that make him different are not appreciated or accepted. “Transitions aren't fun, I've always hated them, I never like change,” he describes. Despite feeling this way, Tommy describes that he's working to stick with some of the lessons he's learned over the years, such as working to get involved and pushing himself out of his comfort zone to not only show up, but also to talk to new people to work on finding a new home at UCLA.

Halfway through high school, Melissa Morales decided to take a big step that, although scary, helped her get to where she is today. Before her junior year of high school, Melissa decided to attend a new high school that she felt would offer her more academic opportunities. She describes that this was one of the first



Imaged: Melissa Morales

times that she advocated for herself and took control of her own future. At first this was scary, as Melissa wasn't sure what to expect at the new school and spent the ride there on her first day questioning herself, but she was quickly reassured that she had made the right choice. Melissa feels that this experience taught her the importance of advocating for yourself—“...if something in your life is not working for you...look for opportunities” to do what's right for you.

When deciding what career to pursue in college, Naomi Orozco experienced a pivotal moment in her life. Throughout high school, Naomi was set on attending veterinary school, but when college applications came around, she questioned if this was truly the career path that she

wanted to follow. Within this questioning, Naomi began researching new careers and was drawn to marketing, which is the career she decided to pursue at UCLA. Naomi describes that she enjoys going with the flow, a sentiment that's reflected in her mindset about life, although she sometimes has doubts about whether or not pursuing marketing was the right career path, she knows that “... wherever [she] ends up going...she'll be okay.”

For many, the transition to college is strongly aligned with a transition towards adulthood, but for many, this transition was slowed by the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true for Jonathan Valenzuela Mejia, who turned 18 only a few days before the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. Jonathan describes that his transition towards adulthood was difficult given the fact that key transitional moments, such as moving away from home to go to college, were taken away from him. Although Jonathan feels it took him longer to say goodbye to his childhood, he was recently able to close that chapter. Today, he feels that his experience taught him to appreciate the things you have in the moment, as “...you never know what can be thrown at you” and cause life to change completely.

Esiselda Jimena Linares' transition to college wasn't smooth either, as she started community college shortly after moving to Los Angeles from San Salvador, El



Imaged: Jonathan Valenzuela Mejia

Salvador. When Esiselda first started community college, she put a lot of pressure on herself to balance studying in English, a language that wasn't completely familiar at the time, and working a part-time job. This pressure caused Esiselda to burn out, and experience issues in both her physical and mental health. Therapy helped Esiselda learn the tools that she needed to recognize when her body needed a break and how to care for herself. With these tools, Esiselda was equipped to transfer to UCLA. Her advice to others would be to recognize that

“...progress doesn’t happen in one day and [we] need to learn how to live with that.”

During Daisy Quinoñes' second year at UCLA, she started



Imaged: Esiselda Linares

her first in-person year of college by moving from her home in Inglewood to Westwood. After her first quarter in Westwood, Daisy realized that living in Westwood was not right for her, but felt that she was “supposed” to stay in order to align with stereotypical ideas about what college looks like. Despite these feelings, Daisy took her future into her own hands and prioritized her mental health by deciding to move back home and continue college as a commuter. Although she second-guessed her decision at first, she now recognizes that this was the right choice for her. Today, Daisy is proud of the fact that she lives at home and loves coming back from class to her mom’s cooking. A lesson that Daisy would like everyone to take with them is 1) that roommates can suck and 2) prioritize yourself.

When Laysha Macedo started



Imaged: Laysha Macedo

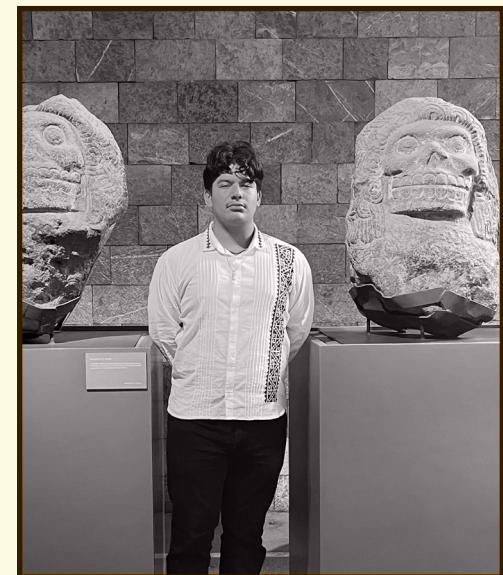
at UCLA, she felt lost. At first, Laysha had a clear idea of what career she wanted to pursue, but after a few classes, she wasn't sure this was the right path for her anymore. Despite this, Laysha describes that she was too shy to know where to look for resources that would help her figure out what classes to take and what major to choose. At the same time, Laysha experienced homesickness, which was only multiplied by the feeling that she didn't have a community to lean on in her freshman year. Laysha's advice to others would be to remember that although UCLA is “...a big, scary school...there are people who want to help you... it's [important] to not be afraid to admit that you are lost because you are not the only one who doesn't really know what they're doing.”

Karim Isaac Hyderali was also impacted by the lack of resources at UCLA, as he worked to adapt to a new environment, full of white people with different cultures and life

experiences. Karim describes that he went from being a star student in high school to struggling academically in college, to the point of being subject to dismissal his freshman year. On top of this, he felt that he didn't have a real support system and felt hopelessness. These feelings were only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which sent Karim back home after his first 2 quarters at UCLA.

Although this was a difficult time, Karim was able to find support through older friends and resources at UCLA, such as AAP, that guided him through the process of picking himself back up. Having come out of this experience, and being close to graduating from UCLA, Karim states that he's learned to be resilient, as

“no matter how hard life can hit you, you can always get back up.”



Imaged: Karim Isaac Hyderali

He states that “although the system wasn’t built to support people like [him] there are people trying to change that, to make sure everyone has an opportunity to excel” and utilize the resources that are available.

Although many transitions are rocky, especially those to college, they can be made smoother with support via programs such as the Freshman Summer Program (FSP) at UCLA. For example, when Alexia Jimenez started college, she attended FSP, which helped make her transition to college as smooth as possible. Although Alexia was nervous to start school, as it meant being in a new community and being challenged by UCLA’s academic rigor, FSP helped Alexia ease these nerves. In FSP, she was able to not only get to know other new students and get accustomed to UCLA’s classes, but also gain confidence in herself. She learned not to beat herself up so much for being shy at times and was able to learn that making new friends, one of the scariest parts of college, wasn’t so difficult when she allowed herself to open up.

Ultimately, transitions may be a difficult thing to deal with, but they can teach us how to grow, become resilient, and realize we can overcome uncomfortable and scary moments. For me, I am about to experience a substantial transitory period as I graduate UCLA and move on to the next chapter of my life. After four years, UCLA feels

comfortable, and leaving that is scary. Despite this, I know how much I’ve grown throughout my time here and feel ready to face the challenges that lie ahead. I will take the lessons shared by the La Gente staff with me, as I navigate the bumps in the road and make a home out of wherever I end up next.



Imaged: Alexia Jimenez

Photos and consent provided by interviewees

Home

by Angel Marquez

Visuals by Haven Jovel Morales

Occasionally, as I passively get drawn into the sight of the immovable white four walls in the apartment, the synapses in my brain ephemerally cast fond memories of my old life. Memories of the many residences that sculptured my world view: all seven of them. At times, these memories don’t feel distant. In fact, I viscerally experience them coercing every limb in my body as I encounter the multitude of selves. I’m a spectator of my old lives.



