

MLK Design Seminar
17.922 IAP13
Assignment 3 – Autobiography
M.I.T. Student

I'm a junior here at MIT studying civil engineering. I was born in New York City on January 5, 1993 to Puerto Rican parents. When I was three, we moved to a small town in Northern New Jersey.

Growing up, my first language was Spanish; but as soon as I started school, that changed. Apparently, I came home one day fuming and said to my mother: "None of the kids at school speak Spanish, so I'm not speaking Spanish any more!" After that, our house gradually switched to an English-speaking one. I don't remember that exact event, but it makes sense looking back. My town is almost entirely white, and all my friends from home are of Irish or Italian descent. I imagine that as a child, I just wanted to blend in and be like everyone else. Years later, I wonder what my life would be like if I had continued to speak Spanish at home. I doubt that things would be much different, but I would probably have a much more evident connection to my heritage and my family culture. Perhaps going back to Puerto Rico to visit family wouldn't cause as much anxiety since I would be able to communicate with them much more easily and with less awkward pauses.

Despite the language difference, my parents managed to share as much of their experiences in Puerto Rico with me and my brothers as possible. My dad told stories of how he would work on my uncle's farm in the summers, while my mother told us of her strict Catholic upbringing filled with learning to cook and sew and reciting the rosary dozens of times a day. While these stories started out as just that, stories of my parents' childhoods, they became a reminder to me of how lucky I was. I never had to work summers on a farm to make some extra cash or deal with overly old-fashioned family members who stifled any sense of fun in the house. I am extremely fortunate to have grown up in an environment where I had everything I ever needed. Besides providing us with a comfortable life, my parents instilled a very strong sense of family in me and my brothers. We grew up with the idea that one's family is all one has; without love and respect for your parents and siblings, nothing else matters. To this day, I remain extremely close to my parents and my brothers. As the oldest, I've become like a third parent to my younger siblings and have tried (maybe too hard) to guide them and support them.

As I wonder what the rest of my MIT experience has in store for me, I know that whatever I do in the next 1.5 years and beyond, I will work to pay back the amazing childhood I was given. I am fortunate to have been born into the life I have, and I believe it's my responsibility to take nothing for granted and to pay it forward.

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