

## El Molino

Language has always been something I've struggled with, from not being able to speak up in class or make many friends because I've been too scared to put myself out there. And although I've gotten better at dealing with the anxiety I get from speaking out and to others, I still struggle with other things relating to speaking.

Speaking two languages is something I'm glad I'm able to do because not everyone has the ability to be able to see the world in two different ways, but not being able to speak both languages equally as well is a struggle. Not knowing Spanish the way I know English is something that messes with the way I view myself, my identity and how I fit into my culture. It prevents me from being my true self in front of those who I love and in front of people I meet who I genuinely like and want to get to know more.



Every summer as well as Christmas time, I go to Ecuador and visit my family. It's my favorite time of the year and I love spending time and going out with all my cousins I don't get to see often. Although it's hard to fully be myself when I can't communicate the way I want to. It's easy to talk to my friends because I know how to say things in a way where we'll understand it. I know references, I know trends, I know slang, I know how to joke around and I share the same environment so we know the same things. But going to another country is so different in the way where you kind of need to live there to understand certain things. It's not just knowing Spanish; it's knowing references from your culture, knowing Spanish slang, watching Spanish shows, understanding different tones, and knowing how people generally converse in different places. This makes it hard to talk to others and it's difficult to connect with them completely because of the language and culture barrier.

I remember last summer I went out to a club with my cousins. We were in our town's local club called El Molino, dancing together and having the time of our lives. It was the first

time I had visited that club and the music was so good. We saw a group of people and they joined our group and eventually me and one of the guys from that group started dancing together. It felt nice and I was having fun just dancing and being around other people I knew, but then he started talking to me and it didn't feel as good anymore because of how nervous I got. It was like everything he said to me, I would just reply with “que?” meaning “what?” because I literally couldn't understand the slang he was using. It made me feel really out of place but it was also cool to see how you don't really need to talk to connect with people. Even through dancing you can connect through energy. Me and the guy, whose name was Alex, took a seat and started talking a little and I told him I wasn't really from there. I was from New York and he didn't believe me until I started talking to him in english. Once we were leaving, Alex and I exchanged numbers and we ended up talking more over text. At first I would just ask my cousin what things meant and what to say and we would both come up with what to text back. But eventually she told me to just flat out ask him to explain words and other phrases he said to me and I said no at first because at the time I thought that'd be annoying to ask someone to do, but I did end up doing that. So we would text and he would explain things to me in depth so I really got where things came from and in what settings I could or couldn't use certain phrases or words. It sounds tedious and kind of silly but it was sweet and it did end up helping me understand more conversations around me. This also made me realize that I could just ask people to explain things and it would make it so much easier to understand. Since then I've been able to talk to be a little more social with people my age when I go out over there since I've had more practice. It's also easier to talk with my cousins since I can tell her more in ways that she'd understand and I'm able to go back and forth with her better.