Nueva Italia, Michoacan. The chirping of the crickets discharges a comforting feeling of relaxation amidst the heavy rain-drops that pollute the ceiling. My white pastel, glazed-porcelain virgin mary light remains on; shining its dimming light across the drapes of the 12x12 den. The monastery sits in silence and yet, in that chamber positioned just ten feet away from my parent’s dormitory, I cry, dwell, pray and whisper for change. Snoring, the body of my mother rubs against my back. I shuffle in isolation, ensuring that my whimpers are not sensed. My breath is shallow, the confines are suffocating. I exist as a product of my mother’s expectations. Here, I follow a strict regime: school, homework, taekwondo, church, sleep, repeat. Everyday at night however, just when the emptiness of the house punctures my piety, and when the restlessness settles, I ponder a life I knew I was not permitted to enjoy. A life of



enjoyment and repulsion, of misery and authenticity.

Weirdly though, in all of its staleness and unsettledness, this cage grants me stability, comfort – unfamiliar feelings to which I was not privy of for twelve years.

Inexplicably, as I gaze over the imperceptible gaps of the plastered-white partitions, I find myself transported in a life fractured by fixedness and inhibition.

El Monte, California. The whistle and movement of the train pierces through the custard boards in the two-bedroom apartment. The excruciating silence breaks in invariable cycles proportional to the arrival and departure of the train. Below the valley oak, I contemplate the compulsiveness of the cycle, accepting every shift, every action the train takes.

There's a soothing calmness to the wheezing. The movement, like my place of residence, is in constant change, directing its path to

the locomotive's lead. A path that is fixed, predisposed, untiring. My eye sockets stood glued to the movement, placing me in a familiar trance that restlessly derailed my understanding of my identity. In my constant movement, there is no time for introspection, just physical relocation – I yearn for a taste of that motion my periphery perceives.

Routinely, as I see the train abandon my sight, I escape to my bedroom to be consumed and paralyzed by the pacifying silence permeating over the surface. I allow myself to be devoured by the comforting solitude that transpires from the freshly painted white canvas that the new apartment maintains. Here, with the flexibility of my clean slate, I lead a life ordinarily modeled by my past ones, adapting and morphing myself to the suppositions that my peers, as well as my family, aggressively sanction.

UCLA. Spatially distant from my state of repression, I allow myself to delve into the composites of the multitudes of selves I once meticulously crafted. From cropped tops, dyed hair, eyeliner, long hair, painted nails, piercings, or even plain short hair, I relentlessly and eclectically explore and perform my childhood's unorthodox ingenuity. The large crowds that prevail at the substantial domains grant me a phantasmal status which allows me to explore the glorious taste of self-determination. Thrilled by this anonymity, I dance, sing, cook,

and rest, unapologetically to the past "normalcy" I was conferred. I follow and craft my own guidelines, belief systems, that although at times arbitrary, akin to those that I previously accepted, remain in my full control. In this hemisphere of the world, I manufacture and control the life I lead.

For every place I lived, I found that there is a variation of me that I left behind. But none that could contain my self-expression.

Living amongst these fixed geographical sites that many call home, I gain an understanding as to its definition. Underlying the concept of home, within its most general definitions, lies the idea of permanence both in relation to time and geographical spatiality. However, reflecting on my various domiciles through my life, I pose a new definition that transcends the one above. I find home to be more affective in its purest state. I learned that home can sometimes be repressive but in my most recent experiences it can become a personal safe haven, a place for growth. Home is not defined by its borders or walls but by those around us that make us feel safe, comfortable, comforted. It is merely a place for ultimate acceptance and self-expression.

Simply put, I am a fusion of my past and present selves that uncontainably share one malleable home – my inner body. I embody every iteration of who I have ever been.



PLAY LIST

Listen to songs curated by our staff and our radio staff *Chismeando con La Gente* all inspired by the emotions, thoughts, and feelings evoked from our title.

Scan the QR code to view the Spotify playlist featuring artists like Omar Apollo in it!



Visual by Haven Jovel Morales

“Eres Gay?”

Queer Latine Experiences of UCLA by Isabela Angulo

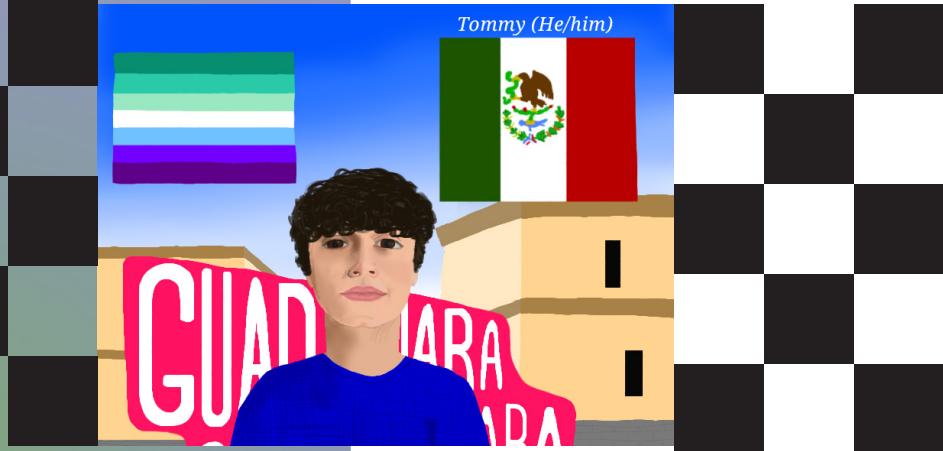
Visuals by Tommy Correa

In my time as a young queer latina, I have traversed countless challenges and questions surrounding my identity. Growing up, I took my predominantly Latine neighborhood for granted, overlooking my Chicana roots and the role they had in my life. Stepping onto the UCLA campus was a culture shock to say the least, surrounded by thousands of people who were not of the same background. In my time away from home, I began not only appreciating my culture more and more, but understanding how it has shaped me into the person I am today. In my exploration of self, coming into adulthood, I was confronted with another burning question concerning my identity: “Am I Queer?”. The answer to that question is yes, but I came to this conclusion after long struggles combating self-doubt, internalized homophobia and the fear that I would no longer be accepted by those closest to me.

For many like me, evaluating your identities and all the ways

in which they intersect can be a confusing and anxiety-ridden process. I view queerness as an umbrella term – describing anyone who does not identify as completely straight, giving the freedom to explore your sexuality. It took me so long to connect with this side of myself, as well as my Latine roots. For a long time I wondered why it was not until college that I fully began to understand myself. Why had I never been curious, both about sexuality and Latinidad, before? After a long period of reflection, I now realize that it was the combination of community, freedom and diversity I experienced at UCLA that finally allowed me to indulge in my own self-discovery and exploration. Before coming to UCLA, queerness was a mystery to me and as I was surrounded by latinidad in my hometown, I did not realize how special my culture was. Hearing queer Latines talk about their experiences living true to themselves, in a place where they are the minority, gave me the courage

and role-models that I needed to acknowledge these aspects of myself. It is important to highlight and give visibility to the queer Latine experience through unique stories that may reflect and at times, challenge the experiences of others in these communities. Stories that, despite their importance and relevance, are far too neglected.



