

public face to protect private realities. This was the year I learned to travel between two cultures.

I remember getting dressed in front of the space heater in the bedroom I shared with my older brother and younger sister. Catholic school girls wore uniforms: we wore white blouses and blue jumpers. I remember my mother braiding my hair and my sister's. The part she drew down the back of my head was as straight as could be, and the braid she wove was as tight as she could manage--to withstand our running, jumping and hanging from the bars at recess. "*No quiero que sean greñudas*", my mom would say. "I don't want you to look uncombed." Appearance is very important within the Latino culture, and teasing with taunts such as *greñuda* is frequently based on physical traits.

As I put on the uniform and as my mother braided my hair, I changed, I became my public self. Our school uniforms concealed a minimal wardrobe, and our braids announced that we were clean and well cared for at home. As we walked to school, away from home, away from the unpaved streets, away from the "Spanish" to the "Gringo" part of town, I would wonder what the people were like in the big houses. What did they eat? Did my English sound like theirs? Surely their closets were filled with dresses, sweaters, and shoes, all worn only once.¹

The uniform and the braids were my ethnic disguise, the public face which helped me bridge the psychic distance between our life at home and my life at school. Assuming a public persona is perhaps not an unusual adult experience. For me, it was a