

# Woodburn is my home: A girl's life from immigration to engagement

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I first immigrated to Woodburn when I was five years old from Michoacán, Mexico. Throughout the years, my family has immigrated from country to country: from Mexico to the U.S. and even to Canada. In each city, I had new experiences and lessons. However, I consider Woodburn my home because that is the place I've grown up most of my years.

For me, growing up in Woodburn has most importantly empowered my identity and desire to create social justice.

Growing up in Woodburn has meant more than engaging and maintaining my culture by going to quinceñeras, religious holidays, Fiesta Mexicana, celebrating Mexican Independence or walking through downtown to enjoy traditional Mexican food. Growing up in Woodburn meant more than just having the outlet mall within walking distance.

By being around families who share part of my family's culture and immigrant background, I not only became empowered in my own identity, but the tight-knit community has provided me with a supportive family.

The strength of Woodburn derives from the community's value of diversity and multilingualism. I appreciate that this community is composed of different ethnicities, ideas and stories because it creates, although not always, an open-minded atmosphere. I'm thankful for having the opportunity to study in schools that teach me my native language along with English. The languages represented in Woodburn include Spanish, Russian and English, as well as Mexican indigenous languages such as Tarasco, Mixteco and Zapoteco, among others.

As an immigrant living in Woodburn, I form part of the history of farmworker immigrants who have been hard workers as

well as passionate advocates for social justice. My parents were farmworkers and I myself have had experience being a farmworker too. I'm proud to form part of this humble, resilient community that continually strives to give the best life to their children. I am a part of a community that sometimes works together against racism and linguistic inequality. Like so many other immigrants that live in Woodburn, our struggles have become part of our growth and strength.

Being an immigrant has meant constantly living under stereotypes, trying to balance two distinct cultures, coming into conflict with your self identity. It has meant resilience and hard work. It is a battle between choosing to assimilate this country's culture or to be proud of my native culture. It has meant that I've had to grow up and be an adult from a young age. It's meant being a translator at hospitals and clinics for my parents and any other Spanish-speaking person. It has meant valuing education more than anything because that's what my parents instilled in me. At the same time, it means that I risked my life and sacrificed my relationship with my mother and little brother in order to have the opportunity for higher education.

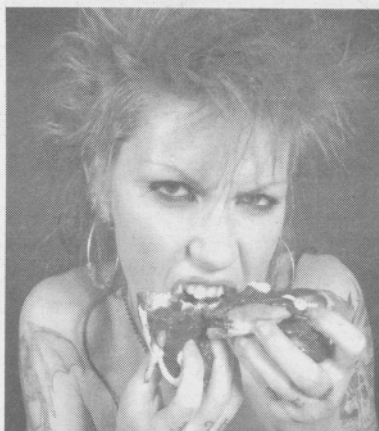
Programs like PCUN (Oregon's farmworker union) and CAPACES Leadership Institute encompass the beauty of this community. Within their workshops, programs, staff, radio and mural they empower and provide resources to the immigrant Latinos living in Woodburn. It is through volunteering at CAPACES and PCUN that I've learned about my community and social justice. In doing so, I have learned about myself.

CAPACES has taught me things that I haven't learned in the classroom. It was important for me to learn about politics, historical leaders and historical struggles; to acquire leadership skills and to define my

identity and be proud of it, which is vital to the self-esteem and confidence of all young kids, and has given me a place of support. I've also worked alongside leaders who are experienced in causes I'm passionate about; issues such as immigration reform, school bonds, driver's licenses for the undocumented, and health and financial resources for undocumented students and families. It is through CAPACES' activities like marches, protests, workshops and experiences that I've realized the impact one can have in their community no matter what our age, gender or legal status. CAPACES helped to educate and guide me which is why I value that they're reaching out to other young students from Woodburn.

As a first generation student, I am changing the history of my family, and one day I aspire to reach a position where my experiences can expand the inclusiveness and representation of all people. I'm committed to pursue a career in public health where I will help improve the resources and support to underrepresented individuals, which is something that TURNO (the youth program at CAPACES, translating to University Talent Returning to our Roots) has inspired me to do. Additionally, it's my hope to serve as a resource and example to younger students so that they too can overcome obstacles and negative perspectives.

The people in Woodburn have supported my growth, learning and health since I was 5 years old. The families of Woodburn share similar stories that demonstrate oppression and injustice, as well as hard work and resilience. It is a beautiful city with continuing underlying problems like racial, gender and linguistic inequality, but this is a community motivated to overcome obstacles, which I am proud to be a part of.



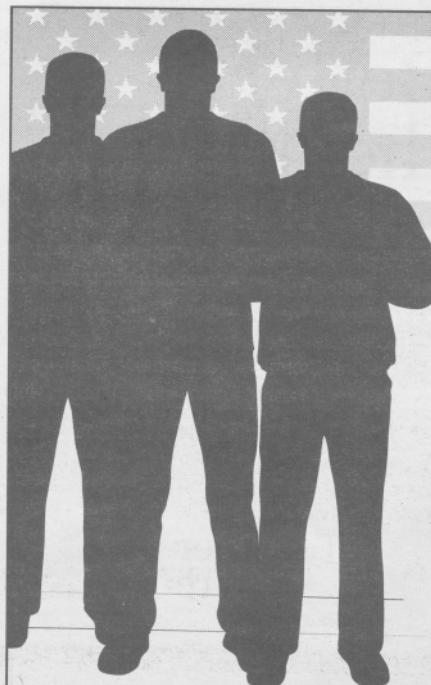
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