“God is Love.”
- Tommy Contreras
(he/him/his), first year Political Science Major, Gay, Mexican-American

Tommy Contreras has always known of his sexual identity. The fact that he is gay has not wavered in his mind, so much so that he never felt a need to come out to his family or friends. At the age of 18, Tommy thought that he should have a conversation with his parents concerning his sexuality, just for the sake of getting the ordeal over with – although, even they found the idea of

coming out to be unnecessary. “When I told them they were like, you know you didn’t need to tell us? ...Straight people don’t have to come out so why should you?” A response that I am sure many queer people would be pleased to hear.

Coming from a substantially large family with 17 tíos and tías and around 71 cousins, Tommy noted the significance that family had in his everyday life. “In Latine culture, family is everything. Every Sunday growing up we’d always go to my grandma’s house, tons of people crammed in this tiny little house.” His grandparents immigrated from San Juan de Los Lagos and Guadalajara, Jalisco. Coming out to his extended family is a bit more complicated than his experience with his parents. Most of his family knows, but a small conservative subsection of his mom’s side keeps him from being fully out to everyone. Despite this, he has no doubt that they will come to respect this part of him. “At the end of the day, I know they are going to accept me because they are my family.”

Tommy still recounts the struggles endured when coming to accept it. He went through phases, denying his sexuality and placing the blame on small intrusive thoughts at the back of your mind. He recounts crying while coming out to his parents, despite a seemingly accepting and low-pressure environment created by his parents. “It’s more of the internal battle that I struggle with... It’s something about

saying the words to their face because society conditions you to think that it is a bad thing.”

Parts of these societal conditions may have an origin in his Catholic background. Tommy attended a predominantly white all boys Catholic school when he was younger. He reported that at times there was at times a strong sense of isolation from his peers, “I definitely felt that I was the only one in the room that was both queer and latine.” However, this changed once Tommy started attending UCLA. This campus provided the environment where he could find community in clubs like MUN and BruinDems, not only befriending people from diverse backgrounds, but those with experiences corresponding to his own. “People always stress that you can learn from the diversity of others, and while UCLA gives so many opportunities to do this, you’re also given that validation of seeing people like you, and you can learn a lot from that too.”

Regardless of any tension between religion and the LGBTQ+ community, Tommy retains his faith, and considers himself Catholic. In response to the stigma against those identifying as LGBTQ+, he stated “People try to weaponize faith, as a means to push people, specifically queer people, out of faith.” Attending Catholic school allowed Tommy to grow religiously and strengthen his faith. “God is love. You can see God in every person.”



“Be forgiving to yourself.”

- Andres Munoz

(he/him/his), fourth year Political Science and Communications Major, Queer, Mexican-American

Many years ago, Andres Munoz' family immigrated from Michoacan, Mexico, and found a Latine community within the Central Valley. As an agriculturally-based area, the Central Valley is home to thousands of migrant workers and their families. Growing up there, he remembered times when he and his family would go picking fruit during his summers and springs. “It was bonding time that I could have with my grandparents and my parents as well,” details Andres. After leaving home to go to UCLA, Andres missed parts of home, realizing how rich in Latine culture the area was. “Even though you can drive 30 minutes in any direction and find a Latine community, the representation on campus is so minuscule.” However, he

states that from this space away from culture, a stronger appreciation for it and an interest in Latine history has stemmed.

Andres recounted the struggles he experienced when dealing with his sexuality. He had no issue accepting that he was queer, but had a hard time with telling other people. At his middle school, any boy expressing the slightest bit of femininity was called “gay,” excluded, and made fun of. Because Andres was not openly gay in high school, he saw this behavior continue, getting to see the ugly comments made and bullying that occurred first-hand. Although he was not ‘out’ to his peers, he shared his identity to his mother his freshman year of high school, telling her he was bisexual. Though she is accepting of his identity now, her initial response was that Andres was just confused. Feeling rejected, Andres mentally tussled with expressing his identity. After officially ‘coming out,’ Andres first identified as gay, but he felt a bit

restricted by the term and the culture that came with it. “There are a lot of gender roles that are applied in non-gender specific ways when it comes to gay culture.” Andres described the term queer as “liberating” because it encompasses everyone in the community. It gives the freedom to explore your own gender and sexuality without the pressure of having to decide on a precise label. “The umbrella has so much room underneath it, why pick one specific spot?”

He also mentioned struggles surrounding his identity that stemmed from the environment created in the Central Valley. “A lot of people are not ‘out’ in the Central Valley. It’s an unsafe place to be ‘out’ and proud so I did not grow up with any queer role models,” he says.

Because of this, Andres looked for an outlet through Instagram accounts like Best of Grindr, which demonstrated “toxically sexual” attitudes, promoting the idea that sex was of utter importance in gay culture. Ultimately he was led to the Gay dating app, Grindr. Only fourteen at the time, Andres unfortunately was met with many dangerous sexual encounters and spaces of toxic masculinity and sex culture.

However here at UCLA, Andres had no issue finding a safe accepting community filled with individuals like him. “I feel very inspired by people here. I am able to work on my queerness not only

through succeeding and failing but also through watching other people succeed and fail,” says Andres. For Andres, UCLA is a learning space, where he is comfortable and free to ask others about their identity expression, including that of gender. When speaking of the intersectionality of these two identities, Andres spoke of the fetishization experienced by a lot of POC in queer spaces, predominantly white queer spaces, being met with labels like “Spicy Latino boyfriend.” “That’s kind of not what I like, but those are the cards that I have been dealt.” However, on a more positive note, Andres spoke of a sense of connectivity and understanding that many queer POC people feel towards each other. “I feel like the people I learn most from are fellow POC.” Andres mentioned also wanting to ultimately serve as a mentor himself for other queer POC, like his friends have done for him.

At the end of our conversation, Andres gave a piece of advice to queer POC everywhere: “Be forgiving to yourself. Being queer is so hard to navigate.” He spoke of the complexities that came with not only understanding yourself through the lens of one identity, but the intersectionality of many identities, including being Latine. Finally, he advised not to get too attached to labeling yourself. “Be okay with not labeling yourself. I think it gives you more freedom than it does guidance.



“Queer means resilience.”

- Issac Membreño

(he/him/his), 4th year (2nd year transfer), Psychobiology Major, Central American Studies minor; Gay/Queer, Mexican and Salvadorian-American

Issac was born and raised in Anaheim California, as the youngest of three. His mother is from Ensenada, Mexico and his father is from San Miguel, Salvador. Growing up, Issac never truly grasped what being Central American nor what being queer truly meant. In Anaheim he was mostly surrounded by Mexican, white, or Asian people. Salvadorian culture made little to no appearance in his day to day life, so he did not think of it nor had the motivation to learn about it. As for his knowledge on the LGBTQ+ community, although he was exposed to queer culture through the media, it was never spoken of among his family, so he never really thought about it. That is, until middle school, when he discovered he was gay. However, he never really had

a reason to tell anyone. “One thing, its nobody’s business.” Secondly, “the media kind of showed me how people who identify as queer can get attacked for it, hated for it, bullied for it.” These depictions made him fearful of fully expressing himself, a sentiment that continued throughout high school. It was tough for Issac, not letting even his closest friends know about his crushes and being unable to ask questions surrounding queerness. His Senior year of high school, he finally let some of his friends into his identity, friends that he had known since middle school. As for his family, Issac has yet to officially express his identity to his parents and siblings, but there is some sense that they know. Issac has an older sister, who is trans, and an older brother, who is also gay, and Issac stated that there is simply an unspoken understanding amongst them. His father implied that he knew without directly bringing it up in conversation. “We were having a conversation on the way to school and he saw my painted nails, I had painted them black, and he just made a comment about them, not in a negative way, and later he told me if you and your brother go to El Salvador its not safe for you guys.” As for his mother, Issac recalls comments of “When you’re married or when you have a girlfriend” from her. “Next time she says a comment like that I’m just going to be like you know I don’t like girls right?” She has made slightly homophobic comments

in the past or comments judging his expression, which has caused some of Issac’s hesitation to tell her. However lately she has shown some growth, as Issac recalls her complimenting his nails, a small gesture towards acceptance.

