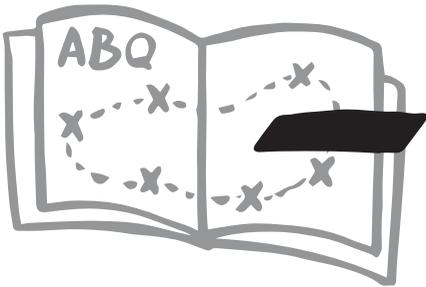




BE-



LONG



ING

WELCOME.

This 'zine was published as part of and on the occasion of *Belonging*, a project by Christine Wong Yap with participation from the public and community partners Working Classroom and Saranam.

The *Belonging* project was developed in Sanitary Tortilla Factory's first artist-in-residence program from June 1–July 8, 2017, which was generously supported by the Fulcrum Fund in partnership with the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and The FUNd at Albuquerque Community Foundation.

Belonging
©Christine Wong Yap 2017
Albuquerque, NM

Drawings, maps, signs: Christine Wong Yap
Photos, activities: Contributors as noted

SanitaryTortillaFactory.com
ChristineWongYap.com
BelongingABQ.com

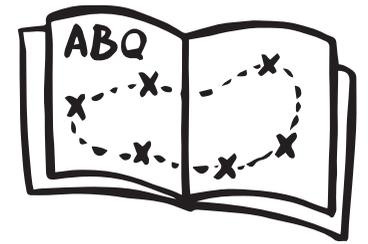
Belonging is a community-engaged, participatory project with three components:



STORY COLLECTION
about places of belonging in Albuquerque via an open call and workshops with community partners.



Thirteen **HAND-PAINTED SIGNS** commemorating places of belonging installed at sites in Albuquerque. In addition, custom **ACTIVITY SHEETS** will be available in wooden boxes at five sites.



This 'ZINE, featuring features **MAPS** of the signs, and **EXCERPTS** of the contributed stories.

CONTRIBUTORS

WHO

This project's lifeblood is collaboration with **Working Classroom**, an arts and education program for young artists from historically ignored communities; and **Saranam**, a two-year housing and education program for homeless families in Albuquerque.

I also created a public open call, welcoming everyone with meaningful connections to Albuquerque to contribute. Since the project aims to challenge assumptions and declare *We All Belong Here*, I wanted to focus on people whose belonging has been questioned, including immigrants and refugees.

There are 24 contributors. About half are in their teens or twenties, reflecting the constituencies of the community partners. Contributors include an 11-year-old and an octogenarian. One contributor has lived in ABQ two years, another, 47.

HOW & WHY

The goal of *Belonging* is to reveal the pivotal experiences that shape one's sense of belonging and connectedness to a place and country, and how it ultimately defines our authentic selves.

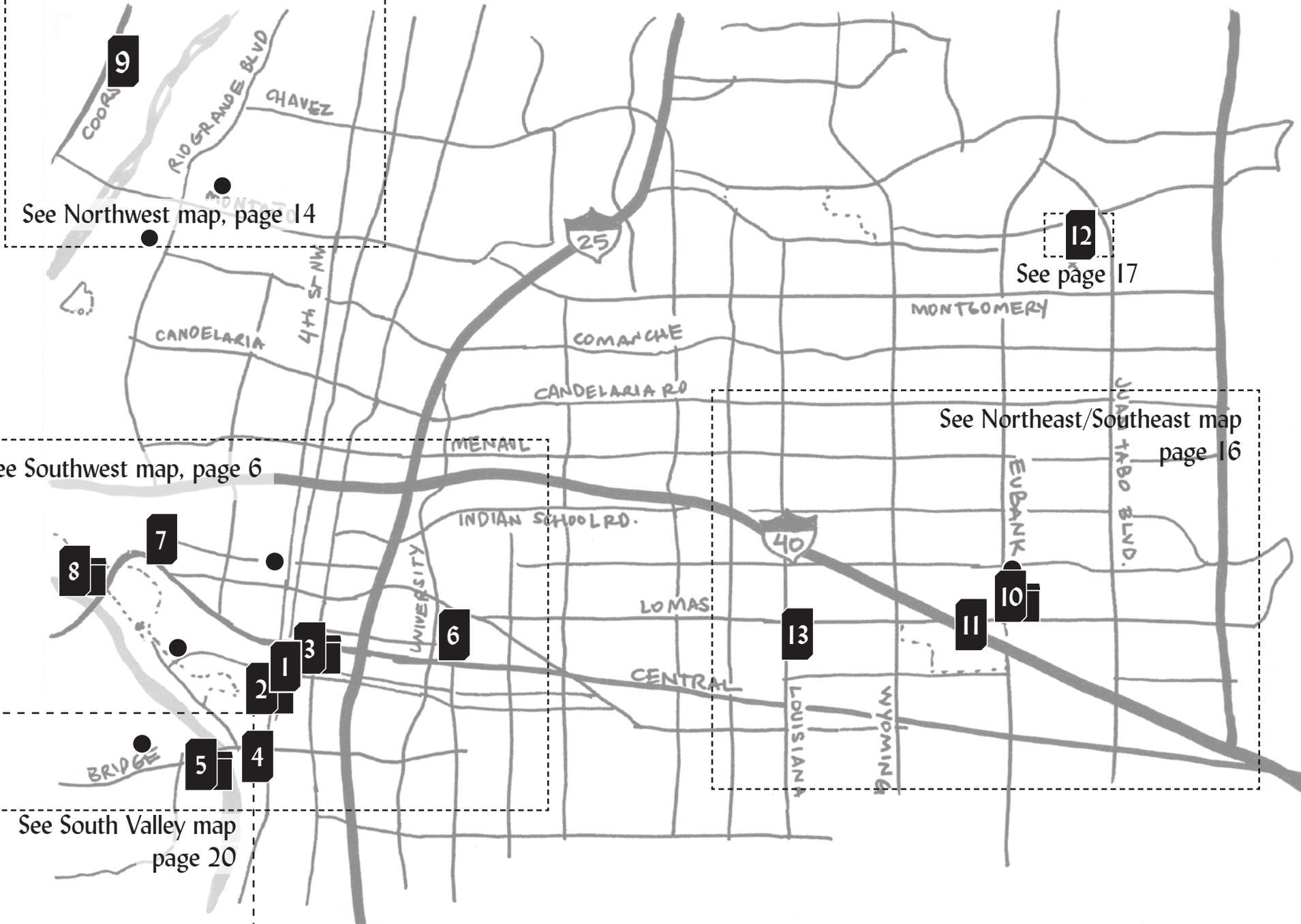
"Belonging" can be quite abstract when tackled head-on. I started by asking: *How does it feel to belong? To not belong? Why is it important to feel a sense of belonging?*

