UC SANTA BARBARA
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# From ‘Broken’ to ‘New Beginning’

A week ago tragedy struck my hometown of San Bernardino. I wish to first send out my condolences to the families, loved ones, and all others affected by the recent disaster out of San Bernardino. Losing someone we know and love is never an easy thing. Having lost several family members and friends to various forms of gun violence, I am sensitive to what some of those grieving are going through.

I never thought that my experience with losing loved ones to gun violence would be relevant to my existence as a student at UC Santa Barbara, until we experienced our own mass shooting in Isla Vista in May 2014. At that time, I found myself consoling students in my classes — much as I had been consoled in my time of grief — by offering a space for these students to express their grief. As a university representative I also suggested additional resources available to help them through their process. Over the past year and a half I have tried to make peace with the fact that regardless of where my family and I choose to live in the U.S., we will more than likely have to deal with some type of gun violence affecting our community.

Last Wednesday while playing with my children, I couldn’t shake the thought of calling my mom. My mother and I speak regularly on the phone, and now that my children are old enough to communicate, they also get on the phone and chat with their “Nana” for a little while. So, as I strategized my day to figure out a good time to call mom, I began receiving text messages, emails and social media alerts regarding a mass shooting that had occurred in my hometown of San Bernardino. My heart sank as my thoughts turned to the family members and friends who live in San Bernardino. I immediately called my mother but was unable to get through to her. I

decided to try her back in a couple of minutes; I figured she might be on the line with someone else, checking in on her as well.

Soon after, when various reports stated that the gunmen involved in the mass shooting were on the loose, my anxiety rose. I picked up my phone and kept dialing until I was finally able to get through to my mom. She explained to me that they were all OK. They were a little frightened, and confused, about what was going on, and why. My mother explained to me that all of the local government buildings and schools had been placed under “lockdown,” including a school one of my nephews attends. I later spoke with him and he told me that nothing traumatic had occurred. Most people on campus, he said, were just following the news — online or through social media.

I’m relieved that my family is safe, but my heart still aches. It aches because as a human being, I can’t help but empathize with someone else who has experienced a loss of life. It seems that my whole life I have been dealing with death as well. Prior to moving to San Bernardino, my family and I lived in a southern section of the Rampart District in Los Angeles. All I can really remember about our neighborhood was the violence. I remember the violence, either associated with drugs, gangs, or police brutality. Matter of fact, one of the main reasons our family moved out of Los Angeles was due to this violence. As a result, I was raised in San Bernardino from the time I was in second grade.

Although once popularly known as the site of the first McDonald’s restaurant and where Taco Bell’s founder opened his first fast-food stand, in addition to being home to the Little League Western Regional tournament, San Bernardino today struggles to move past its 2012 bankruptcy. Its residents struggle to find hope, motivation, and inspiration — in anything — to help them get through the day.

Over the last 6 months, the Los Angeles Times has published three articles detailing some of these conditions: “Broken City,” (June 14); “No Room at the Inn for Innocence,” (July 22); and the latest, “San Bernardino: Broken” (November 6).

As someone who grew up in a working-class household, I understand the financial difficulties that many families face in San Bernardino today. Struggling to find where one might get their next meal, struggling to find stable housing, stable employment, stable relationships. Always struggling.

An important question still exists: “What is going to be done to help San Bernardino move forward?” San Bernardino, like many other working-class cities, needs help. San Bernardino needs other communities to open their hearts and offer their support (emotional and fiscal). We need to rally behind San Bernardino, use this tragedy to bring some much-needed national attention to other social issues that have long plagued the residents of this once-thriving Inland Empire community. The residents of San Bernardino need more investment toward creating, and sustaining, permanent employment opportunities for its residents. They also need better funding for their public schools and after-school programs. Children need to feel like their communities believe in them and their futures. Parents need to feel like they can provide for their children.

One way to show our youth that we believe in them is by investing in their futures. Many civic leaders (Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, Paolo Freire, Carter G. Woodson, Cesar Chavez, Malala Yousafzai, to name a few) have long argued that literacy is the key to freedom: physical or otherwise. I believe that much like the Phoenix, San Bernardino will rise from its ashes to forge a “new beginning.” I believe it will do so because the people of San Bernardino have the heart and the resilience to do so. I send my love and warm wishes, from one SB to another SB.

***Editor’s Note:*** *Galicia is a Ph.D. candidate and teaching assistant in UCSB’s Gevirtz Graduate School of Education. He was the student speaker at the Graduate Division’s 2015 commencement ceremony and previously served as the Graduate Division’s Diversity and Outreach Peer Advisor.*

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## About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.