Now at UCLA, Issac has experienced growth in both his latine and queer identities. Missing his home and the (mostly Mexican) culture he was typically surrounded with, his first year prosed a major challenge when trying to adjust to a new environment, especially as a first generation college student. However, Issac now states that being at UCLA has provided him an opportunity to explore and understand himself more and more. Through involvement in organizations like UNICA and Mecha Calmecac, as well as his Central American studies minor, Issac is more inspired than ever to learn more about his heritage, the achievements of his people, and his culture. “Through my classes I started to notice how I was raised Salvadorian.” His classes for the minor have opened up more conversations about his family. As he learns about the history of El Salvador he is able to talk more to his dad about his past and that side of the family’s experiences. Furthermore, UCLA has provided the open-minded and diverse space that he needed to explore and gain awareness of his sexuality and gender expression, as he journeys through relationships and engages in conversations with other queer students. His experiences have

created a desire in Isaac to fight for representation in spaces that may feel isolating for minorities, like UCLA. He volunteers at the LGBTQ+ Center at UCLA, stating “I like being that Latine person that is also queer to greet people, tell them about the center, just be that representation because it can be kind of white sometimes.” He does not want to allow the appearance of a majority white space to deter queer people of color from finding the resources and community that they need.

When asked about any advice he wanted to give, Issac said this: “Queer and Latine spaces exist, don’t be afraid to put yourself out there” He also stated that no one should allow their identities make them think that they cannot succeed. Instead, let them motivate you to prove those who may doubt you wrong. He advised others to learn about their family history, saying that it can be “empowering”. “I know where I come from, what we’ve done, who we are, and I’m like, I can do it.”

“There is room to educate our family and expand their ideals.”

- Camila Sanchez

(pseudonym) (She/Her/Hers) fourth year Financial Actuarial Mathematics Major, Accounting Minor; Biromantic Asexual, Mexican-American



Camila Sanchez had a difficult time with queer labels in high school. Originally, she thought she was bisexual. She assumed that because she felt no attraction to one specific gender, she felt equal attraction to all. Throughout high school she explored her sexual identity but no label seemed to fit precisely. This was until she heard of the term asexual. For those who do not know, asexual means that a person feels no sexual attraction to others. To be clear this does not mean that they cannot experience romantic attraction, the term only applies to sexual attraction. Camila emphasized the relief she felt when she learned about asexuality in high school. Currently, only her brother and her friends know about her sexual identity. Her brother found out by accident, after seeing an ace pride pin on her school backpack. “He was vaguely familiar with my queer journey through high school so I didn’t have an issue coming out to him,” she adds. For Camila, telling friends is not as big of a deal as telling family, mainly because of

generational differences. “I feel like this generation is 100 times more understanding than my family could be.”

Camila’s family, mainly from or descending from Ensenada, Mexico, have expressed homophobia in the past, making it difficult for her to express herself to them. “There is much homophobia in Latinx culture, so I just learned to bottle my identity and keep that part of myself hidden from my family,” she states. She desires them to be more open-minded. “I honestly feel jealous when I see how supportive my white queer friend’s parents are when I can’t work up the courage to explain my identity to my family.”

On top of compartmentalizing her sexuality, Camila also deals with balancing cultural roots with establishing her own roots in another country. She says, “despite growing up in the US, I am a representation of my mother’s efforts and I have to do everything in my power to make her proud. To make all of her sacrifice worth it.” Although meaning to make her family proud, she feels as though her efforts will never be enough. Fortunately, Camila has been able to find an accepting community at UCLA, particularly in Grupo Folklórico de UCLA. “They are a wonderful group that has helped me celebrate Mexican dance and culture in a predominantly white school.” Camila also maintains hope that she will be able to live and express herself freely around family in the

future. After her cousin came out as bisexual, she saw that there is room for growth and erasure of ignorance. “It showed me that there is room to educate our family and expand their ideals. I hope one day I can work up the courage to do the same.”

When asked what being queer means to her, Camila expressed frustration with the depictions of heteronormativity in the media. “It means growing up believing there is something wrong with you because you feel differently than all (or at least majority of) movies, songs, advertisements, and people around you say you should feel.” However, after she added on some of the more beautiful aspects of queerness. Being queer can also mean “finding peace in a community of others like you and finding comfort in labels that make sense to you and doing your best to advocate for yourself and your community.”

“Find your chosen familia.” - Cuauthemoc Frausto

(they/them/theirs) fourth year Biology Major; Chicana Central American Studies minor, Queer, Mexican-American

Since their childhood, Cuauthemoc understood that they were not completely straight. Even though they did not know too much about sexuality nor the terms that came with it, they cast aside what the

media portrayed as ‘normal,’ which is to be straight, and stood firm in their truth: they were attracted to all genders. “From an early age I knew that I existed on a spectrum of sexuality,” they stated. Despite this, Cuauthemoc kept their expression to themselves throughout middle school and high school. Preoccupied with academics, family life, and more, they really did not seek nor find an opportunity to express their sexuality. Plus, queerness was something left unspoken in their spaces, located in East Los Angeles, in a neighborhood called El Sereno.

Cuauthemoc spent most of their life in El Sereno. Their mother, a single parent, immigrated from Zacatecas, Mexico. When asked about their Latinidad, memories of their mother playing Mana and cooking Mexican dishes rose for Cuauthemoc. East Los Angeles is a primarily Latine area, so they were surrounded by the culture, whether



it be in the form of restaurants, language, or simply the people. Because of this, Cuauthemoc went through quite a culture shock once they left home. They recognized that

they did not have much experience interacting with or even relating to non-POC. However, despite any troubles, UCLA provided the setting for Cuauthemoc to come into their own identity, both queer and Latine.

In this environment Cuauthemoc was able to find spaces in which they felt comfortable expressing themselves without fear of excessive judgment. In their time here they have been able to learn more about queer culture and thus gain a better understanding of themselves. Their first year of college they met many POC through the FSP new student program at UCLA. Afterwards, they decided to join Mecha Calmecac, a student-run Latine organization at UCLA. At this time they were bringing back the Gender and Sexuality Component, which Cuauthemoc volunteered to be the coordinator for. It was through these connections and channels that they started to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community. In their first year as coordinator of the Gender and Sexuality Component, they were able to go to the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference, which educated them a lot about queer history. “Before college I didn’t have an understanding of what queerness was. It helped me peel off a lot of internalized things that I was also working through.”

