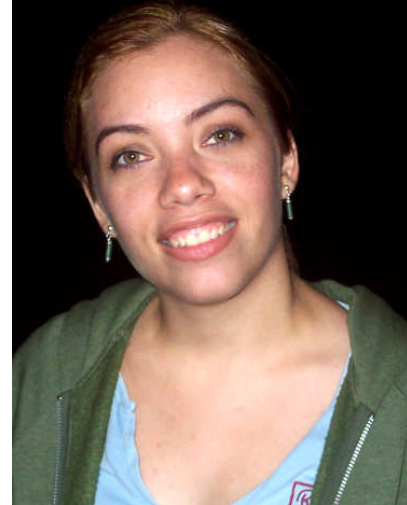


Being a Latina and a Puerto Rican

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Both concepts are very vivid with in me. But at the same time they feel so apart. I have lived all my life in Puerto Rico never in the United States. I have been there for vacations to stay with family and enjoy the sites and, of course, to see the famous mouse.

So why do these concepts for me feel so distant? Is the fact that I am not an immigrant or wasn't born within one of the fifty states. When I read stories about Latinos in the U.S., I feel their pain and happiness, I feel proud for their achievements. At the same time I feel distant for what they have lived or are living is not my truth. I do not live what they go thru every day. That's the moment I feel I do not belong amongst them.

So why call myself a Latina? When I do not share their everyday realities? I might be a Latina because I share a common language, Spanish. To say the truth is more of a Spanglish for me than Spanish. For I use it in my everyday life, even my four year old uses both languages as the Latinos in the States do. It is funny that only that common factor puts me closer to them.

Then something comes to my mind while I am writing this. Since I can remember the United States has been very present in every aspect in the island of Puerto Rico. I have lived its culture which is covering like a blanket my own culture. It's hiding the term 'jíbaro' and pulling us everyday towards them. This is everywhere you go. It is in the music, in the food with the fast food chains, the commerce, our schools, our way of life and more strongly every hour in our politics. So deep it is inside the heart of this Island that our language shares the same importance as the language of the Americans. It is a constant "Battle of the Languages" every four years with republicans and democrats trying to name the national language of the Island. Sometimes Spanish wins and sometimes it has to share its space with the English language.

Maybe I can say that we have become immigrants in our own country. For we have had to adapt to a culture that is rising and is part of our lives. Immigrants! I have realized I have lived under a shadow all my life. I have been struggling to find myself, within two cultures and two languages that have collided in a small island in the Caribbean Sea. But not in a bad way for I have manage to keep afloat, I have survived. Mixing these two cultures that are very far apart from each other and that have found a point where they have come to a balance. That point of balance is my own generation and the next to come.

Now it's clear that I am not so different from my family of Latinos because both concepts are really one. That not only the language or where have I lived matters. But that I have

endured some of the realities other Latinos have lived. So in a way I have lived like a Latino in the United States but in my own country trying to live between two cultures and two languages. That are both very strong and pulling me to either side. It is so clear now. For I have analyzed my life and ways of thinking. I have rediscovered myself. I am not different and I should not feel like I do not belong amongst them.

Now I can say I am a Latina trying to reach into the Latin world that surrounds me and from which I have so many beautiful friends. I will enter this Latin world with an open heart for I want to be part of it in a more passionate way. For I wish to be one with my two selves.