

PROCEEDING BACK TO
HEADWATERS

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THE CIRCLE OF MY IDENTITY

This sculpture is about finding a way to live with both sides of my identity--the Guatemalan and the American, my adopted life and my geographic origin. All my life I have struggled with who I am because I couldn't find a way to represent both sides of my identity equally. I never felt like I truly belong in either community, whether that be the white community I've grown up in or the Latina one. I always feel like I have a foot in each culture.

My ideal identity is represented as a circle, an identity that makes me feel complete and whole. A circle brings to mind the idea "two sides of a coin." In this work, I acknowledge both sides of my identity and portray them equally. The ancient calendar symbolizes the indigenous people of Mesoamerica, making it an ideal choice to use as a representation of my Mayan/Guatemalan culture. To represent my North American culture, I collaged many ideas and images that symbolize my life here; those moments together represent a small piece of my American life.

Adoption has been such a big topic in my life and it was amazing when I realized that there were students here that could relate to me on the same emotional level. Listening to their stories on the topic and how adoption affected them and shaped them into who they are today has been really inspiring; it made me realize the importance of finding the answers to my own adoption questions and ultimately influenced me to reach out to my birth mom to find the answer to questions I assumed would never get answered.

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Who am I? Where do we come from? These are some of the questions I hope to find the answers to. When I think about my life and my identity, I think of two sides making up my identity. The birth side and the adopted side, the California side and the Guatemalan side, with water connecting them together. I was born in Guatemala in 2001, but was adopted and brought to the States when I was little. I have grown up in California my whole life and because of that, I have developed a California lifestyle. California is a liberal state that cares very much for environmental problems. I have grown up learning and living with the environment around me, the mountains, the oceans, the geography. You could say that I know my own environment. However, how could I? To know yourself I believe you have to know your past, which as an adopted person, has made it hard to do. I see water as a bridge, it's a universal ways of life, it connects my California lifestyle with my Guatemalan one, being the similar fact within the two identities that make up me.

What is missing from my backstory? As an adopted child, my backstory isn't complete. Unlike with most people, I don't know who my birth dad is, I don't know who my birth siblings are and I don't have a real relationship with my birth mom. For me I started inquiring about my adoption starting from as young as age 5. When I was growing up, the lack of knowledge on these topics made me feel like an outside, like a freak. I didn't understand why I couldn't have the answers to the most basic questions, the questions that children find the answers to when they are young. I was born in Guatemala in the year 2001 on July 15th to a mom named, Maria. She took care of me for a month or so but, realized that she didn't have the ability to give me the life she thought I deserved, so selflessly she gave me up. I was then given to an orphanage called, Semillas de Amor. There, people looked after me and cared for me, until the Berman family took me home, to the states, where I've lived ever since.

What is water's backstory? What is missing from people's knowledge about waters and its origins? In a study by Andrew Fazekas, for National Geographic, he uncovers the mystery of water's origins. The water that makes up our beautiful Earth, was here long before we could ever guess, even surpassing the our original estimates of it. " The study pushes back the clock on the origin of Earth's water by hundreds of millions of years, to around 4.6 billion years ago, when all the worlds of the inner solar system were still forming." ¹ It is believed that our planet formed dry with high-energy impacts creating a molten surface on the infant Earth. "Water came much later, went the thinking, thanks to collisions with wet comets and asteroids", and so it suggested that the water on the planet already, was enough to start life earlier than we thought, making water and life a big connection into our planet's past. Like my backstory, water's backstory is incomplete and filled with gaps. These gaps led to negligence and a lack of knowledge about the topic or in my case an inquiry to understand and fill in the gaps in my history.

