

Metallic ink dances across the lined pages of a journal; my thoughts materialize into physical words. With nimble and careful strokes, I write narratives of untold stories, poetry, and journalism about marginalized groups. By addressing the issues of racial equity, impoverished communities, and queer rights, I've found a way to acknowledge important issues oftentimes overlooked by the general public. In this world of writing, nothing else matters, and I find refuge from the marginalization of the outside world.

Recently, most of my days have begun to look eerily similar. With dad recently moving away and mom having to work more hours, I spend most of my day taking care of my younger sister and helping around the house. Every morning, I wake up and prepare breakfast since mom leaves for work before my sister and I wake up. Once I am certain my sister has everything she needs for school, I wave her goodbye as the yellow school bus turns the corner. Now, I quickly ready myself for the long day ahead; because I attend the performing arts school away from my neighborhood, I ride the bus for about an hour every morning.

During the ride, I often watch as we leave behind the vacant lots and abandoned homes in my neighborhood and head towards the school. As we dodge potholes and pass the damaged houses, I sit and wonder how exactly this community came to be. When I look at my neighborhood, I see more than the glimpses of broken roads and cracked smiles that appear before me as we leave my city. It is during these hour-long bus rides that I remember that the issues of systemic racism and classism that I write about in my advanced classes are not just hypothetical ideas, but actual barriers that affect my life. After an interesting day of classes, I tend to stay after school for either speech and debate practice, theatre rehearsal, or journalism club. During these after-school activities, I return to a safe haven similar to the refuge I find while writing at home.

The last piece I wrote for speech and debate described my unique challenges within the community and the persistence required to overcome these adversities. Despite the fact that my community is filled with people of color and impoverished citizens, I quickly realized the various hierarchies that are unfortunately still present within my neighborhood. As a queer and multiracial child, I often feel like an outsider within an already ostracized community; many residents are simply unaware of the growing issues of other marginalized groups. Because of this lack of knowledge, I became determined to inform people about how intersectionality and the matrix of oppression directly affect us all. More than anything else, I wanted to raise awareness of political and social issues that need to be addressed within my community. And when other people, oppressive forces, or lack of media representation would seem disapproving, my writing seemed to always be there to support me.

The majority of my writing tends to relate to my experiences growing up, family stories I've witnessed, or lessons I have learned from the community. My last piece was a synthesis of all three of these, and the poem reveals my relationship with my immigrant grandmother, my current battles with identity and prejudice, and my understanding of stories told through my great grandmother who was forced into sharecropping. Sometimes, it can be challenging to find

perseverance and inspiration amongst the emotional stress, gilded family history, and financial burdens. For the majority of my life, I have watched others surround my community and neighborhood with shame and pity, but I have always felt the complete opposite. I am proud of the work ethic, love, and pragmatism found within my community, and I appreciate the countless lessons I have learned because of my community.

When describing the neighborhood I live in, my fellow classmate's faces twist in confusion and pity. Every Sunday, my pastor shouts declarations of homophobic preaching, and I watch as my family silently nod their head in agreement. While discussing my hopes for attending a prestigious university for college, I am told of my "reliance" on affirmative action. Yet whenever I hear these oppressive comments and assumptions of character, I no longer feel the frustration that previously consumed me. Instead, I remember the responsibility I have at home, the representation my community deserves, and my own goals despite the ignorance of others. And ultimately, I remember how I hope to one day help create a world where others will receive the representation and social equity that they rightfully deserve. As I think of all this, I smile and realize that the change I desire starts with a little bit of perseverance and the simple stroke of a pen on paper.