Through their activity in these spaces, Cuauthemoc was able to learn more about queer Latine role models who helped advance the

LGBTQ+ rights movement. They learned about the Latine origins of queer expressions like ballroom dancing and voguing and noted the lack of visibility for these same queer icons within mainstream media. Cuauthemoc is also involved in Grupo Folklórico de UCLA, which they feel has, along with the aforementioned organizations, helped them grow closer to their Latine identity. They also felt more motivated to learn about their Mexican heritage and history from a closer lens.

It was through conversations with people that Cuauthemoc met in college, particularly non-binary people, that allowed them to finally find labels that they really resonated with. “I never really felt like I belonged with men. They definitely helped clarify a lot of questions I had about myself.”

The advice that Cuauthemoc had for others was to “find your chosen familia.” They think that everyone should surround themselves with people who will not only accept them fully, but who do not second-guess their identities and uplift them in any way they can. What really helped Cuauthemoc come into their identity was finding people who created a welcoming space. “I felt safe, so I was really able to grow in that community.”

“I Never Learned How to Swim”

by Tommy Correa

Visuals by Tommy Correa

Saludos, mis amores. Acérquense y déjenme contarles la historia of how I became... Taylor Swift.

On that fateful night of Friday, March 18, 2022, UCLA decisions were released while I was away for my final concert band review. So many seniors had been rejected that, out of fear of spoiling my beloved MROP, I waited until after the whole dance to open my letter. I had waited three years for that Game Over rally after Covid had canceled the last two. For those of y'all that may not know, MROP is the opposite of prom. It consists of a neon rally followed by a neon dance at night. Diana Blue, queen of rallies, describes MROP perfectly: “It’s the classy hoe.” Now, alone in the driveway shortly after midnight, I read the word “Congratulations!”

Then came College Signing Day. On that stage with my parents beaming behind me, I sealed my fate when I pledged to attend and graduate from the University of California, Los Angeles in front of my fellow seniors and their families. The thought of

graduation was like hearing about the beach but never having seen it for myself. From atop that stage, I could see the shoreline marking the end of my time in high school. The way those waves lapped gently at my homeland. Day by day, period by period, I was getting closer to the shoreline with “Thursday, May 26, 2022” etched into it. Everyone was so eager to dive into those waters, and at one point I was too. However, as I stepped up to the surf, I realized that I had never learned to swim. Four years of work were washed away with a diploma, and my “real life” had commenced. I had never felt waters as warm as the orange ones of my high school.

Everybody raved about the next chapter. That wouldn’t start until September, though, and the previous one had already been sealed shut. What was I supposed to do between chapters? There were two ways of viewing the journey just beyond me: 1. I was free at long last, body and soul. 2. I had just been set out to sea adrift, and all I had ever known was forever out of reach. I had been exiled

like Taylor said, and it was a long and relentless summer without my homeland. My New Student Session gave me hope for the future with the thrill of that late night scavenger hunt, but all those strangers reminded me that everyone I had ever known was lost to this process of growing up. Everyone around me was exchanging contact information, but I was too scared to even try to learn to swim with them.

As I was enjoying the end of August, created by Taylor, I received my housing assignment. Then, I learned that I was not part of my roommates' plans to live with our suitemate next door. The thing is, though, that it was not mine but Housing's choice to put me in that room instead of their beloved companion. They still placed blame on me and made me out to be a scary monster that came to ruin their plans.

On September 14, the getaway car delivered me unto my dorm. I survived the four-month ocean separating my worlds, past and present. Physically, I was here at UCLA, but mentally I was right where graduation left me. I stood on the jagged shore of an unfamiliar land, looking back to a lighthouse no longer lit but still warm. It kept me from having to face my new reality. I knew I'd never meet anyone if I stayed on the new shore, cursing the world for yanking me out of the warmest bed I had ever known, so I got a job with BearWear. Across Booth 5 at a September football

game, I saw a man in a UCLA Store shirt. Then I went back to my work and met nice people at those games that left me with glimmers of hope. Luego, La Gente Newsmagazine cured my culture shock, and the American Indian Student Association introduced me to other Yaquis. Perhaps college wasn't all that bad. The whole time I was still in disbelief, though, of the whole idea that I was actually in college.

On the night of October 20, Taylor Swift released *Midnights*. Her album reanimated me like a drought-ruined waterfall after a storm. Seven days later, I fled my room after hearing my suitemates snooping around my things and talking about me like an oddity. I felt like Cassie in the bathtub with them wondering where I could be as they shook my bed. I had thought our issues were laid to rest. Clearly I was wrong, and Taylor was right. I was on my own. The whole time, I had been so blinded by my grief for my old life and so intimidated by the social butterflies that I stowed away my sweet sass and strangeness that made me a marvel at home. I had to return from my tia's house and bring back that bad, bad B that I once was. I returned, yet, fear choked me still before I could snap back at those children. Call me Mirabel with the way I continued to sit atop the Hill's most yonder tower, gazing out into the night, waiting on a miracle that I slowly realized would never come. One November night while I

wandered these dark shores, a small glow appeared in the UCLA Store in Pauley Pavilion. It was...the man from the football game. Never in my two months here had someone put so much effort into getting to know me. Social skills were never my strong suit, so I decided that I must become a mastermind like Taylor to keep my dearest coworker from fleeing with fear after seeing my true personality. I was on a mission to make and keep friends. I couldn't lose.

Soon enough, my first quarter was ending, and I hadn't made friends. With my editor-in-chief whispering "If you're ever thinking 'Should I do it?' Do it" into one ear and Taylor whispering "You're on your own, kid / Yeah, you can face this" into the other, I took matters into my own hands. I shimmied my way into my dearest coworker's email, and to my surprise....it worked. We even played Minecraft over the break! I am a mastermind.

In January, Professor Taub taught us in IASTD-50 about triangulating our research methods. The only things triangulating were my problems: being weighed down by a past brought forth into the present, the lingering symptoms of having Mean Girl roommates, and the sudden news that my dearest coworker would be graduating early. Once again, I really was Taylor Swift. I missed who I used to be in high school after forming a robotic way of speaking to obscure my peculiarity. Even after a room swap, the tomb

of my issues with my old suitemates wouldn't close. If my coworker never saved me from boredom, I could've gone on as I was.

My three issues at hand intertwined like the three Weird Sisters come to hex me. It was hard to move forward with three hands gripping my wrists until they turned red, so I spent winter quarter angry at the world. Without my dearest coworker, I was back at square one, dealing with the loss of my high school self and embitterment of my suitemates. I had come into the quarter determined to make friends and make something of myself, but it proved to still be a challenge. Social anxiety is like being wedged in thick mud on the seafloor, fixed to where the sunlight can't reach. Taylor had thought she'd be saved by a perfect kiss, and I thought a perfect hand would liberate me from the mud that groped and slithered over me. In the end, I was still the only person that could save myself from my situation. What better way was there to end such an emotionally volatile quarter than listening to the Taylor Swift sing her stories strung with woe live in Las Vegas? The price? Missing my beloved MORP that I had planned all year to return home for. It must have been the Lord telling me to move on with my life. To finally step into the daylight, like Taylor said to. For so long, I thought daylight didn't exist here. In reality, I was just so terrified that I overlooked the rays that managed to penetrate a land

that wears a murk like a Hot Cheeto girl wears a cobija. On the night of Friday, March 24, 2023, Taylor touched me in a way that I had never been touched before, and I found peace with my losses. I feared that if I let go of the past, I'd have no purpose or structure to my life. By gripping so tightly, I had prevented myself from finding the gems hidden beneath a bamboozling college life.

