

Reading

José's Story

My parents kicked me out at age fifteen. I come from a *very* Catholic, Hispanic family, and when I came out, they couldn't accept who I was. I didn't want to get into the system, and so I started couch surfing, putting myself through high school, then college, taking several on-an-off jobs along the way.

Three years ago, I went with two of my undocumented friends to a gay bar here in Tulsa. When they showed their international passports to the door person checking IDs, she went through them and asked "Where's the stamp that proves that you're here legally?" They kicked us out, and said they would call ICE if we tried to get back in. That broke my heart completely. How can a marginalized community marginalize another community?

That was a Saturday. Sunday, I called the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center. I filed a report, talked to the executive director, and met with lawyers. Thursday, we met with the bar, which had apologized. Everything was good, but that's when my work started.

I am a gay, Latino, Catholic man who has survived domestic violence, and this is intersectionality at work. There is this culture within Latinos that doesn't accept gay people because of **Catholicism**,¹ and then there's racism within the LGBT community, and discrimination toward people who identify as bisexual or other orientations. All the programs I start here at the Equality Center come from those intersections.

In school, I got the opportunity to host, produce, and direct my own TV show on social issues called *Tulsa Youth Talk*. Now, I'm twenty-four, I'm very energetic, I welcome everybody and anybody, and if you have an idea and want to do it, I will do whatever is in my power to help you. No idea is dumb or stupid. For example, support groups— I know that I'm not the only fifteen-year-old who got kicked out, and I believe that there



¹ As of 2013, an estimated 55 percent of the 35.4 million Latinos in the United States identify as Catholic, which has consistently declined every year. At the same time, a third of all US Catholics were Hispanic, a number that is rising because of the growing Latino population in the United States.

should be a support group for anything—I will agree to lead it, I will show you that there's so much in this world that's so beautiful. A metaphor I use: I'll give you the keys of the car, give you a car, pay for the gas, and pay the insurance. You just have to drive it.

After graduation, one month before turning the age of twenty-two, my dad reached out to me and apologized. He cried. I didn't hold no grudges, and said, "I'm nobody for you to apologize, don't worry about it." Now we talk, and he told me that anything that he does will have representation from my community. At a party two months ago, he even brought a drag queen as entertainment. I cried; I just thank my dad for everything.

There are other families who don't talk to their kids anymore. I'm very grateful and very fortunate that my dad came back around. But when people are saying, "My family this, my family that," I'm like, "It might get better, but don't hold your breath." I didn't hold my breath, I was like, "No, I'm going to do what I need to do and focus on me." Now I'm here. For some reason, that was what touched my dad's heart.¹

¹ From Winona Guo and Priya Vulchi, *Tell Me Who You Are: Sharing Our Stories of Race, Culture, and Identity* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2017), 208–210. Reproduced by permission of TarcherPerigee, an imprint of the Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.