Then, I invited people to share *places where they have felt a sense of belonging*—places where they've thought: "I belong here," "This is my community," or "This is where I feel most at home." That is a proxy for discussing spaces that relate to the **people, activities, and events** that have impacted them.

Contributor's sites and stories—and the multidimensional human experiences they reveal—follow.

Anonymous
Anonymous
Anonymous
Andrea
Barbara Bell
Monica Bencomo
Manuel Castillo
Keily Castro
David De La Cruz
Gabby
Jamie
King of the Court
Jessamyn Lovell
Lucilia Lozoya
Zahra Marwan
Yudima Valdes Mesa
Carolyn Meyer
Analy Morales
Jesus Javier Morales
Jamie P
Ana P. Palma
Izaiah Ramos
Jose Ramirez
Molly Stephens
Estephania Valencia

PLACES OF BELONGING IN ALBUQUERQUE



KEY

 A place of belonging commemorated with a hand-painted sign installed on site.¹

 A place of belonging commemorated with a hand-painted sign and an activity box installed on site. All activities are freely downloadable from BelongingABQ.com.

 Additional places of belonging.²

¹ Note that not all locations are publicly accessible.

² I created signs for some, but not all, of the stories, for reasons pragmatic and editorial, and out of respect for private homes.

1 2ND ST SW

Between Lead & Coal
a creative community

JESSAMYN LOVELL: Sanitary Tortilla Factory, Zendo Coffee, and Sidetrack Brewing are “businesses and spaces that feel safe(r) and welcoming and supportive of artists and creators... especially on First Friday nights when there are art openings and food trucks... I feel a part of this community. It’s fluid and thriving, which in turn feeds me and helps empower me in my workspace [Sanitary Tortilla Factory art studio]. When I chat with fellow studio mates, head to Zendo for a tea, or Sidetrack for a beer, I always feel more whole-nourished.”

Jessamyn Lovell offers free and reduced-rate private investigator services of all kinds and collaboratively creates art works with her clients. JessamynLovell.com

2 WORKING CLASSROOM

423 Atlantic Ave SW
a safe zone

ANALY MORALES: “The people here stand for my rights, for others’ rights, for everyone’s rights. [Having Working Classroom as] my safe space ... gave me the confidence to go out into the world, and project my confidence.”

ESTEFANIA VALENCIA: When “there were many struggles at home,” Working Classroom became “a home away from home, and gave me a sense of belonging and family. I have grown as a young girl from immigrant parents to the young lady who is strong and willing to fight for what she believes is right.”

ANA P. PALMA: “I learned to be confident and strong there.... I am now outgoing, adventurous, calm and active in my community. I wouldn’t be all these things if it wasn’t for Working Classroom friends.”

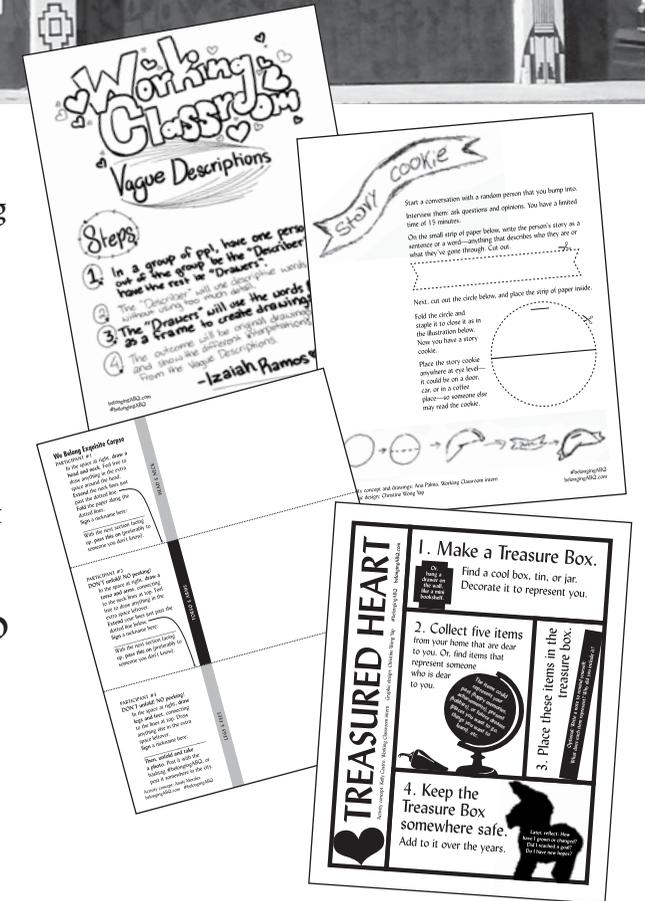
KEILY CASTRO: “The people at Working Classroom have made me feel like my voice is valuable and that I have the potential to belong in places that weren’t necessarily made with me in mind. They have given me art as an outlet to create my own space of belonging ... guiding me in the direction of learning how... to create that space for others.”



