

## Christina's Essay Continued

“Seguimos! We are next! Hurry up! Let’s get in line!” I told Juan backstage as we gave each other a rushed, warm kiss. The auditorium was pitch black as I walked into my position. The wooden floor creaked beneath my feet and the murmuring of the crowd sent chills up my spine. A bright spotlight focused directly on me. I nervously forced a wide smile. Suddenly, the lively mariachi song, “El Son de la Negra,” brought the room to life as all the stage lights came on. The music controlled the rhythm of my heart and the tap dancing of my feet. I strategically made oval shapes with my skirt as I swayed it with exaggerated movements. In the center of the stage, Juan formed wide circles with his lasso and began to jump through them. Occasionally he and I made cheerful eye contact while we danced across the stage. As the end of the song approached, we prepared for our finale. Far apart as possible yet still holding hands, we faced the audience. Holding Juan’s sombrero with my left hand, I pulled myself forward then wrapped into his arms. Then we eased into a dip. With his sombrero, I covered our faces as if we were kissing. Thunderous applause, cheering, and whistling filled the auditorium.

After our amazing traditional Mexican folkloric performance, Juan and I felt more connected, and our relationship became stronger. Although he and I were dating before that day, the performance was a remarkable moment that strengthened our bond. Together, we brought our culture, past, and skills to create a magical dance.

Although similar in many ways yet different in our upbringing, we realized we are two interconnected souls. Juan and I have been dating for almost five years. We have a healthy, affectionate and mutually beneficial relationship in which we both complement each other. Since Juan is a significant part of my life, I wanted to include him in my photo. For the picture, I wore my vibrant pink, traditional Mexican folkloric dancing skirt, and Juan wore his elegant charro Mexican horseman costume. His deep-black beard emphasizes both the masculinity and personality of a vigorous charro. I helped him position his hands on the sombrero. Then I asked him, “Can you fix my shirt, please? Make sure it’s not crooked?” We posed comfortably at last and gave the camera a warm smile.

This picture accurately represents who I truly am: my passions, my identity and my personality. My usual wide smile reveals my teeth. My pride in my Mexican roots and passion for dancing shine through in my costume. I hold an American flag reflecting my nationality. I also softly hold Juan, who smiles with pride in his elegant charro costume, firmly grasping the flag of his motherland.

The vibrant colors of our costumes radiate the lively Mexican culture. I love how my fresh, natural makeup makes me look cheerful and feel more confident. Although our costumes are fancy, we are humble, considerate and friendly. This is the image I want others to see because that is who we truly are.

Juan was born in Lagos de Moreno, a rural town in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. He lived on a ranch with his mother and sister where he learned floreo, Mexican roping. For economic reasons, his father lived in the United States, occasionally visiting his family in Mexico. Eventually, the

family all came to live in the Chicago suburbs where Juan attended Palatine High School and learned English.

On the other hand, I was born in the metropolis of Chicago, Illinois, in the U. S. I grew up in the city of Guadalajara, capital of the state of Jalisco. I lived there with my mother and brother where I learned how to dance traditional Ballet Folklórico Mexicano in school. For better opportunities, my father lived in the U.S., visiting my family in Mexico twice a year. Eventually, I returned with my family to the Chicago suburbs. Once in America, I attended Jack London Middle School, learned English, and graduated from Palatine High School.

Bridging our two worlds together through dancing, Juan and I formed a solid relationship. We started our new journey together at Palatine High School where our love flourished and we became one to “El Son de la Negra,” the most popular folk song in Mexico and its unofficial national anthem. I used to dance and listen to this song while growing up, but I never imagined that it would become a symbol of love in my life.

We never know what life has in store for us. Who knew that the Variety Show would be the catalyst in our lives? “El Son de la Negra,” made me realize that we should appreciate and relish every moment. We should be positive about the future because life is full of possibilities. We should choose to meet life head on, enjoying the good things it has to offer.