



By Brady Wijbrandts
Class of 2023

Nature of Community

Community is not where you reside, but rather who resides within you. The core value Jose Antonio Vargas is striving to find in an isolated world of being undocumented is community. The nature of community shown throughout *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen* can be identified as running from community and seeking community. Furthermore, Jose is stuck in a situation he cannot control and has the choice to either trust his peers with his true identity or continue to bury himself in a deeper hole of isolation. In addition, when Jose makes the leap of faith to open up about his sexual identity and being an illegal immigrant, he begins his journey of relying on community to help him along the way. Jose wants to teach his readers about the nature of community through his stories of lying, rejection, and trust.

Jose realized, from the time he tried to get his driver's license and found out he had fake papers, that lying was going to have to become part of his daily nature. His community would be created and evolved around lies in order for him to live a normal American life with his dark secret. Jose wants to teach others that not everyone is given the same advantages to start life and that it is mentally draining to lie to a community you want to trust and be a part of, but as an

undocumented citizen, lying seems essential to survival. Ultimately, when Jose opened up about who he is, he was rejected by his family, strangers, and the government. Coming out as gay was the first rejection he faced within the journalism community, and even Lola, whom he loved dearly, drifted away from him. Interviewers and news reporters personally attacked him, and he was also harassed for flying first class as an undocumented citizen, even though he couldn't control being illegal in the first place. His community was no longer a place of comfort.

Jose wants to teach us to respect everyone because you do not know their background and the terrible circumstances piled onto people. Lastly, Jose had to decipher who he could trust and who would turn him in. He eventually had to trust people when legal papers wouldn't allow him to lie anymore. Ultimately, Jose had to rely on the nature of community to be loyal to him because it was his last chance at a normal life. Jose suffered, but was always supported and helped by loved ones and friends he could trust. Jose teaches us a lesson about the importance of balancing the right time and right people to trust.

An inspiration to many, Jose is a fighter for freedom and success far beyond the average documented American. Jose is living the American dream without even being American. People sought out his heart, not his legal papers. That is the only way he stayed grounded on American soil. Community is built through relationships, not where you come from or the struggles you have been through. Community is not a location, but rather a value you bring wherever you go. Jose was the definition of bringing the community with him and sharing it with everyone around him no matter the circumstances. Overall, Jose demonstrated a new idea of community through lying to stay in the country, overcoming rejection, and making trust an essential part of survival in his life.

(Brady is a sports media major from Peoria, Arizona.)