PHOTO: ANA P. PALMA

An activity box located inside Working Classroom holds four activities:

- **Vague Descriptions**, a group drawing activity by IZAIHAH RAMOS.
- **Story Cookie**, an intervention activity by ANA P. PALMA.
- **We Belong Exquisite Corpse**, an interactive drawing activity concept by ANALY MORALES.
- **Treasured Heart**, a collecting activity concept by KEILY CASTRO (with additions by Christine Wong Yap inspired by “the symbolic ecology of the home” as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*).



Analy Morales, Estephania Valencia, Ana P. Palma, Keily Castro, and Izaiah Ramos are interns at Working Classroom, an arts and education program promoting the creative, academic, and leadership potential of talented young artists from historically ignored communities. WorkingClassroom.org

3 THE BOX

100 Gold Ave SW
my place in Albuquerque

CAROLYN MEYER: “Since I arrived in Albuquerque in 1984, I have lived in various parts of the city.... Seven years ago I moved to a Downtown loft ... and my life changed completely. Neighbors became good friends. I walk everywhere. I ride the bus. And I discovered The Box, the theater downstairs on the ground floor of my apartment building.

“I went down to a couple of improv performances and enjoyed it. I signed up for a class—a risky move for a professed introvert. And then another, and another. I was hooked. I enjoyed the actors and the students in the classes, although I’m decades older than almost everyone else. I embraced the improv theory and its collaborative philosophy. It has affected almost everything I do now, in ways both large and small. I have found my place in Albuquerque. Now I know where I belong.”

Carolyn Meyers is a writer who has published over 60 books, mostly historical fiction for young adults. ReadCarolyn.com

An activity box located inside The Box lobby holds **ABQ Improv Prompts**, a sheet of 33 cards of local locations and characters.

4 NATIONAL HISPANIC CULTURAL CENTER

1701 4th St SW
self-discovery, identity

MONICA BENCOMO: “My parents were in the military. I struggled with a sense of identity after moving constantly when I was young and living in places where my Latino heritage was nonexistent. In 2009, I started volunteering at the Hispanic Cultural Center because I wanted to donate my time to a good cause in my community, while simultaneously learning more about my heritage. I consider it my ‘home away from home’ as I spend as much free time as I can donate to the institution.

“It’s been important to me because it has exposed me to local and national Latino art, music, and history and has helped me on my way to self-discovery, searching for my Latino identity, while also grounding me in my community.”

Monica Bencomo is Chicana and proud of her Mexican-American heritage.

5 RIVERSIDE DR. SW

off La Vega Dr. SW
be of service to my community

BARBARA BELL: “My feeling of belonging is a combination of nature right outside my door, the relaxed style of the neighborhood, and the types of neighbors I have.

“The Rio Grande is directly across the street... I can go for a walk to relax, bird-watch, walk the dogs, reflect on my day. These are very centering activities that make me feel good.

“My neighbors are, as a whole, unpretentious.... Many Albuquerqueans have a fear of the South Valley. It is felt that it is a dangerous and crime ridden area. I have not found this to be true. Most of my neighbors are poor, but they get by. There are also really down-and-out people with drug problems, but they don’t cause problems for me. Deborah is a heroin addict who lives somewhere down the street. She tries to keep her life together. I talk to her every time she walks by. Sometimes I give her money. She never asks me for money. She never asks me for anything. I’ve known her for 14 years. Somehow she gets by.

“It’s funny that my neighbors [an 80-year-old Hispanic widow and an 84-year-old Mexican woman who lives alone and needed my help following her surgery] have direct similarities in age, language, and lifestyle, but they do not even acknowledge one another because there is animosity between Native Hispanic New Mexicans and persons from Mexico.... Ironically, acceptance is one of the reasons I feel like I belong in my neighborhood—I feel that I can be myself without expectations and that I can connect with and be of service to my neighbors.”



An activity box located at the northern bend of Riverside Drive SW near a footpath to the river holds **A Few Birds of the Rio Grande / Unas Aves del Rio Grande**, a birdwatching activity suggested by Barbara Bell and created by Christine Wong Yap.

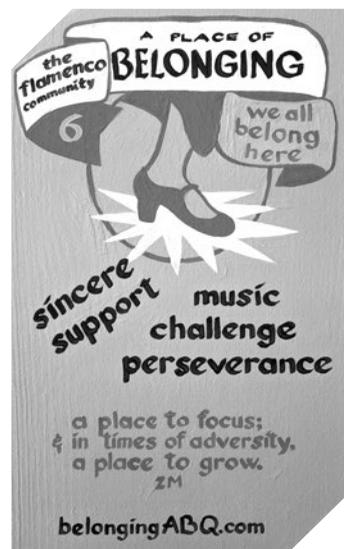
6

FLAMENCO COMMUNITY U.N.M.

Carlisle Gym
Central Campus
music, challenge, sincere support

ZAHRA MARWAN: “The music, challenge, perseverance, and sincere support from the teachers—such as Eva Encinias, a great support—give me a sense of belonging. Initially, I began to study it because the first time I heard the singing, or *cante*, it reminded me of the call to prayers in the Middle East. It gives me a place to focus, and in the times of adversity, has pushed me to grow.”

Zahra Marwan is a Kuwaiti-New Mexican illustrator. ZahraMarwan.com



7

OLD TOWN

Old Town Plaza
ancestry, history

LUCILA LOZOYA (as told to Estefania Valencia): “Old Town hasn’t lost its essence and the ancestry continues to be there. It makes me feel like I am still in my own land. After all it used to belong to Mexico.”



