

KATE RAMSEYER: Hello, my name is Kate Ramseyer and this is the *Vox Insider*. Today, I'll be talking to Vox writer Austin Garza about the process behind writing his story about the Mexican restaurant Los Comales.

Los Comales Restaurant and Store opened in Columbia during 2022, but this story covers more than that. Garza's writing is personal, and lets the reader know how going to Los Comales helped him connect with his own Mexican heritage. I chatted with him about his process and why he wanted to write about it. Take a listen.

Austin, you were working on the Los Comales story. How did you think of the idea to come up with it?

GARZA: So the idea initially came from just going being at that restaurant and eating there a handful of times last spring and throughout the this past fall, and being on boxes, eat and drink department. I it was a shift from being on culture. And so our first pitch was, like the first week of classes, and I didn't really have an idea, and so I thought about like, restaurants I'd been to that didn't really have coverage, and Los camales was probably my like go to. I want to say it was like my first idea, and it was just because, like, you know, I love the food, I love the atmosphere. And so the idea started as just really, like a, like standard story, I feel, and it kind of developed from there. I got some really good feedback that suggested maybe taking, like a first person perspective on the story, and it really just started to build up from from that point on.

RAMSEYER: So, like, did you, you didn't go in thinking that it was going to be a like, first person?

GARZA: No, not at all. I, I really hadn't thought about myself ever really doing a first person story, especially at Vox. I just it wasn't even an idea for me.

RAMSEYER: Even before, thinking of it as like, in first person, like, did you want, Were you incorporating aspects of like, your personal life and kind of what you get into?

GARZA: So I, when I was pitching it, I kind of did that. I just said, like, hey, you know, there's this really great Mexican restaurant. They have this store on the side, and, you know, they sell, you know, they serve authentic Mexican food. And as somebody who is, I guess, Mexican American, it's really cool to have it in Colombia, and to like, have the opportunity to eat food that's, you know, a little less Tex Mex, a little more authentic. And also, like, go to this store and like, buy, like, snacks, or, you know, whatever that might be. Um, but really, I think, like, my biggest, like, the big thing when it started out was just doing a regular department story. I couldn't, I didn't even imagine that. I really

could implement myself into it like that, beyond just pitching it and just saying what my connection is, and, like, kind of leaving it there

RAMSEYER: was this the first time that you had, I don't know, a super personal connection to a story like this on this level?

GARZA: absolutely. I did a story at the end of the fall semester that was about soul bros like the sneaker store downtown. And I want to say I have a pretty personal connection to that too, just because I love, I love fashion and especially footwear. So there was a connection there. But I feel like this story absolutely just kind of like hit on, like this deeper level.

RAMSEYER: How does it feel, getting so personal in your journalism?

GARZA: It felt kind of like weird at first, my first draft, I felt like I got pretty personal, but also I could tell I was like holding back a little bit. And it's funny, because I got my first draft edit back and my department editor. She was like, You need to go deeper. Like, this is not this is not deep enough, and I need you to, like, dig a little more. And I was like, okay, yeah, I probably could.

RAMSEYER: Was there anything that, like, was unexpected throughout this process for you?

GARZA: I think the most unexpected thing, and the most difficult thing was being okay with how personal I got. I mean, like, I touched on, you know, being I'm about, like, half Mexican, and I really, like, talked about, you know, growing up, you know, when I would tell people that I was Mexican, it would, you it was usually, like, something I'd get, like, confused reactions back. And I feel like that was, like, the most difficult part was tapping into that, because it's something that I don't really talk about, especially with, like, a lot of people, like, I've talked about it with like, a handful, but like to put it in writing and to put it on something that is going to be online and also in, hopefully in a print magazine at some point that was that was unexpected, and that was kind of difficult, because, like, the whole time I was like, am I, am I doing too much with this? Is this? Is this going to be a little like, too much information, and just navigating that, I feel like, was the most unexpected thing and the biggest challenge. Looking at it now, I'm very happy with the finished product.

RAMSEYER: What were you hoping once would happen, like once the article published?

GARZA: You know, I really hope that there are people who kind of have a similar experience to me where, you know, they grow up and they have, you know, this Hispanic

background, this Latino background, but it's, it's not really something that was super prevalent throughout their life, but it was something that they always like, kind of longed for. I hope that, you know, people like that can read the story and see that there are places in this area where that's a possibility. You know, I grew up, actually, at a high school Spanish teacher who kind of had a similar experience to mine. So I know that it's possible to kind of, like, tap into, you know, your culture and your background. I just I hope that my story can do that for people and show that, you know, there are these avenues to which you can do that. But also I hope that you know, the people at the restaurant, they read it, and they see that, you know, they're doing great work in the community, and that they're doing like they're impacting people in a way that goes beyond just like serving them a meal.

RAMSEYER: That was Austin Garza on this episode of the Vox Insider. The article we discussed today is live now on Vox Magazine dot com. Make sure to check it out, and keep tuning in to Vox Insider.