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English 1A

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Lives Put Into Perspective

Everyone has a story, and each story may express the different reactions among people. In *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez, we are introduced to many characters who play a very small part in the story and the main two characters, Alma and Mayor. I read the book by reading four chapters a day every day. I thought the book was well thought out on the basis of the names of the character being the chapter indicator and the chapter being in that character's point of view. The characters that I picked are Alma from Pátzcuaro, Mexico because of how she believes she is the reason for Maribel's accident; which is the reason they came to America, and Mayor who is a first generation Panamanian American who is bullied at school; and lies to his father about being on the soccer team at school like his brother was. I also picked Garrett who is a bully that has to deal with being abandoned by his parents and his older brother dying; which could have led to him being the way he is, and Micho who is a photographer who once worked in Mexico and is now in America who understands that the media is the one that influences the way that American's see people from different countries. Each letter is different because each character has a trait that separates them from another character that I am writing about, from a mother making a bad decision that involved her daughter's health, to a boy being bullied and lying to his father, with another being a bully to those weaker than him and losing his brother and parents, to someone's home being in the spotlight by the media and having to deal with being racially stereotyped because of what the

media says about his race. We can begin to see the lives of these people in their point of view and how they deal with their lives because of the circumstances that lead them up to the point of their introduction. My letters are being arranged in the order of how the characters are introduced, except with Garrett, since we finally learned his name when Mayor was confronted by him in the locker room.

Dear Alma,

At the beginning of the story I had questioned your reason for coming to America since you had not explained the why the doctor had told you to do what you did. You had wondered to yourself, "Had we done the right thing, coming here? Of course, I knew the answer. We had done what we had to do. We had done what the doctor told us," (6). In the end, though I finally understood your reason and admire you for leaving your home for Maribel. I do regret to say that it was your fault for your daughter's accident and it could have been prevented if you had not crumbled to your daughter's begging. You had stated that, "She looked at me again with her big, expectant eyes. I never could resist her," (99). This shows your weakness to your daughter, which is something she should not have used against you in the case that what she wanted to do was very dangerous. You should have told her this instead of going against what Luis had said about him being the one that should go up the ladder.

What I found most interesting about you was the fact that you did what you thought was the best for your daughter and left your home just so that she would get better, showing that you care for her very much and doing something that most parents wouldn't do for their own kid. I cannot relate to your situation since I had never faced the choice of leaving my home to help a family member and never crumbled to the begging of my niece and nephew since I wanted to show them that they can't get everything they want in life. Instead of letting her climb that ladder, I would have told her that it was too dangerous for her to do and that she should let the people working the job do it instead since she is too young to be climbing such a tall ladder. I would have told her this because she has to understand that there are limits to what she can do and she cannot get her way for everything since there are consequences for the littlest of things. The only

advice I can give you is that you should not have let your will crumble to your daughter because like many kids she can use it against you to get anything she wants, which is exactly what happened and now you have to face the consequences of your decision to let her go up.

Sincerely,

Natalie Garcia

Hi Mayor,

I understand where you are coming from when you talk about how you had hoped that the bullying would stop, and I slightly understand your reason for lying to your father about soccer. You had stated that, “School had started two weeks earlier, and even though I had told myself that this would be the year the other kids stopped picking on me, the year that I actually fit in for once in my life, things already weren’t looking good” (14). Many students who are bullied hope for the bullying to someday stop, which typically happens when you and that person start going to different schools. I also understand your reason for lying to your father. He had mentioned and you had responded, ““But he’s getting better. Aren’t you?” he asked. And I struggled to nod through the rush of guilt I felt about lying to him and the humiliation I felt about sucking so bad” (68). The reason I understand why you did this is because he had always compared you to your older brother Enrique and you felt as if you were letting him down because you did not achieve anything like Enrique did. It was wrong of you to lie to your dad, but it was the only thing you could think to do.

What I found interesting about you is how you had thought that you had to lie to your dad so that he wouldn’t be disappointed in you for not being like Enrique. You should have explained to him that soccer isn’t for you and that he should have asked you if you wanted to play instead of just assuming that you would be amazing at it. I can relate to both your situations because I was bullied through most of my time in school, and I felt pressured to be just like my older sisters and brother, whom my mom view as the golden children. I think I would have also lied so that my parents wouldn’t be disappointed in me, but I later would realize my mistake and tell my mom the truth instead of having her find out from someone else. I would have acted like

this afterwards because I felt guilty about lying to her. In the case of being bullied, I would have stood up for myself and confronted the bully in a nonviolent way, asking them why they felt that it was needed to bully me. Not standing up for myself would have lead to me having to deal with it longer. My advice for you based on my experience is to confront the bullies about their reasoning for doing what they are doing to you and to tell your dad the truth because if you don't it can ruin your relationship with him and he can lose his trust in you.