The Bosque. “I love how alive it is. It’s full of sounds.” —ANONYMOUS PHOTO: DAVID DE LA CRUZ

8

THE BOSQUE

Paseo Del Bosque Trail
my favorite place in the whole world

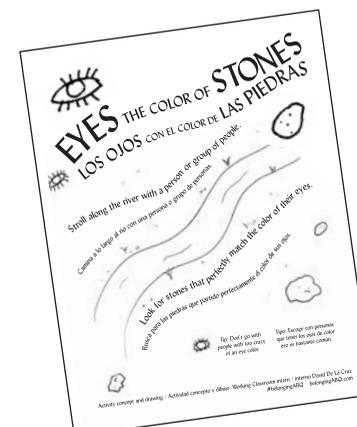
JAMIE P: “Farming, bird-watching, building community, and linking them all together, has tied me to the land and the people and other creatures who enjoy and depend on it.”

“From the Cesar Chavez/Dolores Huerta Day(s) of Service, to the classic Americana that is the Maize Maze, to the dog days of summer diggin’ in the dirt—tending the people by tending the land feels so incredible and grounding.”

“I will always have a big piece of my heart in the—sometimes sandy, sometimes clay—soils of the floodplains of the Middle Rio Grande. I have been forever touched by the Rio’s powerful effects and will always feel at home, just like the Great Blue Herons and cormorants—even when some might think of me as out of place. Where life can be supported, no matter who found their way to the bounty, life is welcome, and I feel that nurturing in the Open Spaces all throughout the valley, no matter what geopolitical happenings may currently surround me or this sacred swath of land.”

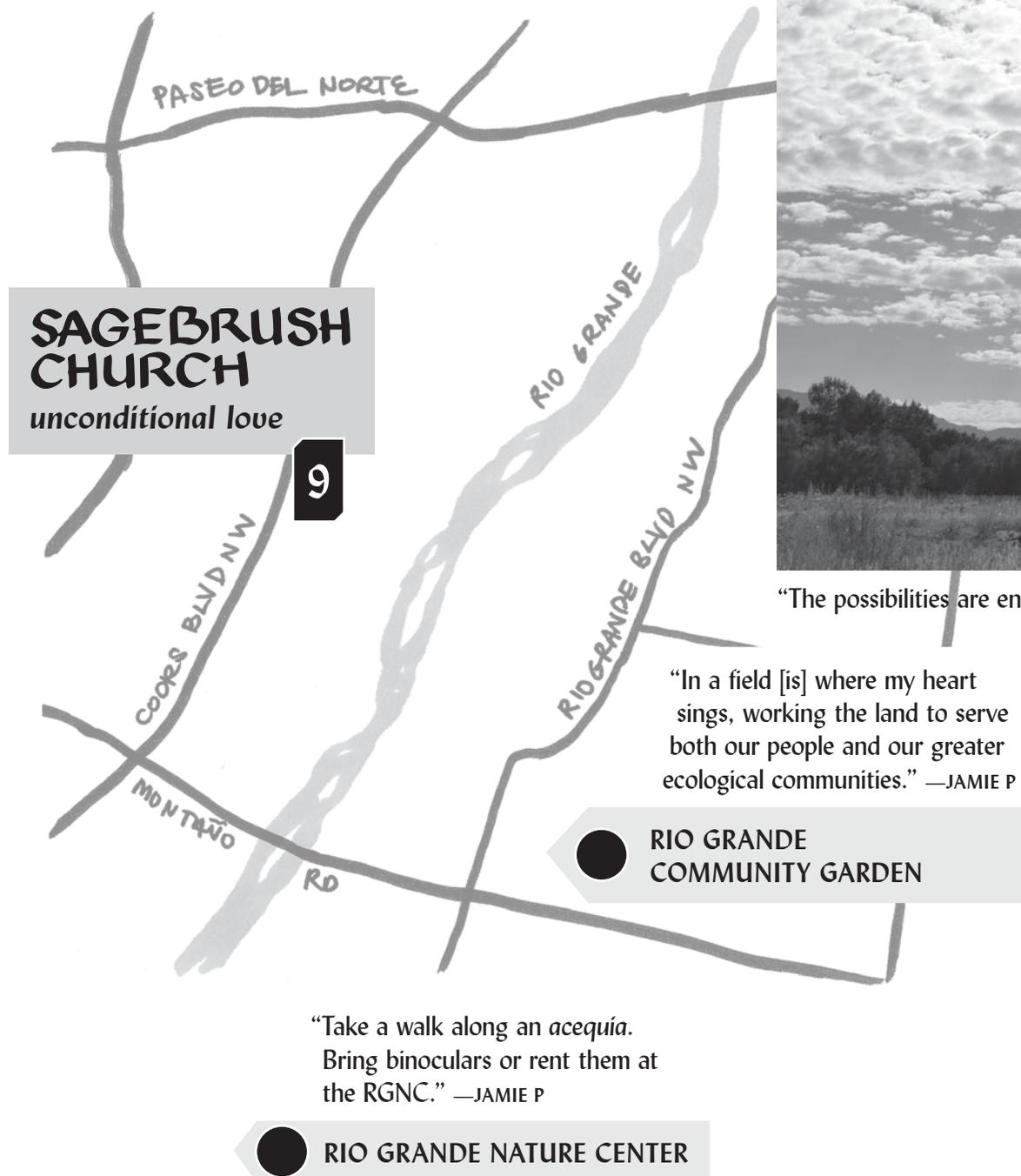
Jamie P. is “a suburbanized hillbilly looking to get back to pastoral roots... believer in the goodness in everyone.”

ANONYMOUS: “I love coming here with friends. It is calm and it’s the closest thing I can get to nature. I love how alive it is. It’s full of sounds. The colors of the leaves—bright green in the summer, and golds, oranges and burnt yellows in the fall. I love the constant rush of the river and the distant traffic sounds. I almost always go there with someone else. It’s become a regular place to visit. I think it’s a mixture of familiarity and somewhere that is beautiful, peaceful. This place is my favorite place in the whole world.”