What do I want to know, and because of that, what do I not want to know? Adoption is such a tricky process to go through, for everyone, not just the adopted person. A multitude of issues may arise when children become aware that they have been adopted. Like the feelings of sadness, grief, pain, confusion, and lost. For me, it made me feel as though I was missing

¹ "Mystery of Earth's Water Origin Solved." *National Geographic*, National Geographic Society, 30 Oct. 2014, news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141030-starstruck-earth-water-origin-vesta-science/

important pieces in my life, and so I blamed it for the reason I fully couldn't connect into any community. I think in the adolescence stage of people's lives, being adopted makes it harder to transition from adolescence to adulthood. It's more difficult due to the fact that we have to learn how to come to terms with and integrate both our birth and adoptive lives into our identity. In Kathryn Patricelli's essay, she talks about the long term struggles of adoptions. "Adopted children may struggle with self-esteem and identity development issues more so than their non-adopted peers."² For me, the idea of identity development hasn't been easy. I struggled with the knowledge that I have a whole other family somewhere. Since my adoption was an open one, that means there is a chance to meet and create a relationship with my birth family, though because it was an international adoption it makes it a bit more complicated to do so. I want to meet my birth mom so she can answer the questions that have been nagging me for 16 year. Like why was I given up, why did she think she couldn't support me? Do I have siblings and were they given up for a adoption too, if not, why did you chose to keep them and not me? Who is my father? What did he look like and act like? Is he alive, could I meet him, would he want to meet me? All these questions and more would come streaming out of me, if I ever had the chance to talk to my birth mom. However when thinking of questions that I want answers to, it made me realize that that entails there are questions that I don't wish to know. For some adopted children, they have no interest in the answers to the questions about their adoption, they are content living with a veil of ignorance over their past. Unlike me, they don't want know what their birth parents were up to all these years, they don't want to know if they ever thought about them or regretted giving them up and they don't want to know if there's a possibility to start a relationship with their birth family. For me, I have chosen not to talk or contemplate about certain parts of my adoption, like why she gave me up. However, I don't think there are any questions I wouldn't want to know the answer to.

When talking about water, most people know that the scarceness of clean drinking water is real problem that grips our world. Though they don't know how to do their part in helping fix the it or what is actually causing the problem. There are many reasons why water pollution and problems exist. One of the reasons is, we keep adding to the problem. According to an article by the World Resources Institute, "Climate change is warming the planet, making the world's hottest geographies even more scorching. At the same time, clouds are moving away from the equator toward the poles, due to a climate-change driven phenomenon called Hadley Cell expansion. This deprives equatorial regions like sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Central America of life-giving rainwater."³ Another reason is a simple one. When populations increases so does the demand for water. "The world's population, now at 7.5 billion, is projected to add 2.3 billion more people by 2050." In a world with that many people how are we supposed to supply enough water to satisfy their thirst? Lastly, water is being wasted. It is true that water is a renewable source, however most of the time it is wasted. "Inefficient practices like flood irrigation and water-intensive wet cooling at thermal power plants use more water than necessary." Not only do we pollute our

²"Long-Term Issues For The Adopted Child." Mental Help LongTerm Issues for the Adopted Child Comments, www.mentalhelp.net/articles/long-term-issues-for-the-adopted-child/.

³ "7 Reasons We're Facing a Global Water Crisis." *7 Reasons We're Facing a Global Water Crisis* | World Resources Institute, www.wri.org/blog/2017/08/7-reasons-were-facing-global-water-crisis.

water at extreme rates, but we don't treat, said water. "About 80 percent of the world's wastewater is discharged back into nature without further treatment or reuse." These are only a select few of why water is running out, being polluted and being used so quickly. To those who want to fix these problems, I'd ask, what can I do in my community to cut down on wasted water? Are there ways that I can showcase to my community, the real water problem at hand? And are there organizations I can join to help solve water issues on a global scale? All these questions and more are the questions we should be asking to solve the problem, us humans, have created. However in our world there are people who are aware of the problem at hand, and yet are content in not wanting to know how to fix it. They are happy not asking questions about it or even talking about it in general. For them they see the situations as, "if it's not spoken, then the problem doesn't really exist." These people don't want questions answered about the water crisis because just like adopted people who don't want to talk about their adoption, questioning it or drawing attention to it, makes it seem real, makes the situation exist.

