

MASSART

SOME STUDENTS HAVE A BACKGROUND, IDENTITY, INTEREST, OR TALENT THAT IS SO MEANINGFUL THEY BELIEVE THEIR APPLICATION WOULD BE INCOMPLETE WITHOUT IT. IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE YOU, THEN PLEASE SHARE YOUR STORY.

My Five-Letter Sanctuary

When I was seven years old, one of my friends had just returned from a trip, and along with her excitement came multiple keychains with names written in shiny pink letters for my friends and me. As her hand extended out to mine and as the smile on my face grew with immediacy, a sparkly keychain dropped in my hand with the name “Izzy” shining back at me. I looked at it, then back at her, then to all my friends who were now smothering her in hugs, and then back at this new and transformed me who was hiding behind the name *Izzy* in this small, plastic, cheap souvenir. I stood there a little confused, but suddenly this sense of relief and enlightenment washed over me and consumed all of my confusion as if I had just been saved from something, as if I was finally given a name I could share with people, as if this keychain was the key to an easier life without a name so difficult to pronounce. For a few months after, I wrote “Izzy” on my papers, my quizzes, and my workbooks. However, as I flip through the diaries I scribbled nonsense in, and as I shift through the drawings my parents kept, I realize that I never signed my name as Izzy on the personal things I had created. On the writing passages, the

drawings, and the small songs I composed for myself, beneath the passion for art and creative moments lies my true self and my real name; Itzél Ríos-Ellis.

Even at that young of an age, I understood that my name wasn't meant to be written on keychains at souvenir shops and rather was a name with such significance, such history, and such color saturated into five letters that it was actually one of my responsibilities as an Itzél to embody the meaning of the name. From there on, I understood that my name was not my given label, but is indeed me. This immutable, everlasting name gifted to me from my parents who studied the ancient Mayan Goddess Ix Chel and her beautiful, innate habit to add color, life, and imagination to everything before her, is one of the many things that truly encapsulates what I aspire to be and what I hope I will be able to be proud when it's time to look back on what I have made out of my life.

As a bilingual, bi-cultural, completely white-passing, first-generation proud Mexican-American 17-year-old girl, whose foundation of cultural duality easily crumbles with the impossible and indefinable feeling of being an outcast in her own Mexican family reunion because of her predominantly white phenotype, my name has become a sanctuary for myself. This constant battle with my identity that I have carried in myself since I first realized the significance of what it means to be Latina and not be able to resemble it has both rendered me unaware of what it means to be someone of two contrasting cultures and has also inspired me to become closer to myself through creative expression that reflects these personal issues. My father, an immigrant from Mexico who created his life in the United States at the age of nine-teen to pursue a musical career, and my mother, an ironwoman built of resilience who was taught the meaning of hard work at age twelve, realized that giving their three children the names

of Itzél, Xóchitl, and Enrique would not only bless us with the immediate opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the Latinx blood that runs through us, but also create a foundation for us to begin our lives as who we are with the understanding of where we come from and who we were created from.