An activity box located near the Paseo del Bosque trail at Central holds Eyes the Color of Stones / Los Ojos con el Color de las Piedras, an observation activity by Working Classroom intern DAVID DE LA CRUZ.

NORTHWEST

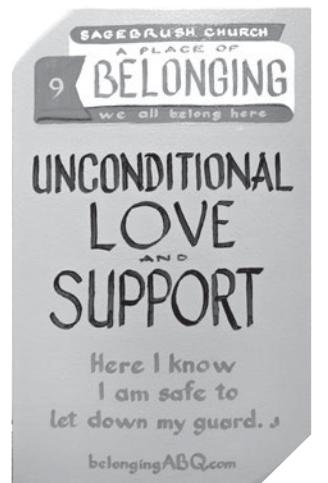


“The possibilities are endless— nature is wild, and these are Open Spaces, with an emphasis on *open*.” —JAMIE P PHOTO: JAMIE P

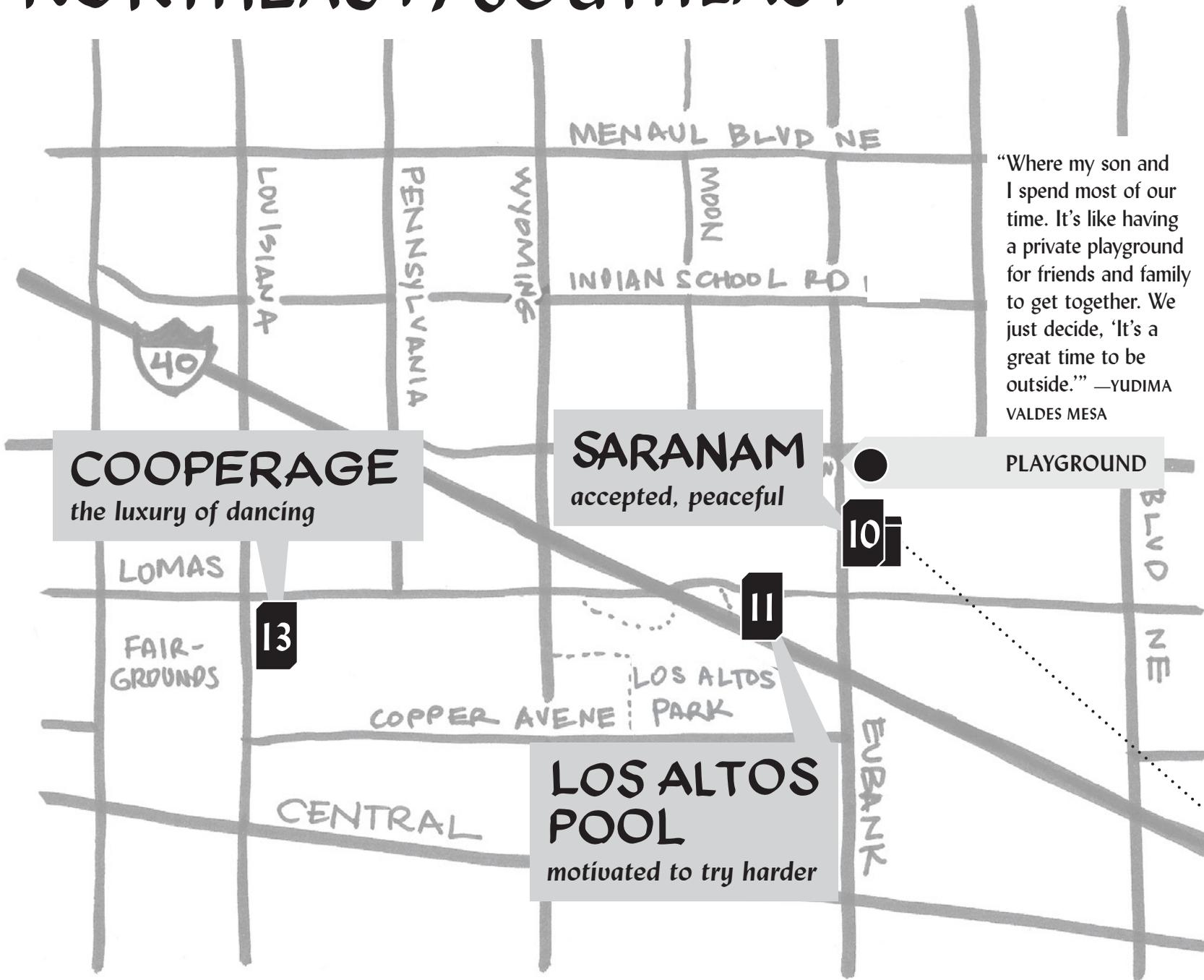
9 SAGEBRUSH CHURCH

6440 Coors Blvd NW *unconditional love*

JAMIE: “I was introduced to this church at a very low point in my life. They accepted me and supported and loved me unconditionally during my recovery. They keep me accountable and don’t judge me. Here I know I am safe to let down my guard. I think my faith helps me connect to people there. Also, many people there have pasts like mine, so we are also connected through our heartbreak. This place has made me want to help others like me. I serve in the jail and prison ministry and I feel it is my purpose to share my story to inspire others.”



