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Essay

Since the bleak beginning of my existence, I have continuously searched for the identity that surrounds my own culture. Growing up in the vast community of Texas, various ethnic backgrounds engulfed my childhood. My closest friends from elementary school all the way until high school consisted of varying cultures and practices deriving from countries halfway across the globe. However, while I was consistently reminded of the beautiful and unique cultures of my peers, my own self was lost in the midst of my own cultural universe, searching for the right star that belonged specifically to me. The thought of being an imposter within my own life captivated my thoughts when the sun rose until the sun set, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Being a Caucasian, my genetics are hay-wired with German, Italian, French, Scandinavian, and Irish backgrounds. All regions stealing tiny pieces of my DNA that ultimately make me, me. Yet, while my genetics range from multitudes of countries, I never seemed to have one that I could call my own.

During the early stages of my life, I always spent the summer break at my Nonna's house. The small, warmed cubicle that would eventually teach me all there was about my cultural identity laid to rest there, just waiting for the maturation of my own self to occur as I grew older. Inside of her house, relics of ancient Poggioreale, Sicilia, hung on the warmed toned orange and yellow walls. In the kitchen, a tile abstract piece of Sicily hung above the stove consisting of bright blues and greens that mocked the clear ocean of the coast. Wines from Northern and Southern Italy were encased in a cavern in the dining room, while black and white photographs of my Italian ancestors were sheathed inside antique photo frames on every wall inside of her Italian home. To any normal individual, her house would look as any normal home, but to me, I cured my cultural imposterness within this dwelling.

Each holiday and trip down to Nonna's house was engraved with the teachings of her culture and family from generations ago. Christmas was filled with the baking of cuccidaties; a traditional Italian pastry filled with the grindings of figs, raisins, and nuts that are encased in a dough filling. During the times of our baking shenanigans, my Nonna would reign the stories that prevailed in the history of cookies. My Nonna's grandma and grandpa would bake cuccidaties as a symbol of the Catholic Church, as each ingredient symbolized a notion of

Jesus Christ's body. While the cookies were a small step in my cultural identity search, there was vast more to the findings of my identity. Italian reunions from Poggioreale were held each year at the Saint Joseph Hall, and as the most Italian looking grandchild of my Nonna's, I was bound to go with her as her guest. Greetings were held with kisses on the cheek, and verbal sayings revolved around my appearance of my bushy eyebrows, dark eyes, and olive complexion. At each reunion, stories were told to me of my Great Grandparents and what seemed to be twenty-thousand cousins, as I deemed it to be impossible to keep track of each and every one. These gatherings made me feel as though I had a home, a place I could belong. With each sight of my Nonna, every conversation led back to how her life was influenced by her family members in Poggioreale. When I was a little girl, I paid no attention to the history behind her stories. As I grew older, I began to appreciate each meaning behind every word, as my Nonna was the key to my vast journey.

During high school, I had the continuing thought of non-belonging. As I was equipped with maturation, the realization occurred to me that I did belong somewhere. Maybe this "somewhere" is not associated with a physical place, sport, or click of friends, but instead a feeling of finding a home. The continuing trips to my Nonna's house made it apparent that I did belong somewhere. My Italian heritage shaped me to understand that because you might be a part of something small, you can always find a sense of belonging within your family.