Latinos

LIZA: I think that it's very helpful to have this support here, so as not to feel so isolated.

from 1A

ROSY: I come here, and I don't see any Latinos. We have to make some meetings and start to make a community for something as simple as transport. We don't have any transport to go to Eugene. That's the town we have to go to for groceries, because here I don't find what I need.

KARLA: When we got here years ago, they didn't have a Hispanic aisle. The only place you could find Mexican food was in Ruby Begonia's - that was the restaurant across from 7-Eleven. And they would get their food out of town. Safeway didn't have Mexican. No tortillas, nothing.

The group laughed.

KARLA: They slowly started putting tortillas in there and canned Mexican food. But we used to go to Eugene for everything.

ROSA: Every two weeks.

KARLA: Every two weeks it was a trip to Eugene. And then Fred Meyer opened, and they've got a little bit more. And now they have way more than 20 years ago. They almost have half an aisle.

The group laughed.

KARLA: We recently went to California and we found a Mexican market. (Andrea) didn't know anything about

Mexico, really. She came to America when she was tiny. But we spent an hour in the Mexican store because I was like, "Oh, my gosh!" I'm finding candy here, little knick knacks over there I hadn't seen since I was a kid.

ROSA: In Eugene there is a Latino center, but the difficulty is that, without licenses, we don't dare to drive to Eugene. I say that having a license, which makes me feel secure, because I can go, knowing that I am not doing anything wrong. But it becomes very difficult for people without them.

There they have resources, they have immigration, health services, help for abused women, dentists; in other words, they have many things there that we don't have here. There are people here who can afford the clinic here, but also people who can't, and what do we do with those people? And if they have small children?

And now, with DACA. ... In Eugene, a lady went to get help with her forms and they charged her \$500. But you can download the forms off the internet for free because it's all free, except for the U.S. fees. But they charge you a lot for help filling out the forms.

When my husband filled out my forms he did not hire anyone because they wanted to charge us thousands and thousands of dollars, so he filled it out himself. But he had to go to Hood River because that's where you have to go.

KARLA: That's why we started filling things out ourselves. It's not too much, but we can help each other and not charge to help each other with our applications.

LIZA: Yes, because this is a small town and we do not have the same resources as a large city. I think things like that extend beyond just the Latino community because there are people here who speak English who are in the same situation.

ROSA: That's why I think that if we started having events and started a Latino foundation, we could help the whole town.

I've always wanted to do this to show Florence that we Latinos are hard workers and we contribute to this town to make it better. We look for work honorably. No one comes here to steal. I have a small screen-printing and embroidery business, and we are contributing to the city because they charge us for our business license. So, there are many things that one can do to demonstrate that (contribution).

Why is the Latino community here having such a difficult time coming together?

KARLA: Honestly? I think everyone here and the Latin community in town all has their little groups.

We're in a country that we have to fight for ourselves, in a way. They're also just out for themselves. That creates a lot of conflict because you're not just helping them to help them out and do good. You help them to get something back later.

That's not the way I work, and that's not the way our mom brought us up. You help, you do good and you don't expect anything out of it. That's all you do.

If they decide to help you down the road, then good. If they don't, then at least you did something good there.

Maybe we are in a country that is not our country, because we're not born here or it's not our country because people have just pushed us aside a little bit. But we like to be who we are and help who we can. KARLA: Maybe.

LIZA: We've had bad experiences. So, it's not that you're not willing, you're just more cautious about it. I feel like there's an unspoken solianother Latino does you wrong, it hurts so much more. **KARLA:** Oh yeah. It does.

darity amongst Latinos, and if

LIZA: It hurts so much more. ANDREA: There are a lot

of Latinos like my parents who are willing to help out, even if it costs them something. But we don't see it as "we need something in return." And then there are Latinos who are like, "Well, why should I help?" Or they turn their back on their own.

Since we're such a minority, shouldn't we be standing up together and helping each other out? At the same time, there are other people who aren't in our Latino community who offer to help more than the people who are closest to you.