NORTHEAST/SOUTHEAST

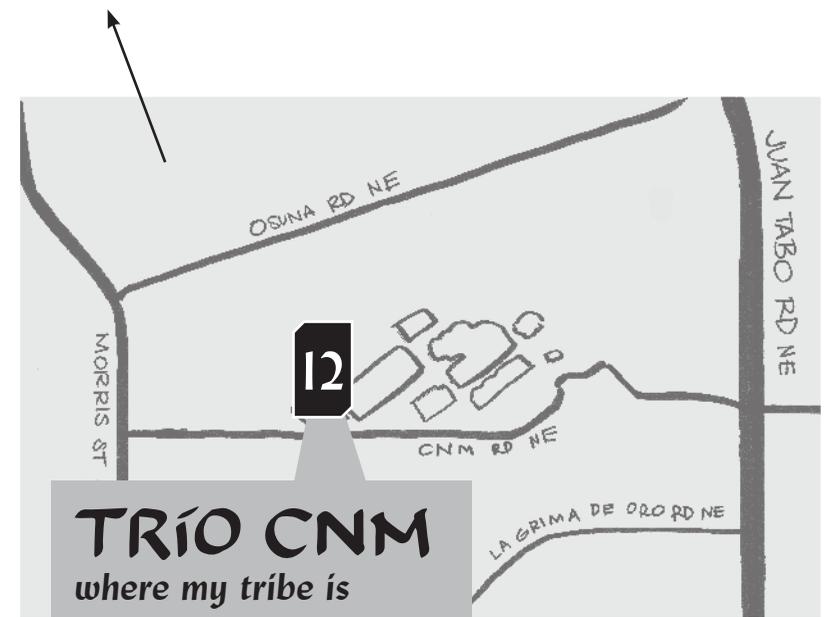


COOPERAGE
the luxury of dancing

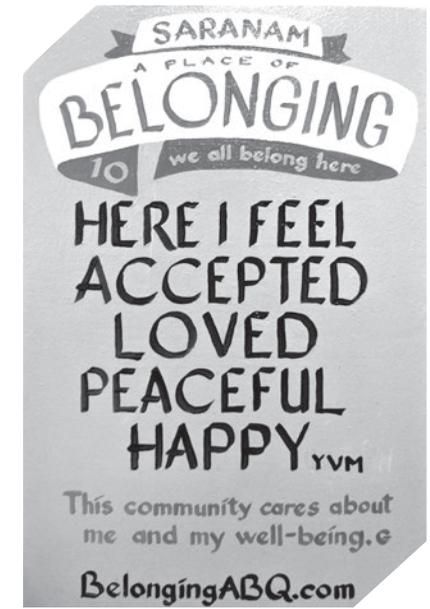
SARANAM
accepted, peaceful

PLAYGROUND

LOS ALTOS POOL
motivated to try harder



TRÍO CNM
where my tribe is



An activity box located inside Saranam’s childcare center (not open to the public) holds copies of all activities.

10 SARANAM

1100 Eubank Blvd NE
accepted, peaceful

GABBY: “Saranam helps homeless families get back on their feet by encouraging the pursuit of education, money management, and parenting skills while providing housing and basic essentials. I feel at home here because I am surrounded by people who have been in similar circumstances. I feel like I can let my guard down a bit more with the people here... This community cares about me and my well-being. Saranam has impacted me by letting me feel like I can be myself. As a result, I feel a stronger determination to succeed, knowing that there are people rooting for me and my success.”

YUDIMA VALDES MESA: “At Saranam, I feel accepted and loved. It’s my community where ... I do not feel discriminated [against] or stereotyped. This is my family for the past year. In the classroom, we open up. We help each other with our limitations. In every activity, conversation, reunion, [or] event, people are caring.... The Saranam classroom is like a sanctuary for me. I feel peaceful and happy here.”

Saranam is a two-year housing and education program for homeless families in Albuquerque.
saranamabq.org

11 LOS ALTOS POOL

10100 Lomas Blvd NE
motivated to try harder

MANUEL CASTILLO (as told to Izaiah Ramos): In his first year of working “at Los Altos [Pool], his coworkers threw a potato-themed party for him. Because they actually acknowledged what he liked, he felt he belonged. [Belonging] makes him happy and motivated to try harder and work harder.”

12 TRÍO CNM MONTOYA

TW Building
4900 Morris St NE
where my tribe is

MOLLY STEPHENS: TRÍO “is a constant reminder of where I am going and where I started out; a place of encouragement and like-mindedness; and where many of my closest friendships began. ...They’re my little unrelated family. We share triumphs and failures. We encourage each other and remind each other of goals. They’re my support system and my tribe. They have given me a drive to succeed and the encouragement to continue when I felt like quitting.”



13 COOPERAGE

7220 Lomas Blvd NE
the luxury of dancing

YUDIMA VALDES MESA: “For economic and time reasons, I have only been there once, but this place has a Cuban band at times. They play live music until past midnight. It transports me to the years when I was in Cuba and had the luxury to go dancing on the weekends until my clothes were dripping with sweat.”

