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Prompt 3

Life in the Backstretch

The backstretch community is a community like no other. I have been fortunate enough to experience both perspectives: living outside the racetrack in a house while also seeing how life is living in the backstretch. Growing up, I would be in the backstretch very often because my parents spent most of their time at the barn and they did not always have someone to take care of me. Additionally, when I started school, most of my friends had parents that worked in the racetrack too, therefore, I would visit them and get an idea of what it was like to live in the backstretch. Like in any circumstance, growing up in the backstretch comes with some challenges as well as benefits.

The backstretch community is unique since it is a community where all the people share many similarities. What brings these people together is that no matter what their job title is, they share on job characteristic in common and that it is to care for the horses and prepare them to win a race. Being part of the backstretch community is different than living in any other community or neighborhood. In another neighborhood, your neighbor may have a completely different life than you. For instance, the neighbor's job may be very different: they may have weekends off, a set schedule, and granted vacation time. This is not the case when working in the racetrack. These workers understand that just like humans have to eat, so do the horses. Working in the racetrack is a job that requires attendance seven days a week. Also, there is no set

schedule, some days may be short while others may be long and you may have to spend the whole day in the barn if there is a horse that will race.

Moreover, when living in another neighborhood, your neighbors may not necessarily understand what it means to work in the racetrack. From experience, I know that when my parents have tried to explain to our neighbors or even family what it is like to work with horses in the racetrack, they seem confused and do not understand that there is more than just seeing a small group of horses race against each other and betting.

One of the challenges of growing up in the backstretch is that there is a limitation in the experiences and opportunities available. The backstretch is made up of predominantly Hispanic people; therefore, if your whole life is spent in the backstretch, it is difficult to get out of your comfort zone and meet new people that may not be as similar to you. This happened to me, it wasn't until high school and attending university that I began to be in a more mixed environment, where there was not always something that would connect me and the person I was socializing with. Many instances I felt like I didn't belong because I was not in my comfort zone. Not everyone spoke Spanish or understood why I had such a huge interest in horses. When I would try to explain to new friends what my parents did for a living, they would quickly assume that we just owned a farm, they had never heard of the racetrack. This also caused me to lack confidence and communication skills because I could not always find the courage to interact with people that were different than me or what I was accustomed to being around.

Another challenge of growing up in the backstretch is that there is a lack of space and privacy. Families that live in the backstretch live in very small spaces. Most of the time it is one room that they accommodate as their bedroom, living room, kitchen and a bathroom. When I was younger, I remember my friends being so amazed at the fact that I lived in a 3-bedroom

household where I was able to have my own room. Growing up they didn't have that, they had to share their space with their parents and siblings and did not have much privacy. As a result, this can make it harder to learn about being independent since they always have family around.

Growing up in the backstretch, however, also has its advantages. For instance, growing up in the backstretch means that you will grow up around the same people and will have the opportunity to get to know them better. As a result, you will share and live multiple meaningful events and experiences together. Long lasting relationships will develop and friends will turn into family. Since my parents spend most of their time at the racetrack, there are many friends that are now considered family since we are always together. They have been part of many important events in my life such as my quinceñera, graduation, along many others. Similarly, I have attended many events that are important to them. Having connections and friendships with people from the backstretch results in a second family, although we may not be related by blood, I know that I can count on them when I need guidance, advice, or a favor.

The backstretch community is special. By growing up in the backstretch important morals are learned such as loyalty since you will be around and associate with the same people for years. Although there are many challenges that come with growing up in the backstretch such as limitations in experiences since many have not experienced living life outside of the backstretch and lack of privacy. There are also advantages from growing up in the backstretch since many attachments are formed. I have been blessed enough to meet many people from the backstretch that have become family, while also being able to experience life outside the backstretch. Although it was difficult at first, I have gotten more comfortable in interacting with people that are different from me, share different interests and background.