

Genesis Noelia De los Santos Fragoso
“Just Off the Orange Line”

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If you take the Red Line to Park Street, switch onto the Orange Line towards Forest Hills past the hustling vendors and the smell of fresh roasted peanuts toasting, and get off at the very last stop, you'll end up there. No, not Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, but instead the South Street Housing Development. Like Harvard, it is a place filled with dreamers, future changemakers, and aspiring artists; the only difference: opportunity.

At the college— Weld Hall, Eliot House, they aren't too different from the apartment buildings I grew up in. Paint peels off of the walls, pet cockroaches occasionally appear in the showers, but, more importantly, loving community members envelop you with their kindness. Those brick buildings, though rigid and cold on the outside, are home to a roaring hearth. The people, like my former neighbor/*vecina* Ana, whose smile reveals a glimpse of the metal cap on her tooth, are family. The first responders when you are in need.

On August 3rd 2006, I was 8 years old when my mother received a call that would change everything. My father had suffered a car accident in the Dominican Republic while on his way to visit my grandmother. It was out back by the green dumpsters that my *Mami* relinquished every sense of being, falling onto the cold concrete in disbelief. An immigrant and alone without any immediate family, my mother depended on the South Street Housing Development. For an entire year, during the many months of my father's multiple comae and surgeries, this community fed us, clothed us, and watched us. It was on the playgrounds of this concrete jungle that I learned what a home looked like. Every *vecina* in our building, at 4 Metcalf court, lit a candle for my family. It was the flicker of those red candles that brought my family and me all of the way here to Harvard Yard.

I remember sitting in the stairwells of Weld Hall on move-in day, looking up at my father. That day was the first time in 30 years of living in the United States— of living in the Massachusetts-- that he had stepped foot into Harvard Yard. As I sat there I recalled the day that I, a 12 year old girl, was moving out of her home at Metcalf Court. When we left those project buildings, my parents did not look back, but today I do. In that moment sitting on those stairs in Weld, I remembered how I as a child would sit and wait for my school bus on the stairwells in my apartment building. I thought to myself and realized just how far I had travelled. Though fairly close, Cambridge-- let me be more specific-- Harvard still feels worlds apart from the courtyards at South Street that gave me my first scars when I fell off of Yamilex's magenta Barbie-stickered bike. These brick buildings, though their facade may be similar, still swell with the privilege that lies behind their walls, the privilege of opportunity.

Here at Harvard, I have found women similar to Ana, a lot younger, but also willing to stay up with me as I filled Eliot's D entryway with shrill cries when my mother was diagnosed with cancer. If the walls in Eliot House, if the walls at 4 Metcalf Court, could speak they would have enough stories to fill several novels, testifying to the pain and trauma, but more so, the love and support I've received in my various homes.

Harvard is a home, and we all have complicated relationships with home, but it is a place that has touched us all. And as we leave this home that we have created here as a community, I urge us to think about the opportunities that we have been given. Let us think about the privileges granted to us as we go through the world carrying a Harvard diploma. Let us think back on our time here, and more importantly be conscious. Conscious of the weight that our education holds, conscious of all of those who simply do not have the opportunity. It could

rightfully have been someone else in our place, but it was us. Now, what will we do with what we have gained here? I hope that as we answer this for ourselves, we lead not with our privilege, but instead work with a desire to create opportunities for others.