My sister has no reason to start the (DACA) program that she's starting. But she does it because she wants to help. She wants to be a voice. And my mom said to me, "You need to do something too because you're in that program, and you should be speaking out. What your sister is doing is what you should be doing."

KARLA: We don't quote a lot of people, but the one person that we do like to quote is Mother Teresa. And she's always had that quote, "Give until it hurts. And if it hurts, then give some more."

We were born with nothing, and we'll leave this earth with nothing. So why, when we're on this earth, can't we help somebody and do something?

KARLA: True. Maybe I'm just speaking from my experience and my family. A lot of times my parents have put their names and their resources out there and they get a slap in the face. And no matter how many times they've been slapped, they keep putting themselves out there.

Maybe it's good to teach them, and each other, that we're here for each other. And we're here to look out for each other. And protect each other.

Is language a barrier to building a community? **ROSA:** (It used to be) at the

schools, they set the Latino children apart, assuming they don't understand English.

Andrea's first language was

English because I had to leave her with the babysitter, and the babysitter spoke English. Even so, they had her in ESL classes because they said she did not speak English. The babysitter would say, "How can she not speak English, we

speak English all the time?" That's something that makes many children shy and harms them over time.

LIZA: I agree, I had a very similar experience. My first language was Spanish since my parents had just arrived in the country (from Cuba), so I learned Spanish first, and then English in school. But every year they would send me to ESL classes even after learning English.

I don't know, maybe it was the way I looked, the way I dressed, my last name, but they would put me in these classes where they would teach me things like the months of the year, or colors; I already knew that, but they would still send me to those classes.

When I was 13, my parents still didn't read or write in English as well as me, so I would fill out all the school forms. So, one time I just said, "No, I'll fill out that I only speak English."

ROSA: Yes! Because that's what one does.

LIZA: They sent me to take a Spanish language exam and they showed me pictures and asked me to say the word in Spanish, I replied in English, "I don't know." It was a picture of a fireman. I know what that is, but I didn't want them to know. You have to play the game and play dumb.

ROSA: They give us many labels.

LIZA: Yes! For example, in school if there was anything related to money, they'd say things like, "Oh, but you don't have money for that. You'll need a scholarship."

ROSA: But things are different now.

LIZA: That was in the 1990s, during another time. Minds are changing. I don't know if you have felt the same way, but I grew up during a time when it was a bad thing to be Latino. You couldn't speak Spanish in public janderson@thesiuslawnews. because people would give *com*.

you dirty looks.

ROSA: People do that here too.

LIZA: Yes! I reached an age when I decided to stop hiding and show people that yes, I am Latina, and I am also a good person!

KARLA: Yes, and I also speak *two* language.

LIZA: Yes, that motivation to show people: I will teach you to understand.

ROSA: Yes, it's that. It's that we all conform, all of us, be it white, black, red, yellow; we are all one person, one We are all humanity. Americans, and that's what I tell my kids, that's what I want. I came to this country for it to be worth it; to have left family, culture, to have left many things that one misses, but in a positive way.

LIZA: That is something very special about the immigrant community in this country. It's like, we left our countries of origin, but for something. It's for something that we left and sacrificed - our cultures and family members in other countries that are all over the place. It's not that you come just for no reason, so I think that hard-working mentality exists amongst many immigrants.

KARLA: And it just goes beyond race. It goes to the human race. If I'm a human, why don't I have the right to speak the way I know how? Why don't I have the right to behave the way I was brought up? We just need to learn to live with each other. And respect each other and each other's way of living and culture. Just respect each other. That's all there is.

Editors note: Since the publication of the first part of this series, multiple social media posts have addressed different points of view within the Latino community on the topics discussed in the article, including the need or efficacy for having a cohesive and active representation in the community.

Members of the Latino community are welcome to contact the Siuslaw News to further the discussion in future articles. Email reporter Jared Anderson for more details at





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