From,

Natalie Garcia

Hey Garrett,

Before I start anything, I want you to understand that I do not agree with the things you have done that have caused others pain. Mayor had stated that, "The year before, he'd spent a few months in juvenile detention at Ferris because he beat up Angelo Puente so bad that by the end of it, Angelo had two broken arms and blood pouring out of his nose" (16). To hear that you had done that to someone who was possibly innocent is sad because you should not harm anyone unless they have done harm to you and even then you shouldn't cause any major or minor damage to them physically because the way they see you as a person will never change, no matter how hard you tried to better your image. I am saddened to have learned about your background though. "Garrett didn't have a single friend that I knew of. His older brother had gone to Iraq with the air force and had come back in a body bag. The rumor at school was that Garrett's mom had a breakdown after that. She just couldn't handle it, so she'd split and hadn't been back since. Supposedly Garrett's dad started drinking so much that he lost his job" (69). I won't say that I pity you, because I understand that people do not want others to pity them. I will say that what your parents did was wrong because they should have thought of you first instead of thinking about themselves only. What they did may also be the reason you feel that it is necessary to bully those you see lesser than you.

What I find interesting about you is that you had to experience the loss of an older sibling and had to deal with your parents abandoning you. I can relate to you in the sense that I had lost my stepbrother when I was young but not to him leaving for war. I was three at the time, and for five years I had to deal with my stepmom ignoring me and my brother, who was too young to remember him, just because she didn't know how to deal with losing her oldest kid. Instead of

bullying others, I would have tried to make friends so that I had someone to comfort me when I faced dark times when thinking of the sibling I lost. The advice I can give you is that you shouldn't let your parent's choices to neglect you influence your life so much and that you should fill your life with people who you know will be there rather than follow you so that they won't be a target.

From,

Natalie Garcia

Dear Micho,

I understand what you mean when you talk about how people don't know Mexico as a country and only know it for its tourist spots and how they don't know the people who come from Mexico. You had stated that, "I came from México, but there's a lot of people here who, when they hear that, they think I crawled out of hell. They hear "México," and they think: bad, devil, I don't know. They got some crazy ideas. Any of them ever been to México? And if they say, yeah, I went to Acapulco back in the day or I been to Cancún, papi, then that shit don't count. You went to a resort, congratulations. But you didn't go to México. And that's the problem, you know? These people are listening to the media, and the media, let me tell you, has some fucked-up ideas about us" (237). To hear that you think that is comforting because not many people understand that or want to admit it. I also agree with you when you mention being discriminated wherever you go. "When I walk down the street, I don't want people to look at me and see a criminal or someone that they can spit on or beat up. I want them to see a guy who has just as much right to be here as they do, or a guy who works hard, or a guy who loves his family or a guy who's trying to do the right things" (237). I understand what it is like to have something like that happen to me. People have no right to do such a thing because they don't know you as a person and they don't want to take the time out of their day to do something that doesn't benefit them.

The most interesting thing about you is that you know the differences between the reality of the country you came from to the fiction that the media wants others to believe about that said country. I can relate to your situation because while I was in Florida, I had a girl call me many different racist terms because that was how she was raised to see me on the outside and taught

not to look at me for what lies beneath my skin. I would have tried to tell them not everything the media says about something is the truth and they like twisting it to make them seem better than others. I would have acted like this because they have no right to judge me for something they know nothing about me as a person and only want to see me as a whole representation of the country where not even half of my heritage comes from. The only advice I can give to you is to not let their actions bring you down because they don't know you and don't want to take the time to get to know you as the person you want them to see you as.

Sincerely,

Natalie Garcia

Each person is connected because they have to face the facts that those around them, or they themselves, are judging them like how Garrett in a way judges Mayor because of Mayor's ethnicity. Alma judges herself because of Maribel's accident. Others judge Garrett because he bullies the kids at school and doesn't have friends. People judge Micho when he walks down the streets or goes into stores because of his ethnicity. My experiences are similar to Mayor, Garrett, and Micho because like Mayor I was bullied in school because of something I had no control over, like Garrett I lost an older sibling and had to deal with a parental figure having a mental breakdown and figuratively leave me behind, and like how Micho is judged wherever he goes just because the media says that those of Latino decent. I have no similar experiences with Alma because I did not let someone so young do something so dangerous and never let myself fall to the begging of a child. What I learned from this assignment is that everything has its consequences, and those consequences come with a lesson in life that makes us think of what we should do so that the same outcome doesn't happen. It also taught me that we shouldn't let ones ignorance affect us as a person because we know who we are as people, and if they don't want to take the time to get to know us then we shouldn't waste our time trying to explain who we are to them.

Works Cited

Henríquez, Cristina. *The Book of Unknown Americans*. Vintage, 2014