Now, it's spring quarter, and my first of only four years at UCLA is winding down. While I haven't fully given myself up to this new and different land, I have found a few hidden places that feel like home. Long story short, Taylor survived, and I will too. I've known this whole year that I can conquer this, but I had narrowed in on how difficult it is to start over. I have survived new starts year after year since kindergarten, and here I am now as a freshman at the #1 public university, surviving yet again. Difícil es, pero nunca imposible.

Por fin, I am learning to swim y abrazos a cada uno de ustedes aprendiendo a nadar todavía.



Florecer a Distancia



Visual provided by Laysha Macedo

by Laysha Macedo

Being the oldest daughter in my household paved the way for my role within the family. Like many Latinx kids—for a significant part of my childhood and adolescence—my responsibilities entailed helping my parents navigate living in a country where they were unfamiliar with the language.

From reading health insurance forms to attending parent-teacher conferences, I was there to provide support for the family in whatever they needed. I was sort of an additional parent to my younger

siblings: looking after their needs, making doctor's appointments, and walking them to school when necessary. I was one of the parts that ensured that the household dynamic worked.

Eventually, the time for me to leave for college was drawing near. As the days passed leading to the start of my freshman year, it became more and more real that I was going to be hundreds of miles away from home, and that my role in the family was inevitably going to change because of the distance. I'll never forget the

day. My family dropped me off in my dorm. It was a weird mix of emotions because we were all excited to see UCLA. It was surreal to be in a place that we never really thought we'd end up in. Under that excitement was an understanding of the changes that would happen. When we were finally saying our goodbyes, I remember my brothers crying to me, which has never left my mind. Our relationship as siblings is very much like that of Disney Channel shows—brothers and sisters fighting or joking around so much that very rarely do you see them share a moment of sincerity. I had never had a moment like that with them; where I felt that sort of love and genuineness. This made parting very difficult, like I was abandoning my own children.

Once I settled into my new life away from home, I would call home as much as I could and on the days I couldn't call, I would at the very least send pictures of my meals to reassure them that I was okay. As those first few weeks passed, it soon became clear that with the pace of the quarter system I found myself unintentionally neglecting our communication. We were already adjusting to changes that came with being away from one another. Instead of being a shout away, I was a call away. I wasn't there to sit with them at the dining table and translate documents or go to appointments with them. I did as much as I could but the reality was that I could not give them the same amount of

support as I did before because I wasn't right there with them.

The distance introduced change to both myself and my parents. I was transitioning into adulthood and learning how to be independent and by the same token, so were my parents. This didn't mean I would ever be absent from their lives, but rather that we collectively had to adjust to these newly established dynamics and adapt to the idea of living separately for the next few years.

A lot of the growth we experienced had a lot to do with my role in running the household. My parents had to become more vocal about asking the school to have a translator present during meetings and during our phone calls, my dad made an effort to speak English, not out of necessity but as a way to practice and gain confidence. One of my younger brothers even started doing more work around the house now that I wasn't there just as my mom started to work her way through using a computer without help. It took lots of time and adjustment and at the start, many calls between us were just about figuring these things out but we eventually found a way to make it work.

One anecdote that comes to mind when I think about where we are now is from this past summer. To preface, my dad—for as long as I can remember—always invited me to go to drive-thrus and restaurants so that I could order for the family. That's

always been the drill and as anxious as it made me as a child, I always did it. When I visited home last summer, he—as always—invited me to go with him and I did. I asked everyone what they wanted and made a note of it and we went on our way. Because these things have always made me nervous, I ran through the order ten times on the way to the restaurant so I wouldn't mess it up. As we pull up, my dad starts lowering his window and I start getting ready to sit up and order. As I'm about to speak, he starts reading off everything from memory. He never even turned to me. He said everything with so much ease. I had not remembered him ever looking this comfortable speaking English. I was a little surprised but proud. He had invited me to go with him this time for company, not because he needed me.

I was going through a transitional period learning how to navigate a university like UCLA and living with people I had never met before. I was learning through trial and error—with no one I could really look to for answers—how to be a student who is the first in their family to go to college.

Outside of academics, I was also growing as a person and trying to figure out who I am. With that came some changes in how I dressed and going out to parties with friends which I had never done. I remember telling my mom once about the first party I went to and her reaction—while not angry as I

had anticipated—did cement that she was also going through this period of transition accepting that her daughter is not a child anymore and that I was putting myself out there in a way that she was not used to.

These simultaneous transitions were an immense time of growth for us. As I get older and my parents get older, these transitions will continue to happen as we adjust to whatever life hands us. While it was a hard couple of years adjusting to individual and collective changes, we made it through and learned things from each other and ourselves.

El Camino Sigue

by Karim Isaac Hyderalli

The joy you saw in my eyes
Butterflies and bees surrounding me
Clouds covering rainbows in the sunny sky
Innocence and ignorance to how cruel this place can be
I look around and see smiling faces all around
Nothing in the world could stop me from lifting myself off the ground
Playing games and rolling around in the grass
Finding refuge from the sun, reading under the safety of a tree
Universes existed in the soil
Blooming flowers meant the universe saw us as hers to spoil

To be surrounded by games and toys
Happiness was all we knew, no other choice
There was no struggle to go forward in life
All I did was eat and play
And talk about how I was going to be someone great one day
To openly love, laugh, and care
To openly cry when you feel despair
No matter how trivial it may seem
As children we were allowed to let our emotions free

Evil had not made its debut
But even then I knew it was those who opposed all we sought
Evil were the ones we always fought
Evil were the ones who wanted to bring our light and cast us into the dark
Curiosity grew and independence was desired
To think for myself, that's what I aspired to have

To let the bird out of its cage and the beast off of its leash
For all boundaries holding me down to finally set me free
But what I learned was that the world was not ours to flourish
The cards that were dealt in an unfair way
And it meant for other people's joy, we had to pay

I saw through your illusions and had to ask myself
How did I not see we were the ones who always fought on the side of hell?
They say to never meet your heroes, never meet your idols
But what happens when you need them there for when you start to spiral?
The innocence of a boy taken away by his own observation
Desensitized to the ways of the devil
For sin has always been my revel
Greed, lust and wrath: the holy trinity of our twisted paths
Despite being critical of all that we do
I do have requests for you
Would it be okay to right our wrongs?
If I were to make a divine melody out of a catalog of siren songs?
Would you be there to numb the pain?
Would you be there to tell me it was all worth it over and over again?
If I told you I loved you would you

finally take that knife out of my heart?
I would ask for it all to be fixed but, we were broken from the start

As my mind got stronger, my heart grew colder
Numbness is better than pain
Anger and hatred replaced my sorrows
And I tried to find what would fill that void at the bottom of a bottle
Just like every one of my old role models
All I want is to be left alone
Everywhere feels like hell and nowhere feels like home
If I want to succeed then I have to get it on my own

Evil in my eyes and hatred in my heart
Ravens, crows and serpents revealed their dark arts
Owls fly in the night with silent wings
Witnessing benevolent bees fall victim to wasp stings
Numbness to evil turned into the love of it
Taking pleasure in seeing chaos spread simply for the fuck of it
Lying, cheating and stealing generate success
Moral victories only generate stress
I'm not aspiring to be in the little leagues all my life, I want to be among the best
So its all about me in this cold world, fuck the rest



