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Prompt 3

A Very Unique Experience

The children and teens in the backstretch community, including myself, have been living in the backstretch throughout our whole lives. Sharing my life with other people from similar backgrounds in a small and private community for 18 years has been an interesting experience to say the least. This community has many differences compared to any other places in the Chicago area, but there are also some similarities, and how has this experience affected me as a person.

Work and housing should be mentioned first, as it is the reason why the backstretch community exists in the first place. Work is about a 5 to 15 minute walk from home. Not many people have the luck of just taking a little stroll on their way to work. Having a job that requires you be close to these beautiful and luscious beasts is not one that everyone can have. Of course, there are dangers associated with the job, but the workers are always able to handle the dangers well. People are always helping each other, both at work, and at home. Living in a dorm room for my whole life is something that I will never forget for the rest of my life: having one singular room to be the bedroom, the living room, the kitchen, the closet, the pantry, (there is a bathroom separated by a door, of course), etc. Many people here are so tight knit that we also consider each other as family. This has helped me learn that we should always appreciate the things we have and the people that we are with because connecting with this specific set of people is a unique experience.

School also helped shape my experience in the backstretch because it took about 80% of the kids and teens' lives. Regardless of where we lived, we had transportation provided to us via school bus. At Hawthorne, the kids wake up at a similar time as the other kids that live at Cicero, but at Arlington, the kids had to wake up at the time range from 5am-5:30am so they had to ride the school bus for an hour at least to get to school, and another hour to get back from school on a good day, getting home from 4:30pm to 5:30 pm. They had less time to do homework, and even less time to go outside to play around the beautiful "park" because it is a school night and they had bedtime at 9pm. Also, due to this constraint, the kids were unable to participate in some school programs, which is a huge challenge to them if they want to go to college or do well in life. The kids would also be embarrassed if their classmates knew if they were from the backstretch because it can be assumed that they are poor. I want to tell my life story, and would almost boast about living on the racetrack. These obstacles, including the coronavirus pandemic, did not stop me, however, as I took many honors, AP classes, and some college courses, and excelled at them. This has taught me to be a hard worker and always overcome any obstacles because the rewards are always worth the fight.

The aura a stranger gets when going inside the backstretch is a very happy and welcoming one. The environment depends on where we live, if it is a resemblance of a forest, or an embodiment of a filthy urban area. Regardless of the environment, the people will always be in a happy mood, treating each other as family, and creating an overall feeling of happiness while living there. Although there are many disadvantages while living in the backstretch which include sacrificing a few more things for school, not being able to participate in some school activities, and some more added dangers to everyone other than the ones already present in other

places, there are always some good things that come out of it, like hardworking people, interacting with great people, and having a great and unique experience overall. What is included here is only 1% of what the true experience in the backstretch community is. This is only the tip of the iceberg. I cannot wait to tell my life story to people I meet and possibly telling it to my future children.