

## Edition 2

### CSUEB Catholic Club

I am a white middle-class American woman. What does this mean to the outside world? I'm told I have no culture, on documents I check the box "white." Life must have been so easy, and many times I'm told you have no idea about x,y, or z. For most my life these ideas were generally correct and I did not question their validity. I lived a comfortable life, with two loving parents who worked hard for my brother and I to be and become all that we wanted to. I never thought twice about my culture or how my culture affected me. For the most part I had no idea about discrimination, feeling out of place, or immigration. All I knew were the voices that surrounded me. My grandfather would talk rarely about my Nano and Nana who immigrated from Spain and Italy. How my Nano came with hardly anything as a boy and worked his way to owning vast acres of walnut trees, the family farms that live on to this day. My mom would tell stories that my Nano and Nana would never speak a word of Italian or Spanish outside of the house or to any of the grandchildren, because that was the old country and they were American now. Other than these few stories, being the fourth generation in America, I knew very little about the places my ancestors came from or the struggle it must have been for them to get here.

Living in the Central Valley I was surrounded by farmland for most my life and with that comes migrant workers. I will never forget in second grade when I was playing on the swings with my friend Gabby and a girl came up and asked Gabby "why do you always wear the same shirt." Gabby responded, "This is the only shirt I have." Being seven years old I did not know what she meant, but I will never forget the look of shame on her face. To feel that as a second grader, I will never know. My best friend in middle school has parents who immigrated from Mexico. They would frequently invite me to their house. I will never forget the smell of enchiladas being prepared, the voices of children running around, the grandparents bickering in Spanish, and all I could think was how all of them lived a two-bedroom house. She lived just a block down the street from me, but her culture and experience was vastly different than mine.

I would hear on the news about people fleeing their countries out of fear to find a better life and I would think of my great-grandparents and my friends from school. My thoughts immediately went to feeling so lucky to have been born here. It was not until I went CSU East Bay that I truly started thinking and investigating what it means to be an American, to be born in America. My freshman year I was asked to write a speech about my culture. I asked myself, "what is my culture, do I even have a culture?" I stood in front of my class and spoke about being an American. After hearing all the speeches in my class, I realized I was the single non-1<sup>st</sup> generation or immigrant student in the classroom. Through my years I have come to the realization that this is the single greatest aspect of East Bay and the Bay Area as a whole. To be surrounded by so much diversity is truly a gift. East Bay has proved to be a place that is welcoming, accepting of new ideas and accepting of all. After giving my speech I was afraid I'd get ridiculed for having "no real culture," but this was not the case. I was applauded and everyone asked questions, genuinely wanting to know more about my culture. One that was as foreign to them as theirs was to me. East Bay has given me the opportunity to become friends with Latinas, Kenyans, Indians and the list goes on and on. To hear their stories and learn through their hardships and triumphs. I may never understand what it is like to be an immigrant, but through the ability to hear people's stories and truly get to know them as people, I'm able to put a real face, a face I truly care for, when immigration is brought up daily in the news. To truly think about how it affects them and their families. I can say without doubt when we take away borders, when we look at people as people, with God – we find that we all are just wanting the best for ourselves and those around us. We all deserve the opportunity and ability to pursue this goal in anyway we can.

With Love,

Miranda McDonnell, Catholic Club President