Visual by Haven Jovel Morales

Loneliness is a sharp feeling that pierces the soul
Leaving behind wounds that heal too slow
The rusted knife of isolation severs all connections
I was left alone wandering in the desert of emptiness with no sense of direction
Aching for the echoes of the warmth of understanding altered my perception
My soul was left in purgatory,

however, there was a light pointing towards resurrection

Feeling sorry for myself and lashing out grew old
I knew had to do what it was my heart had always told me
I couldn't let the world beat me down and make me fold
I laid down in the forest of despair and decided I would no longer be a victim to darkness's hold
I clutched my heart until it sparked

and embraced a new mold
I looked up at a phoenix circling the sky, its story was not finish being told
Sharp shrieks caused by internal suffering echoed through the woodline
Each scream was a battle cry from the ongoing war fought deep inside
Refusing to be a victim to the shadows imprisoning me
I sought out the light of nature's warm embrace

Seeking solace in the whispers of the wind and the gentle sway of grace
The trees stood tall and beared witness to my metamorphosis
Demons I had to confront surrounding me, the emotions I felt were tortuous

As I shed old layers of my past self I emerge transformed, unburdened, and sane
The tree's branches reached out

to me offering a hug to relieve my pain
They said they could hear my sorrows and feel my guilt
The echoing shadows of evil will always be in the embroidery of my life's quilt
As the seasons changed, so did I, with each passing day
I gave my heart to those around me so they would never have to feel that way
The way I did when I was caught in satan's hold
The way I did when my actions caused me to be all alone
But here I stand so old but still knowing I have to grow
Like the trees that guided me with each sway of their branches
Their beautiful, graceful dances They taught me that even the brightest lights can emerge from the darkest of shadows
That even the most corrupt souls can one day become hallows

They trained my spirit to be a guiding force for the lost youth As the years went by and my body grew to be frail
I lived my life honoring the stories the trees did tell
However, eventually evil came

again and had at times prevailed
Trees were cut down and our connection with nature had at times failed
But the hopeful youth continue to make sure they're protected
They make sure the lessons learned through the trees are respected
But still I, an old sage at this point in my life have yet to learn every lesson
And I fear I will not be able to because death's door beckons
But I know the next generation will leave the healing spirits of this world in good hands
And we will see the generational trauma inflicted by the corrupted hearts of men come to an end

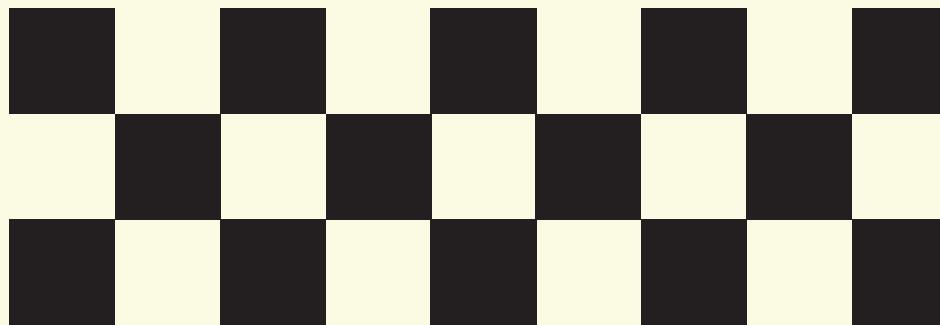
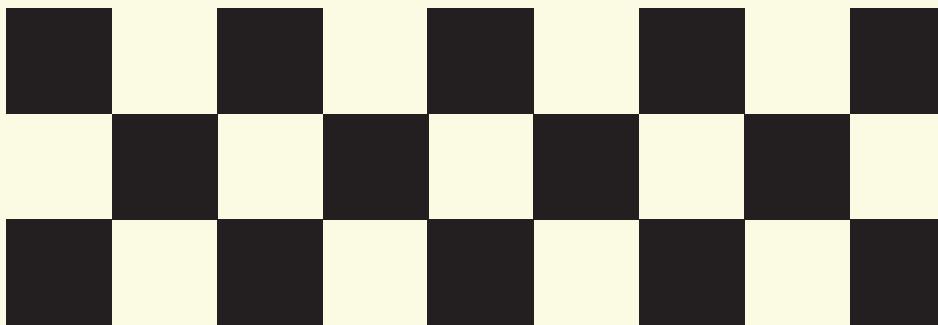
My omega draws nearer by the day, I remembering being young when life was all about play
I remember when reality struck me like lightning
I remember my self- realization being so damn frightening
I remember the painful transformations I underwent to get to where I am now
And all of the suffering I endured is truly okay
As long as the youth of tomorrow continue to see brighter days

So here we are at my bittersweet end
Surrounded by my loved ones, family, nature and friends
The trees promised me that when my body starts to decay
I can nourish the roots of the trees where the children will play
My soul will continue to carry the healing torch that keeps our spirits alive
Well there she is, death is such a beautiful sight
Drawing my last breath I smile knowing I lived a wonderful life
Everything fades to black

But suddenly color is restored in a way I had never seen before
I can hear the echoing laughter of children and birds chirping like I never had before
My dormant soul was no longer at rest
The trees had taken me in saying I had passed their tests
I had proven myself to be worthy of being one with mother Earth
That my new role is to guide the spirits of this world up until their death, starting at their births
A soul once corrupt with lust, chaos and greed
Now sits here, guiding the world into the light through the warm embrace

of the trees
My journey goes on and the road continues
Illuminating paths for those souls cast into the dark
I carry the legacy of the trees, what a beautiful art

In this ever-unfolding tale, my spirit dances with nature's symphony, A teacher and an eternal student, forever connected to the world's divine harmony
Everyday we continue to sculpt the world with beauty and love
Continuing on this road until we all transcend into how we envisioned the heavens above
The road goes on, the journey never ends but that's okay it beckons me to explore
As a part of the trees, I will alway forever seek out to help this world I adore
I am eternally grateful for those who guided my soul
To those who made sure I was no longer part of the darkness anymore



Un Camino Por Recorrer

by Andrea Alvarez



Visual by Melissa Morales

“Vamos lento, pero llegaremos lejos.”
Seventeen-year-old me faithfully believed this,
twenty-one-year-old me is now uncertain.

Twelve years had passed-
eternal.

Pero ya conocíamos el camino.

¿Y después de eso, que?
Pues parece ser que el camino se parte en mil
se ha convertido en un laberinto y no se cual dirección tomar.
Quisiera pedirle al GPS direcciones para un futuro feliz y seguro...

The road that seemed clear and straight ahead ya no lo es.

Post-grad plans are shared and I sit in silence
with hesitation, I speak of plans that once ran confidently through my mind,
pero no hay vuelta atrás.

Mi padre ya le contó a todos que su hija será abogada,
“¿cómo puedes parar ahora si has llegado tan lejos?”

Because when you’re first-gen,
no se puede parar en el medio del camino.
Our parents crossed borders so we could have opportunities-
ones that they could never dream of.

Ahora toca afrontar un camino nuevo y desconocido,
pues así lo quisieron mis padres
and this is the American Dream;
pero cada día se siente más lejano su alcance.