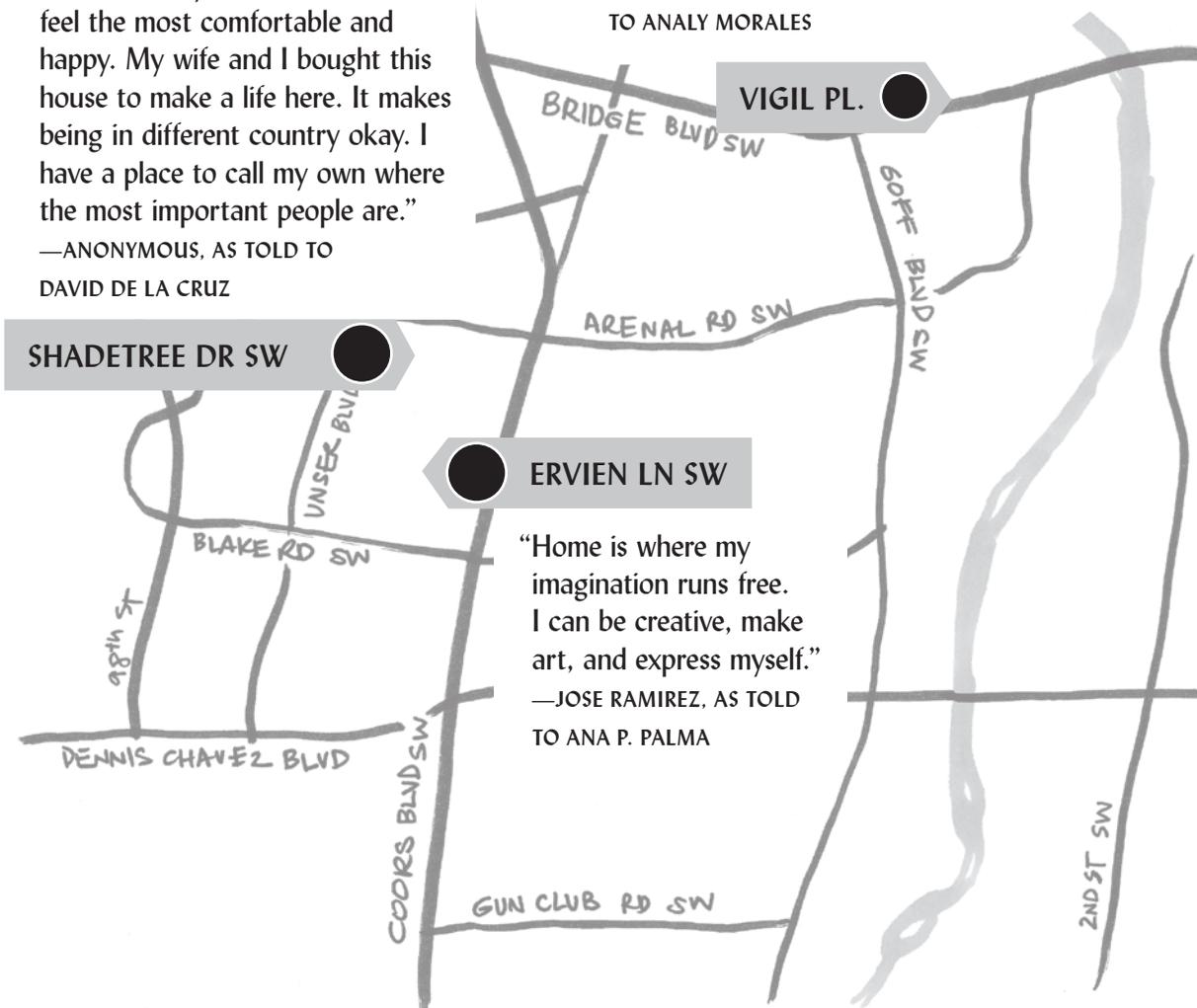
SOUTH VALLEY

“Coming from Mexico, Albuquerque has become our new home. But my house is where I feel the most comfortable and happy. My wife and I bought this house to make a life here. It makes being in different country okay. I have a place to call my own where the most important people are.”

—ANONYMOUS, AS TOLD TO DAVID DE LA CRUZ

“I belong in my room where I can use everything, without worrying that someone will make a negative comment. My dad made all of the furniture in my room. It feels good to have something made for me by my family.”

—JESUS JAVIER MORALES (AGE 11), AS TOLD TO ANALY MORALES



“Home is where my imagination runs free. I can be creative, make art, and express myself.”

—JOSE RAMIREZ, AS TOLD TO ANA P. PALMA

FINDINGS

WHERE DO CONTRIBUTORS FEEL BELONGING?

First, contributors feel belonging at **ORGANIZATIONS**: community non-profits (Working Classroom, Saranam), colleges/universities (flamenco classes at UNM, TRiO at CNM), and membership groups (Sagebrush Community Church). Combined with **public parks and recreation** (Los Altos Pool, Paseo del Bosque State Park), this suggests the importance of the non-commercial sector for belonging in everyday life.

Second, contributors belong via **ACTIVITIES**. Many involve movement: flamenco classes, salsa dancing, improv classes, walking through the *bosque* (a cottonwood forest that runs along the Rio Grande), bird watching, farming, and playing basketball. These activities engage senses and create more salient lived experiences. This vividness comes across in an anonymous contributor’s description of the *bosque*: “The colors of the leaves—bright green in the summer, and golds, oranges and burnt yellows in the fall. I love the constant rush of the river and the distant traffic sounds.”

Activities also involve learning, which can lead to satisfying feelings of competence and relatedness. Zahra Marwan said her flamenco class required “perseverance,” offering “a

place to focus” and receive “sincere support.”

For others, **art** is an empowering activity that engenders transportable feelings of belonging. Placelessness is advantageous: “Art always is a special place where I belong. The reason it’s special is because art can happen anywhere,” wrote Izaiah Ramos. For an anonymous contributor who said, “My art ... is a part of who I am, and will continue to be with me where I can utilize it and be myself,” art-making is also a process of self-making.

Third, contributors associated places of belonging with places where they’ve made or recalled **HAPPY MEMORIES**. Salsa dancing to a live band transported Yudima Valdes Mesa to more carefree times in her native Cuba. For Andrea, ditches or *acequías* (a community-managed irrigation channel) remind her of reuniting with a beloved parent. During the workshop, she spoke of returning to places of belonging in the future in order to center herself. It was a moving testament to the power of place to connect her past, present, and future selves.

Fourth, other **PEOPLE** give places a sense of belonging. For Keily Castro, “The friends I made at Working Classroom have ... made me a part of their lives. Making art together strengthened our relationships and our

belonging.” Or, as an anonymous contributor elegantly stated about his South Valley home, “Where my family is, that’s where I belong.”

