Fall 2012

Final Narrative

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Coming to Iowa State was the beginning of an experience that would change my life in many ways that I previously thought unlikely. In some ways, this experience isn’t over, since I am continuously made aware of parts of me that I didn’t know existed and of attributes that I didn’t know I possessed. When I first arrived in August of 2011, the temperature was at 60 degrees. I would learn to find this pleasing, but at the time it was one of the many differences that piled up and overwhelmed me. Being from Puerto Rico, the only introduction I had had to American college life prior to coming here was through movies, books, and television. College back home consists of commuting for half an hour and coming home in the afternoon. The streets around the University of Puerto Rico thrive with college life, but the town of Rio Piedras is a separate and distinct entity. The sudden disappearance of the UPR would not be felt if you had not already known it was there. Ames, on the other hand, seemed to depend on the University as much, maybe more, as the University depended on it. Compared to the University of Puerto Rico, Iowa State is also massive. The day after I got here, which was also the first full day I have ever spent without seeing either of my parents, made my feet sore and my calves ache. It was full of errands, the movement of furniture, and the planning of routes to get to my classes. All through it, however, I was blank. I wasn’t excited or sad. I simply felt a slight discomfort. Two days after I had arrived, I finally got together with friends from back home. Valerie and Erica went to High School with me and I had known them since we were all in kindergarten. For the rest of my first semester, seeing them brought something familiar to my landscape.

As the semester went on, I realized that I could never truly get used to the cold. It has been a year and four months since I first arrived at Iowa State, and I still brace myself before leaving a building in the winter, and feel frustration during the last days of fall when I see snowflakes fall on my phone’s screen. During mid-September, I was already wearing the “winter coat” my
family had bought me because the mid-50 degree temperatures I was experiencing at that time were too cold for me. During mid-September, I realized that classes at Iowa State were significantly harder than anything I was ready for. It was during this time that I learned that the quality of the education that I received back home didn’t prepare me well enough for Calculus One or General Chemistry. While the professor skipped sections or chapters, the muttering of other students around me, “It’s ok, I already did this in High School”, made me feel alienated. During mid-September, I also met Michael.

One of the main reasons I sought to leave home was homophobia. In Puerto Rico, news reports of transsexuals getting killed, dismembered, and burned are set aside when Beyoncé announces she’ll be holding a concert. News of an amendment to the Puerto Rican constitution outlawing gay marriage being passed with no opposition is brushed off when Beyoncé announces that she’s cancelling the concert. As a gay teenager, Puerto Rico was a terrible place to grow up. I decided at an early age that, as soon as I got the opportunity, I would leave. The day that Iowa State sent me the letter saying that I had received the GWC scholarship, I got that opportunity. Because of this, one of the first things on my agenda when I got here was to attend meetings of the University’s Gay/Straight Alliance. That day (the only time I have ever attended those meetings), we were separated into groups. I’ve always been a people watcher, and the attitudes and expressions and body language of the people in attendance made me feel very unwelcome. I didn’t interact with many of them, but from what I had seen and heard, I wasn’t like them. The group that I was assigned to consisted of an overweight Physics major (He didn’t fit in), an overweight Fashion/Spanish double major (He fit in because of his major. I’ve also heard he’s a cross-dresser), a relatively attractive Computer Engineering major (I later found out he was arrogant and condescending), and Michael. From the start, he made it obvious that he wanted to
talk to me. “De cómo viniste?”, he asked. I replied, word for word, “I don’t know what you’re trying to say, but that definitely isn’t it.” As soon as this response passed through my lips, I regretted it. My usually pleasant demeanor had been tarnished by an unusually aggressive first impression. Looking back on, I was probably just nervous. He handled it elegantly, though. “See? I’m not that good at Spanish. You should give me your number so you can tutor me.” And I did. By the end of the semester, he had become one of the most wonderful people I had met at Iowa State and one of my many regrets.

The fall semester went by, mostly without incident. It wasn’t until the end of it that I began to feel strange about my developing relationship with Michael. Towards the end of November, he was starting to get strangely moody and would disappear for days at a time. He would contact me again with some crazy story about how he was kidnapped by his friend Amanda’s boyfriend, who was an ex-con. I would laugh, because by then I had learned he was a big talker, and ignore the rest of his unusual behavior. It wasn’t until the day I was five minutes late to meet him at the UDCC that I realized this wasn’t normal. I excused myself for my tardiness, but he wasn’t having it. He was incredibly upset, accusing me of ditching him for my friends. I was stunned. He raised his voice at me and stormed off. This over-the-top reaction to my five minute lateness left me wondering if there was more to his crazy stories. Later that day, I found out he was a drug addict.

The rest of the semester after that consisted of me scrambling to help him, since he had promised to get better. It was never direct, though. Now, instead of disappearing for days and later coming up with a crazy story, he wanted and demanded that I be there for his come-downs. His stories turned out to be true, with the only lie being that he left out the fact that it happened as the result of an altercation over pills. The ensuing chaos that I brought upon myself for not
distancing myself from him ended up in my missing two finals and failing one class. An entire semester of hard work had been turned into nothing during its final weeks. In my mind, though, it was worth it, because Michael was better and we could be happy.

The first day I got back during Spring proved me completely wrong. During Spring semester, I paid the price for my naiveté. In contrast to my Fall semester, there was never any period of time when I thought things were going well. Michael never stopped using, he got me involved in his drug use, he lied and cheated on me, and I once again failed one of my classes and did decently in the others while Michael cried to one of his teachers, got taken out to dinner by her, and handed an A when he was earning an F in the class. I won’t go into detail of what happened, but Fall of 2012 is the result of me attempting to put the pieces back together after my inexperience and weakness let me be hurt and affected negatively by a person that didn’t care of the damage he caused others. In a way, my story is reflective of the sheltered life that I led back home. I am convinced now that, at that time, I wasn’t ready to move out. My Iowa State experience hasn’t been what I wanted it to be. I haven’t made friends or joined clubs. I haven’t built relationships with professors or gone out to parties, all for the same reason: I was inexperienced and let a negative influence take over my life. Fall semester of 2012 has been slightly overwhelming. I was placed on Academic Probation and this was my last semester before expulsion. I’ve done well in 4/5 classes, obtaining high B’s and A’s, and am still waiting on my fifth, Calculus Two (which I probably shouldn’t have taken, since it’s one of the hardest classes that my major has to take). For Spring 2013, I’m ready to not have this pressure on my and make my experience at Iowa State what I’ve always wanted it to be, an adventure.