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Marian Bean: Crossing Borders Entry

Through the Barbed Wire

Separated by the barbed wire stood a young boy. Behind him was a worn-down shed he called home. He smiled ecstatically at my family and me; however, hidden behind his joy his eyes told a different story. He spoke of the weary elongated two-mile road he walked daily to deliver his family fresh drinking water. At times, he found himself asking passing drivers for food, water, or other necessities to provide for his family instead of attending school. As we said our goodbyes, I felt disconnected with the island I confidently believed was a part of my identity. We continued our travel down south of the Dominican Republic, finding new places to explore and encountering new people along the way. We stopped at a luminous isolated beach. Just above the rocky mountains stood scattered cardboard sheds. There, too, lived others with struggles similar to the child we had met. As I stood at the beach surrounded by the vast beauty of nature, my thoughts returned to the young boy. Our contrasting lives were separated by that barbed wire. My roots are deeply embedded in the Dominican culture; yet, my encounter with this child only confirmed my false sense of reality.

Looking out at the glistening beach, I thought back to my freshman year of high school and recalled a lecture my teacher shared with our class. “Do you see diversity in the cafeteria,” asked my freshman English teacher, “amongst your friends, this classroom? Just look around class.” I was one of four students of color sitting in freshman English; yet, I could not comprehend how

my skin color instantly separated me from my peers. My Caucasian peers did not hesitate to categorize me based on my mocha-colored skin and dark brown hair; to them I was foreign. At that moment, I instantly felt estranged, even alone among my classmates. I longed for a sense of community, a community I felt alienated from. If my complexion had been whiter, would my classmates view me equally? As a Dominican American, I felt an immense disconnect to my own identity. Often times asking myself, *who* I really am. I obtained opportunities that many people of my same complexion or darker have not been able to accomplish. Although, like many people of color, my opportunities of success has always been hindered through an unjust system. The journey I endured to stand on my two feet has been no where near easy, and every so often it felt that my path to success was also a long weary road. A false sense of hope assured me that I was much more than the color of my skin; however; as heads turned in my direction, I knew I was standing behind that barbed wire. I have never lived in a cardboard shed, much less walked two miles to deliver drinking water to my family. However, the restrictive barriers I continue to face today will no longer deprive me from finding a sense of community. As I look back at the walls that once confined me, I am no longer filled with doubt. I have crossed the barbed wire through a new foundation of growth and hope where I have claimed my identity based upon my traditional values, my inquisitive mind, and my unyielding independence.