

Anum Arshad

October 24th, 2013

The Diversity of Riverside

Diversity means so much more than the ethnicity you were assigned the day you were born. It embodies the holidays celebrated by each individual family, the culture shared with loved ones, and the various languages spoken around the world forming the same thoughts. To me, diversity is more than a compilation of data held in the briefcase of a man whose job it is to make important decisions based on subjective numerical compilations. Diversity is being able to walk through your city and see all of the unique people that make up one special community. Whether it is ethnicity, skin color, income level or gender, no two people are alike.

I always thought that living in Riverside was always similar to living in a homogenous city, where everyone seemed to be the same except for a few outsiders that had slipped through the cracks. My early school years consistently showed me that there wasn't that much diversity in the part of Riverside I was accustomed to living in. Everybody knows about the infamous "Orange Crest" area where diversity has seemed to be lost. Sometimes this isn't a big issue but at other times it can really affect the way one develops and grows as an individual.

Switching to a new school to start off the fourth grade, I was nervous like many other kids would have been. Eventually I learned that the nervousness I felt was not unwarranted. For the first few weeks none of the kids seemed to interact with me or invite me into their essentially closed off clique. I was not like everybody else and I soon started to feel like an outsider. If exclusion wasn't enough, eventually a few names

started to be thrown my way making me want to give up on school all together. As time passed on I made a few friends and tolerated the environment I was subjected to but the cliques never seemed to dissipate. That sense of belonging was always lost on me and it made me wonder if this is what it was like to live in Riverside.

In the 8th grade I made the conscious decision to explore a new horizon, seeing as the sun was long set on the one I once had dreams for. I had taken the plunge and signed up to go to North high school starting my freshman year instead of going to King. I was completely unfazed when the few friends I did have started to criticize my decision, letting out a few brazen opinions about the types of people that went to school there. It was my life and I was ready to find a place where I actually belonged. That first step I took was the best decision of my life.

Coming from a predominantly white school environment, the culture shock I experienced when I first stepped on to John W. North's campus was unseen by the sea of unsuspecting students around me. Nobody seemed to care that they were with dissimilar students that deviated from the social norm. Everyone just seemed to join together and form a bond that couldn't be separated by race, religion or even gender.

I had finally seen a school where everyone didn't look the same; I felt like I truly belonged here. By the end of my first class period on my first day of high school, I had already made several new friends, each different in their own way. It continued this way for the rest of the day and eventually I realized that people could be much more variant than what I was initially conditioned to believe. Surrounded by a mass of various people, it was a bit hard to comprehend at first. Eventually I became an active part of the school and experienced some of the best moments of my life as a high school student. The rich

diversity that Riverside offered now embodied me after being hidden from me not too long ago.

As I became familiar with the part of Riverside I was previously unacquainted with, my love for the city grew on and on. Downtown was a distant place not too long ago but now it was a site to visit with my friends on the weekend. The kindness and compassion people around me had never ceased to amaze me as I continued on my search of the real Riverside. A sense of accomplishment washed over me as I finally found a place that I was proud to call home.

The term diversity seems so common now that no one really understands the impact of its true meaning until it is lost from our lives. Its so much more than just a word that's thrown around by board room executives; it's the foundation of our community.