

Being from the Valley of the Sun

By: Jeannette Martinez

If you have ever lived in Sun Valley, then you probably know “the look.” The look comes from the person you have just told where you live. They may perceive Sun Valley residents to be one or more of the following: poor, working class, white or Latino and with low economic status, a lowlife; and of course, living in a trailer. It is a look that stigmatizes. Although it may seem like an exaggeration, I have received this look more than once, and it would not surprise me if it has been given to other Sun Valley residents. After living in other areas in Reno throughout the past twenty years, and then always finding my way back to Sun Valley, I have become attuned to how others perceive Sun Valley culture and the people who choose to live there. It is assumed that Sun Valley residents are for one reason or another, outcasts of Reno, thus live on the outskirts of it, even though that is not usually the case.

Sun Valley is a desolate, unforgiving desert landscape sprouting with mobile homes and entrenched with dirt roads. Turn into any street outside of the main road, Sun Valley Boulevard, and you will find a variety of mobile homes with character. In some homes, objects such as tires and other car parts decorate its surroundings, while others are eccentrically painted bright pink with white polka dots. You can buy an old boat and rebuild it right in front of your trailer, as I have seen a resident has done; you can own horses, you can plot your home whichever way you would like; to a certain extent, you can live the way you want there. The simultaneous lack of uniformity, yet silent consensus for individualism, is what draws residents in. Independence and resilience, whether coming from sheer desire or from necessity, exists in the people and their rebellion to conform to the Midtown way of

life. It is a place of individuality in one of the most organic and unrestrained ways I have witnessed and have been a part of.

The Latinx culture, especially Mexican and Salvadoran culture, although not the largest, is strong and proud.¹ It is what I know best about Sun Valley. The Sun Valley landscape for many Latinx people, especially for Latinx immigrant parents, is reminiscent of home. Perhaps it is because nature is unbound, or perhaps it is because its ruralness brings a familiar warmth to their hearts. My mom has said many times, “Aquí me gusta porque se parece mucho a El Salvador, la tierra, los árboles, como pega el sol...” (*I like it here because it reminds me of El Salvador, the terrain, the trees, the strength of the sun*). The culture is present in local businesses, such as Alfredo’s Tacos truck on the corner of Fourth Street and Sun Valley Boulevard and the Pupusa food truck right across the street, the predominantly Spanish speaking Sun Valley Catholic church, St. Peter Canisius, and within the very mobile homes inhabited by Latinx families. Working-class Latinx families in Sun Valley make up about 30% of its inhabitants.² Because the cost of living is lower in Sun Valley, it has allowed many immigrant families, such as mine, to reach an alternative to the once sought “American dream” of owning a home. It is not the standard two-story home with a white picket fence typically envisioned, but it is nonetheless a place to call your own.

Many minority groups, like the Latinx community with lower economic status, are being pushed out of the central Reno area due to the increase in rent and gentrification of areas that used to be predominantly Latinx, such as Wells Avenue. This economic push-out inevitably forces many working-class people to only find affordable living in Sun Valley, or

¹ I use Latinx instead of Latina/o because despite of homophobia/transphobia and racism/anti-blackness, trans, queer and anti-racist Latinx people exist in Sun Valley.

² Cummins, 195.

much further out. Furthermore, this socioeconomic trickle effect exemplifies that it is not only a personal choice to live in a place like Sun Valley, many times, it is the best choice of already limited options. Mobile homes are cheaper than a home that is not transportable, thus allow individuals who would otherwise not be able to buy a \$300,000 to \$800,000 home (or more), standard price range in the broader Reno area, to own a home.³

At first glance, Sun Valley does not present itself as appealing, but the goal to live on your own terms, and the resistance to conform to the status quo of upscale suburbia is what makes it an interesting place, and in this nature is where the city's identity lies. Even though it is a place where people try to make the best with what they have, the combination of being working-class and being a minority, along with the mobile home title, is heavily disdained. Consequently, this leads to less resources, which impacts the very quality of living for residents, and contributes to the erasure of Sun Valley people and culture overall.

³ "Reno, NV Real Estate Homes for Sale." Accessed July 1, 2020.

Works Cited

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