

“Mama, I’m Famous!”

By Cassandra Mendez



I was a freshman in college sitting alone in a glass room in Ohio State University’s main library, drinking a frozen hot chocolate on a warm April night. Suddenly, someone I had not had the pleasure of knowing quietly knocked on the glass and I, thinking he needed the room, waved him in.

I was greeted with, “I feel like I’ve seen you before, have we met?”

(Bear in mind, he was asking a legally blind person.)

“I don’t think we have,” I responded tentatively. “But I’m the girl with the stick around campus, if that helps.”

“Oh yes! I have seen you before!”

My unexpected guest turned out to be a very nice gentleman, who asked me curious yet respectful questions about my vision, which led to a good conversation. This encounter reminded me that I may be more easily remembered thanks to my appearance.

“Oh yes! I have seen you before!”

All throughout my life, encounters like this have been commonplace. People who knew me fifteen or twenty years ago will still stop my (Puerto Rican) mom in stores and ask, “Do you have a blonde daughter? I remember her!”

This past year, I started a new job in the same city where I went to college. Many of my entry-level colleagues would easily respond to my introduction with, “Oh, I’ve seen you around! We had a class together,” to which I tried to be polite. I’ve even been in bathrooms on the other end of the building where women begin with, “Don’t you walk to work every day? I just love seeing you and your working dog!”

The most fascinating recognition was at a Starbucks in the Seattle airport a couple years ago. Having received a tap on the shoulder, I jolted and removed an earbud only to hear, “Do you fly often? I’ve seen you and your dog on some flights and I knew I recognized you!”

As a teenager, I craved that glorious anonymity which I assumed was inherent to a large setting like Manhattan. Yet after having attended a university of 60,000 and working in a corporate office of 13,000, I know that anonymity is merely an illusion. While I still wish I could come and go as I choose, I’m not sure I would recognize my own life without the privilege of being so recognizable thanks to albinism. It frequently leads to interesting discussions, whether about my vision or what classes I took in college. As I said to my mother after my first stage performance at age four, “Mama, I’m famous!”