Being adopted causes many feeling for the person, sadness, happiness, confusion, though a big emotion is disconnection, whether that be from their community, their adopted family or even their birth family. For most people the older they get, the less they feel attached to their birth heritage/ culture. It's as though there's an invisible barrier that separates me from my family, from becoming a real part of the family. Growing up, I definitely saw that mine and my family's skin colors were different but I didn't see that as the main reason I felt divided from them. I felt, some of the time, that I was a guess living with a host family. I would feel like I would never really be integrated into the family all the way. Even now I feel a disconnect during some family gathering, where it's easy to spot me as the "one who is different." For many adopted children, the act/want to find your birth parents widens the gap of disconnect between you and your adopted family. "Adopted children may feel as though they are betraying their adoptive family and/or that they will hurt their adoptive family by expressing their desire to learn about their birth family."⁴ Even just looking into the faces of my family, I can see they're connected not just loves they feel for one another, but they also share each other's features and personalities. This just is another example that showcases the divide between me and them. The idea of looking like your family has always fascinated me. I use to look at my friends and their families and imagine how similar I'd look to my own birth family, what traits would I poses from them? Growing up in this adoption process it sometimes might feel like I'm undergoing it alone, with no one who shares my feeling, however that's not the case. There are so many people going through the same thoughts, feelings and ideas as me.

I talk about the water problem in a way that makes it seem like it's only San Francisco's mess and problem to fix, this couldn't be farther from the truth. The water problem affects everyone on the planet., it is everyone's water that is getting trashed and wasted, and because of this, we have to look that this mess as all of ours. In an article by SmartCities Dive, it talks about three different cities and their novel solutions in tackling the problem of water scarcity. As said before,

⁴“Long-Term Issues For The Adopted Child.” *Mental Help LongTerm Issues for the Adopted Child Comments*, www.mentalhelp.net/articles/long-term-issues-for-the-adopted-child/.

the increase in population, increases the demand for more water. Because of an increase in population and drought, these 3 cities have had to find new ways to fix the lack of water available. First is Los Angeles. In the Southern Californian city they have made headlines by placing 96 million shade balls into the their Reservoir. “These small black spheres cover the surface of a body of water to slow evaporation, conserving water. The dark coloring and expansive coverage of the balls mitigates evaporation by reflecting the sun's rays back into the atmosphere—providing "shade" for the water”⁵ Along with LA, Singapore is also taking steps in trying to fix the problem of clean renewable water. “Singapore is tackling this challenge through strong branding and educational outreach, including a NEWater Visitor Centre.” Finally, in Qingdao , china, they are trying to find ways to have enough water that satisfy their population of nearly 9 million residents. To do this, they have taken measures like, “constructing a massive desalination plant with the capacity to produce enough water for 500,000 residents every day.” It’s great that big and influential cities have seen the water problem as a real issue and has taken steps to trying to solve it. So to the state of California, it might seem like we are the only ones trying to prevent this problem but just remember that there are people out there who connect with your thoughts and feelings on this topic.

I want all these research to have a purpose. What’s the point of doing this essay and project if it doesn’t change the perceptions of me or others. Can my journey and research bring me into a new community, and help we integrate both sides of my identity to feel as though I whole? My initial reasoning for doing the topic adoption again, was so that, I could try one more time to focus on my adoption story and really think the thoughts and feelings that encompasses it. When talking or thinking about my adoption story I always manager to tell it in a way that strips the emotion out of it, this is because without the emotions, good and bad, it makes it easier to tell to people. I hope that with this research, I can take the similarities and differences between the two sides of my identity, and put them together in a way that makes me understand myself better.

⁵ “Three Cities Innovated Solutions for Tackling Water Scarcity. Smartcities Dive EMBARQ Network <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/friday-fun-three-cities-innovate-solutions-tackling-water-scarcity/1099086/>

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