Quisiera tener una bola de cristal y mirar hacia el futuro;
maybe this would bring me the answers I can’t seem to find within me.

But it doesn’t exist.
Así que seguire caminando,
a ciegas y sin ninguna dirección,
si el destino no es el que esperaba, ¿será que podré cambiar de camino?

No se pueden tener todas las respuestas.
You can’t enroll in a class that teaches you
how to navigate the scary and uncertain future ahead.
Solo nos queda caminar y caminar,
until we find our destined path,
sin importar cuantas veces tuvimos que volver hacia atrás
y comenzar de nuevo
un camino desconocido.

Reflexions: the look of a graduate

by Jonathan Valenzuela Mejia

Visuals provided by Jonathan with consent of individual

Graduation is a time of changes and many different feelings too. Excitement, nervousness, accomplishment and many more feelings can come together all at the same time.

Most of the time, these feelings come together once someone actually sees themselves as a graduate. When they literally look at themselves in the mirror and see their accomplishments realized through a cap and stole. I had the opportunity

to talk to different seniors about their emotions regarding graduation while wearing a cap and stole on Bruinwalk.

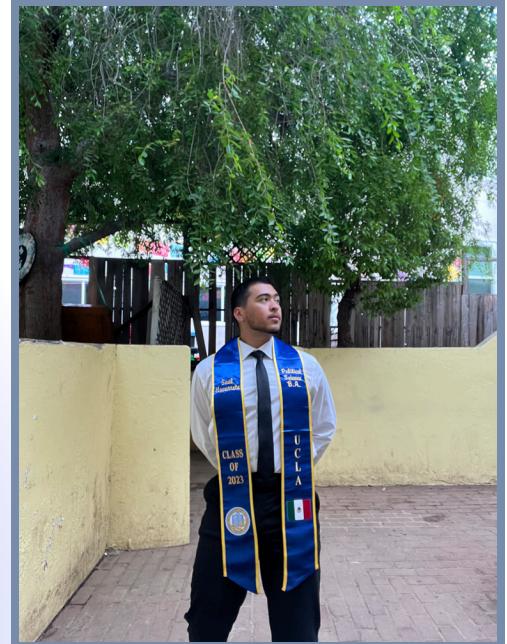
For Carol, one of our writers at La Gente, “it doesn’t feel real”. She remarked, “I have chills”. Carol retold how when she went to buy her graduation stole, cap and gown, she questioned her life. Seeing herself in the mirror for the first time, she thought much about all the work it took for her to get to this point. For

Imaged: Carol

herself and many others, this moment marks a realization of having finally achieved a dream that someone has had since they were in high school, or younger. To her, she can’t grasp that she’ll be a graduate. She knows it’s coming, but also thinks about all the tests, grades and more that took for her to get to this point. It’s because of that hard work that for her, she’s able to be in a cap and gown.

For Janny, a Human Biology and Society major, seeing herself in the mirror for the first time with a stole made her realize that she needs to buy it. While she knew it would be expensive, it would be worth it. “I’m attached to UCLA but am happy to leave” she mentions, and that she hopes to be a physician assistant in the future, but wants to do work for a couple years. She’s excited about her work prospects, and mentions that earlier in the day, she got a job offer to work in Alaska. While her parents did college in Korea, she’s the first person to graduate from the United States, and her younger brother is a freshman here at UCLA. To her, college was exaggerated and, like Carol, recalls all she was told by her teachers about college during her time in high school. While college, to her, is overhyped, she’s happy to be at UCLA and to have met the people she did and get her degree.

For Saul, a political science transfer student, seeing himself wearing the cap and stole for graduation helped him feel that his time at UCLA was worth it. He



Imaged: Saul

mentions how “...everything was so worth it, studying, sleepless nights, B.S. from TA’s and professors...”. Additionally, when seeing himself as a graduate, he felt pride because being a first-generation college student. There’s been a lot of pressure on his shoulders; he’s not just the first to graduate college within his close family, but within the entire extended family, including his cousins. Now that he’s sort of reached the finish line, he feels relief that he no longer feels the pressure as much. Graduation from UCLA to Saul doesn’t just mean graduating, but also accomplishing a dream of his. Saul actually got into UCLA straight from high school, but was worried about loans since his family was unable to help him financially, so he couldn’t attend. While he was upset that he wasn’t able to attend UCLA straight



Imaged: Jacky

away, he made the best of his time in community college by working full-time and relying on the people he knew at UCLA already. Ultimately, he knew he belonged at UCLA and being able to graduate from here has helped him cement that feeling. At the end of the day, Saul continues to feel some pressure to perform well, but as he graduates with Latin honors, he remembers why he worked so hard during his time at UCLA. He did it not just for himself, but to “set an example for his family for generations to come.”

For Jacky, a Biology major, the idea of graduating hasn’t hit her just yet. She felt strange not feeling much for it being six weeks into the spring quarter, but nonetheless is excited about the next chapter for her. Graduating to her is bittersweet

because she has really enjoyed her college experience and feels weird that she’ll no longer have the student structure that guided her for most of her life. Feelings from her high school graduation—the excitement that surrounded her then, upcoming college experience—come to mind during this time. UCLA was a big change for her, coming from a small high school. Nonetheless, it’s an experience that she’s come to love. When she tried on her cap and stole for the first time, she couldn’t really describe the feeling as she’s only worn graduation attire once before in high school. However, some feelings of excitement came about as she let her feelings settle in a bit. She mentions that “it hasn’t hit [her] all the way” and how she looks back at all the times she had midterms and stayed up late to study in order to get to the accomplishment of graduating. For her, being one of the first in her family to graduate from college has made this experience more special for her. She thinks about how her parents came to the United States for a better life, and for her to obtain her diploma helps solidify that sacrifice. For now, she’s pushing many of the thoughts of graduating to focus on her midterms, but looks to what awaits her after, which is the medical school application season and working as a scribe in the medical field.

From these different experiences, graduation can be a time of many feelings: excitement, pride, joy, but also nervousness about

what awaits beyond UCLA. Thank you to all those that I interviewed for their vulnerability and their feelings regarding such an impactful event, and a time that celebrates the accomplishment of being done with their undergraduate career. While for many, this may not be the end of their academic career, it marks a time of transition and growth. A time that all of us, sooner or later, will experience.

La Gente 2022-2023 Senior Spotlight

Karim Isaac Hyderali

Laysha Macedo

Haven Jovel Morales

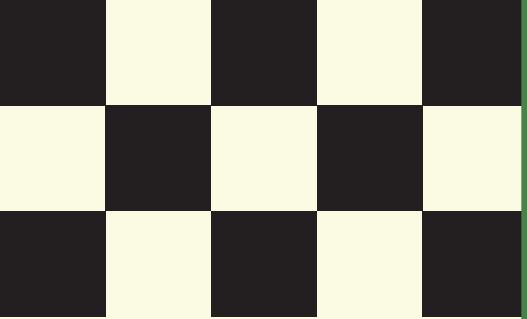
Renée Grange

Esiselda Linares

Carol Martinez

Congratulations and many thanks to our graduating seniors for their contributions and amazing work to the magazine and organization!





*La Gente Newsmagazine is the
first and only Latine student-run
magazine at UCLA.*

*Keep touch with us on our
social media and look out for
recruitment in Fall 2023!*

