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More Than Just Some Rain

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MORE THAN JUST SOME RAIN

by Ignacio Carvajal, former student



My mother called. “Diay, Jose,” and I can picture her driving her Toyota Corolla, on the way home from picking up my sister and groceries for dinner, “era para ver cómo estabas, porque ayer no supe nada de vos.”

I did not call or see or hug her for a day, and she is concerned. In Spanish, I tell her that I’ll be taking the

7:10 back to Lawrence and that I’ll be home for dinner. After I hop off the K-10 Connector, I start my car and drive off. The hip-hop crew, The Blue Scholars, flowing out of the only working speaker, put it simply: “It’s gonna take more than just some rain to change this.”

I, like most, know change. Almost seven years ago, it took more than metaphorical rain for my father to decide that he would pursue an education in the United States. He brought his whole family with him. I was a 13-year-old child at the time. Now, I, like many, seek change. If not change, I at least seek a satisfactory understanding of the necessity for it, or the catalysts behind it.

My medium for this understanding, in the past couple years, has been higher education, specifically at Johnson County Community College. The college has a self-appointed duty to constantly adjust, re-evaluate and understand how to cater to thousands of students. I roam the hallways and see these adjustments take place.

Inevitably, people come from a certain place, a certain family, a certain culture; they fit inside a variety of bubbles.

Often, though, we place them into rigid boxes: “black” boxes, “gay” boxes, “Catholic” boxes, “women” boxes, “men” boxes, “Muslim” boxes, “foreign” boxes, “American” boxes, “right” boxes, “wrong” boxes. We assume a totality, instead of a mere characteristic.

I live in what some may regard as two different worlds. My home is a haven for Spanish, for Costa Rican food, and for family. When I am not at home, I speak, read and write mostly in English. I am even an English tutor, and my behavior certainly changes as I go in and out of myriad bubbles.

I see the words that I choose to utter and the actions that I choose to carry out as a response to what surrounds and shapes me – as characteristics – but by no means as a direct representation of the totality of my being. We all navigate realities, bubbles, and they are vastly different. We must,

though, cease to be scared of them; we must realize that they lack the rigidity of the boxes we continue to create.

Change does not come easily. However, in my four semesters at JCCC, I have come across people who are constantly devoted to the implementation of it.

The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion was instituted to become the catalyst of this change. From Latino Writers Collective readings to multicultural events, the office strives to infuse understanding about the individuals who populate the college’s bubbles. They seek to educate about a change that becomes more and more necessary. They are the sparkers, the shakers, the storm clouds rolling in.

I have experienced their efforts first hand. It was thanks to the ODEI that I joined the Latino Writers Collective after the office showcased its members at a reading. It was partly thanks to their support that JCCC’s “Multicultural Night” was a success last fall. It was largely due to people like them and their efforts that I will seize the next step in my education.

As a non-citizen, I am not eligible for any type of federal financial aid. This – and any boxes into which some might tend to place me – made no difference when I strode into Carmaletta Williams’ office to meet her. It made no difference when I was introduced to President Terry Calaway by two of my mentors, Drs. William Stockton and Robert Xidis. It made no difference when I introduced myself to Dr. Dennis Day. Thanks to their support and encouragement, I am the first JCCC student to be a recipient of the Jack Kent Cooke scholarship, which will fund my studies at the University of Kansas.

The way I see it, we all are scholars. My mother is a pious scholar of life. Preya, a JCCC cashier, is a scholar of making me feel welcome with just a smile when I come to buy a bus pass. I am simply an aspiring scholar of understanding the world that surrounds me and its people, the change that they continue to demand. The people at the ODEI are scholars of meeting the needs of other scholars: scholars who refuse to be placed into boxes.

As I steer my car around a corner in a town in the Midwest, on the way to dinner with my mother, weeks away from moving to Washington, D.C., for summer study, I see the way the bubbles float into each other. I see the way that they fuse.

I pull into my parking spot, sit back and see drops on my windshield. Life keeps moving. And people keep trying to change to live it. The Blue Scholars start to die down on my stereo.

It is "gonna take more than just some rain to change this."
But in the halls of JCCC, and inside the heads of people who
seek to understand, it is already pouring.

OUR ARMED STRUGGLE

We are
brothers in arms
but we use them to hug
like only real men know how to
like we are not afraid to admit it

We are brothers in arms
but our only war is
a war on ignorance, misconception
and if we carry bayonets on our shoulders
it is only to dig the graves in which to bury them

We are brothers in arms and
wave not the flags of idealists,
only our hands and words
beckoning the ears that are
willing to listen

And we are also the sisters
tired of nursing the wounds
of their husbands and fathers
who could not open their eyes
and chose to shoot instead of speaking
chose not to swallow their pride and
let it come out in the form of bullets

We are brothers in arms
and in our holsters are
only the tools of the builders:
hammers not for smashing bones
but for laying foundations
and letters to sink into our

concrete walls, hoping to remind us,
every morning at waking

That we are brothers in arms
brothers in tongues and eyes,
brothers in waiting, never
just sitting and waiting, but
bringing forth the days – that will come –
when we can stand and proclaim this
and watch our brothers and sisters embrace it
bring into their homes and at the tables say it:
These arms will not harm you
they will speak to you, let you
stand upon them and, if at all, they bring fire
it will be the one already burning
in the eyes of our sisters and brothers
waiting for the right hands to feed it.
We are brothers in arms.
We are here to feed the fire.