

Student 3M
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“Positivity Ahead”

Growing up in East Los Angeles, I was always cautious of my surroundings especially in places I was not comfortable in. Even my mom told me, “Ricardo, tenga cuidado en esas calles,” and she was a traditional Mexican mother who was always tough and strict. It wasn’t until one traumatic, life changing moment where I thought to myself, “I got to get the heck out of here,” so I can live a safer and productive life.

I was always that shy little kid who was taught by my mom to say “hola” and smile to people when I would pass them by. I always tried doing the right thing by going to grade school every day, getting good grades, and never causing trouble. If I would see someone whom I wasn’t comfortable being around, I would just keep my head down when I would pass by them and keep on walking. At times I would take a different path to get home to avoid someone that I didn’t want to come in contact with. That’s just the type of kid that I was.

High school was a difficult time for me especially growing up in East L.A. I never wanted to dress like the other kids who were always wearing baggy clothes, have a colored bandana wrapped around their head, or wear a bunch of flashy jewelry. I never talked like how most of them talked, “what’s up holmes or hey ese,” because that type of speech never suited me. Because I never did what the norm was of that high school, I was always viewed as the odd kid. Luckily, I did have a few friends that I had a lot in common with who weren’t into all that ‘norm’ stuff. We would always go out to eat or go to each other’s houses to hang out. Not being of the ‘norm’, we would always be called “bicho raros” which meant weirdo’s in Spanish by the other kids of our high school whenever we would walk down the street. At times we would get

rotten food thrown at us. This type of harassment always prompted me to think, “I’ve got to get out of here.”

June 1, a day that I will always remember. I will always remember this day because it’s the day that I finally graduated high school as well as one of the most traumatic, life changing days of my life. I had just finished eating the graduation feast that my mom made me when I heard a commotion outside my house. I opened the front door and I saw two people arguing on the street. I had recognized one of the people arguing because I had gone to high school with him but I did not recognize the other person he was arguing with. They argued for a good five minutes, screaming a whole bunch of profanity and nonsense. The stranger pulled out a gun and shot the classmate right in the chest and took off running. I quickly shut the door in fear and disgust because I just witnessed one of my classmates get shot in the chest. Luckily, the kid who got shot survived. For the next week, I kept reliving that horrible moment. It came to a point where I said to myself, “Enough is enough.” I told my mom I wanted out and she agreed with me to let me leave East L.A.

I did not know where to go but my mom told me to move with my cousin, Ramona, who lived in Eureka, California. She told Ramona of my situation and Ramona decided to let me come live with her. I did not know much of my cousin Ramona, but thought this is my only way out of this terrible area. I packed two suitcases full of clothes and jumped on bus headed toward Eureka, California.

The bus ride from East Los Angeles to Eureka was one of the worst situations I ever had to endure. Sitting in a small, smelly, hot bus for nine hours next to someone who smelled like garbage didn’t make the ride pleasant at all. Halfway to the destination, we stopped in Red Bluff to get some food. I got Chinese food from this funky looking Chinese place that was in between

a liquor store and a carwash. The food was more or less good. After I ate my food, I opened the fortune cookie that came with my food. It said, "Positivity ahead." This gave me a good sense of knowing what my future would be like when I got to Eureka and, after reading the fortune cookie, I was able to enjoy the bus ride a little better.

After that excruciating bus ride, I finally arrived at the bus depot in Eureka. I was greeted by my cousin Ramona who welcomed me with open arms. "How are you, cousin? I am so glad that you are here," she said. I replied, "Fine, thank you for welcoming me into your home." We then went back to her house where I would start my new life.

On the way home, we stopped at a red light at the intersection of Main and Pine Street. At the corner of the light, there were two kids who looked about 12 years old on their bikes. I had the window of the car cracked and could hear them arguing. Even though I could not hear word for word, I knew they were arguing and immediately pulled my window up because I didn't want to hear anymore of that nonsense. For a minute, it reminded me of being in East L.A. when I would see people fighting over nothing. I pulled the window up because I didn't want to be surrounded by that because I knew that I was starting a new life in Eureka.

When we pulled into Ramona's neighborhood, I immediately saw the different atmosphere from my old neighborhood back in East L.A. The houses seemed well maintained, there weren't sneakers hanging from a telephone pole, and everybody seemed nice and normal. Ramona's house was a stupendous one-story house that looked the same from all the other houses in the neighborhood. She showed me to my room and from that point on I knew I was going to enjoy a life without fear.

A week after I moved in with Ramona, I decided to enroll in College of the Redwoods in Eureka to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice. I am now pursuing to become a police officer so I

can help keep people, like the ones I knew in my old neighborhood, off the streets as well as help citizens who need assistants.

I thought I would never leave my old neighborhood. With one life changing experience, such as viewing someone get shot, can quickly change your way of thinking. Hopefully, in time, I can revisit my old neighborhood to visit my mom and make a positive influence amongst the people there. All I know is that the fortune cookie was right, there is positivity ahead.