



StoryCorps: A Lesson in Belonging

By [Charles Vogl](#)



Recently, I heard this piece produced by StoryCorps. It moved me, in part because it is about feeling at home in America.

My family came to what was not yet part of the United States in both the 18th and 19th centuries. So Francisco Ortega's story of when and how he felt "belonging" in the United States reminded me how hard some people work to guarantee that the next generation will feel safer and more comfortable. It demonstrates how relationships, empathy, and connection are deepened when we share the stories of our formation.

If you haven't heard this 3-minute piece, please stop reading and click the link to listen.

Francisco Ortega and Kaya Ortega on StoryCorps:

<http://storycorps.org/listen/francisco-ortega-and-kaya-ortega-161216/#>

Francisco's words are:

One day at college, a professor of mine says "Hey, I have these guys that are struggling." So they gave me kids to tutor and this kid calls me to have a beer. He says, "Hey. I wanna meet you down at this bar." So I go down.

This guy grabs my arm and he says to me, "I want to thank you for helping me, I couldn't have done it without you."

And as I'm walking away back to campus, I am flooded with this emotion. And I'm like "why am I feeling this way?" and I realize I came to this country as a poor non-English speaking immigrant kid, and I was teaching how to write. And for the first time in my life, I felt like I belonged here.

Why did this move me? Because Francisco reminds us that when we contribute, we can step up to a new level of feeling belonging. In Francisco's experience, someone (perhaps unwittingly) invited him to help others in their formation, and this led to his deeper belonging — not only at college, but in the country.

I write more about this in the "Inner Rings" chapter in *The Art of Community*. We don't need to get bogged down in the details here. What matter is that when we are working to bring people together and to create stronger belonging, inviting others to contribute (even if we think our role is to teach them) can make all the difference.

How are you inviting or facilitating others to contribute? Are they waiting for an emotional experience of belonging because they aren't contributing yet and don't know what is possible?

Special thanks to the non-fiction storytellers and producers at StoryCorps, who remind me that America is so much more than what network executives are willing to put on TV.

- Charles Vogl

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