Further Areas of Inquiry. These themes inspire more questions I’d like to explore. What is the nature of the connection between movement and wellbeing? How does embodiment—the sensate experience of the organism,’ as psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk might put it—increase autonomy or wellbeing? How does it make us feel more centered or more authentic? How does a place accrue meaning with time, memory, and experience? How can external environments shift internal states? How might one map the formative experiences of our identities? Do we already make ‘mental maps’ of our life journeys? What are their forms, textures, and feelings?

AMBIVALENCE ABOUT BELONGING

Like many dimensions of psychological experience, knowing how belonging feels is easy, but articulating its conditions can be difficult. A number of contributors struggled to identify a place of belonging. Barbara Bell’s narrative is telling:

“I have lived in Albuquerque for 47 years and it is difficult for me to answer this question [about where I’ve felt belonging]. I have

lived in every quadrant of town. My parents were not from here and I have never felt like I really belong in Albuquerque. Both of my parents have passed away and I have no blood relatives here.”

Yet she goes on to share a description of her neighbors that is notably empathetic (PAGE 11).

To make the project’s premise more accessible, I asked contributors to think of *spaces where they’d felt belonging*—not places where they *always* feel belonging. Yet belonging is a feeling, and can be too fleeting to fix to a physical space. Izaiah Ramos stated:

“I have felt every place I used to belong has denied me in some way. My home is always home but it denies what I stand for. My car is mine but it leaves me in tears stranded.... I don’t belong to a place, only moments of situations with others.”

WHAT CHARACTERIZES A PLACE OF BELONGING?

ACCEPTANCE. Many contributors used similar phrases—*being accepted*, *being free to be themselves*, and *not being judged*—to describe their places of belonging. At first glance, this seems simple: psychological security is a fundamental human need.

Yet acceptance is foundational to growth and empowerment.

Many young women attributed their places of belonging with increased **self-confidence**. Through Working Classroom, Analy Morales gained the “confidence to go out into the world, and project my confidence,” and Estefania Valencia said she has grown from “a young girl from immigrant parents to the young lady who is strong and willing to fight for what she believes is right.” These comments link esteem, agency, and social activism.

CLAIMING SPACE. Belonging is the freedom to be true to ourselves, including our highest potentials. If acceptance is ostensibly simple, it becomes more complex when our individual identities intersect with social and political ones—such as being undocumented, queer, trans, Muslim, homeless, or formerly incarcerated. In the International District, I heard a young Muslim refugee from Pakistan share how it took over half a year for him to gather the nerve to ask for permission to pray at work. (His boss responded by handing over a set of keys and welcoming him to use his office anytime.) Confidence and courage can help individuals claim spaces. Some Working Classroom interns are Dreamers, and will be the first in their families to attend college.

In doing so, they will be practicing the principle of equal opportunity. Coming from a place of belonging can instill the self-validation to enter new spaces and declare, “I belong here.”

AUTHENTICITY. At the same time, belonging is also the freedom to be more than a label. It is to express authenticity and multi-dimensionality. Highly developed places of belonging celebrate idiosyncrasies; furthermore, they allow members to share “heartbreak” (Jamie) and “triumphs and failures” (Molly Stephens). They embrace the whole individual, not only desirable characteristics or moods. Implicit in that embrace is the affirmation that each person is inherently worthy.

Some places of belonging are created by circumstance or affinity. Some are born of intention, thriving as participants practice uncommon degrees of acceptance and authenticity.

The places of belonging highlighted here, and their associated activities—from an assertive Flamenco *gólpe* (foot stomp), to empowerment through art in Barelás, to the Bosque’s sanctuaries for migratory and native species, including us—reflect rich interpersonal and creative lives intertwined with Albuquerque’s natural, social, and cultural resources.

CODA

I believe that the task of self-knowledge is ongoing and fruitful, and that appreciating relatedness and belonging aids in subjective and social wellbeing. It is never too late to reflect on what belonging means to you.

SELECTED QUESTIONS:

1. What is belonging? What does it feel like to belong? To not belong? Why is it important to feel a sense of belonging?
2. Think of a place where you feel or have felt a sense of belonging. Perhaps there is a place where you thought to yourself: “I belong here,” “This is my community,” or “This is where I feel most at home.” Describe that place.
3. What gave you that feeling of belonging? If from people, who? How do they contribute to your feeling of belonging? If from an activity, what was it, when does it happen? If from a past event, what was it, when was it? If from a place, what makes that place special? Describe.
4. How has this place of belonging impacted you? How does it make you *you*?

THANKS

Desiree Beltran
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Erin Fussell
Bill Gilbert
Michael Apolo Gomez
Lucy Lippard
Debra Maese
Ronny Quevedo
Saranam
Gabrielle Uballez
Willie Smoker/TRiO
Young & Sophia Wong
Working Classroom
Michael R. Yap

Thanks to contributors; especially to Barbara Bell, Keily Castro, David De La Cruz, Analy Morales, Ana P. Palma, and Izaiah Ramos for additional project assistance.

Thanks to STF studio artists, and all who welcomed, supported, shared, replied, referred, attended, introduced, translated, and helped me feel that I and this project belong here.

Sincerest gratitude to Sanitary Tortilla Factory and the indefatigable sheri crider, whose vision, support, and hard work made this residency and this project possible.

ABOUT ME

I’m an artist. I currently live in Queens, NY, and am originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. I make participatory projects to explore positive psychology and related principles, such as research projects on interdependence and collaboration. Increasingly it seems that my projects are frameworks that offer participants opportunities for self-reflection and conversation.

The places where I’ve felt belonging are printshops, *muay thai* gyms, and among a group of *jiujiteiras*. Those places were special because of teachers who exhibit patience and generosity, and who manage to cultivate improvisation and individuality within a field of knowledge and its rules. I’m also thankful to studio mates and training partners, and humbled to ground our mutual support and respect in dedication, stewardship, and effort.

WE

ALL

LOBENIG

HERE