

## Personal Background

As a Human Book volunteering for the Human Library, I typically start my Readings with the same introduction:

“I was born in Peru to a low-income family. My father was a tuk-tuk driver and my mother a police officer. Our extended family, primarily composed of indigenous farmers, left the Andes to pursue rumors of prosperity in the capital and settled my family on the outskirts of Lima in the early 1900s. We had a rough start, but our circumstances changed when my father graduated as an automation engineer. He found a job in the Dominican Republic and was able to give my siblings and me the chance to attend private schools, learn English, pursue higher education, and see the world.”

Then, my Readers take over and ask me questions for the rest of the session. Usually, they inquire about the differences between our lives and steer the conversation toward my most peculiar experiences. For instance, the time my elementary school teacher washed my mouth with a soap bar. My first experience with alcohol at 12 and how I quit drinking at 18. The time the police robbed me at gunpoint. Or the time my bus was hijacked by bandits wearing ski masks and carrying AK-47s.

I know. More than peculiar, it may sound like I’ve had a tragic life. Nevertheless I, like many citizens of Latin America, don’t dwell on my misadventures. Far from it, we have a tendency of telling our stories in an engaging way: “Two police officers boarded our car, searched us, and, seeing we didn’t have any money... You won’t believe this... They made us drive to an ATM.”

In a way, I feel that this part of my life attests to García Márquez’s claim, “El surrealismo proviene de la realidad de América Latina.” And I often think about this resonance. I think that, having experienced several socioeconomic facets and geographies of the Latin American reality, I’ve always found the same: Violence, crime, poverty, and corruption.

Yet again, it’s not what it sounds like. Latin America is a land of beautiful landscapes and abundant natural resources. Home to kind, hard-working, and optimistic people, who refuse to dwell in their misadventures and who patiently await a government with solutions to their problems. And like a child holding a shiny Pokémon card, this image of Latin America is one of my most valuable possessions.

This is why I do many things, like being a firefighter, running for student body president, and conducting research. Because I want to believe that I can contribute to making my card even shinier.