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All to Remember Was the Crying

Citlalli Galvan

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WE sit on our leather couch in our home in Soledad, California. She was snuggled up with blankets and our small dog while watching TV. She was very relaxed, as if she didn't have any care in the world. Although before the leather couches, before the blankets, before owning the house, and even before the family, she laid on the desert floor at the age of fourteen years-old. She laid on the cold desert sand, huddled up in a ball, scared and hungry, not knowing if it was the wind howling at night or the coyotes in the distance.

My mother can remember her times in Mexico. The little house that she lived in that was on edge of her town, and the street dogs that she would occasionally feed. She can recall her bike rides from her job in the tortilla mill to deliver the hot, homemade tortillas to the people in the neighborhood. My mother can remember the times she would have to wake up early for school, get ready with her sibling to start the walk. My mother could laugh when she tells me she was good in school; math was her favorite subject. During the day, she can recall the smells of the taquitos in the street corners, yelling out to the neighbors to come buy his tacos and hot dogs, the smell of mechanics working on their cars in the heat. She can smell the gases and the oils they use, the smell of cigarettes and sweat coming from the older men. My mom can close her eyes and recall her laughing with her friends while bike riding through the town, trying to avoid hitting anyone, she can recall them yelling out, the older women looking at them in disbelief of them being unladylike, they had no care. They were teens, doing whatever teens did back then, living their best life.

Whenever we go out to hike, my mom makes connections to her walking to school early in the mornings. She lived far away and had to walk everyday with her oldest sister and her younger brother. When we would sit by the lake, she would laugh with my dad and explain to him that she would have to bathe in the lake that was a few feet away from her small house. My mom would bathe

with her older sister, she can still feel the icy water while smelling her aloe vera shampoo. Whenever my mom made connections or would bring up memories of Mexico, she always had the good memories. It would have seemed that she had a stable life in Mexico despite being lower income, but I couldn't help to notice she never spoke about her traveling from Mexico to the United States.

When the topic of immigration would be brought up, she would stay quiet as if she wasn't able to talk about it. She wouldn't bring up any memories or any connections, as if she was being silenced by a dark looming cloud that would rain down on her if she were to speak about it. I don't know if anyone notices it, the small hint of being scared in her eyes, the way she would tense up and gulp; as if she's trying to fight the words from leaving her mouth. Her family also didn't speak about it. Not my aunts, and not even my uncle, and certainly not my grandparents. They must've been so young when it happened, to leave their home for a mysterious land, with no idea what the plan was. They've been in the United States for years now, why is it hard for them to remember the trip that changed their lives forever? Was it traumatic?

I showed my mom an old picture of her. She was hugging her grandma from behind with a big smile on her face. I wanted to know the backstory. Not the backstory of that picture, but of what happened to that young smiling girl. I asked my mom to recall the story of her migration story. I was scared that I reached a point where we couldn't continue, but then sighed and stared at the picture, as if the picture was telling her where to start. Just by staring at her face—her eyes staring at the picture as if it would be the last thing she would see—staring at her mouth as it would open and close as if she was gathering her own words. Then finally, she started to form her words and so the story began.

It was 1993 and she was fourteen years-old. The oldest sibling was eighteen, her brother was nine, the second youngest sister being about two years-old and the youngest in the bunch was a baby. My mom stares at the picture some more but she's staring at the background - it's the kitchen filled with pots and pans and food items, it could've been lunchtime or dinner. Only my mom and her older sister knew about the plan to travel away, they assumed it was a small time thing and not a lifetime change. My mom half smiles when I asked if she left anything valuable. She takes a deep breath and I can see the tears starting to form in her eyes. She left behind the only home she knew, the home she grew up in, the home where she shares precious family memories; the home where the Navarro family went through thick and thin. She sniffles and wipes away the tears that were able to escape her eyes. She left behind her friends, the ones she

shared secrets with, the ones that would take turns to sleepover at each other's houses, the ones she would go to school and work with, the ones she would join to go shopping.

To this day, she doesn't know what happened with her friends, whether they still lived in Mexico or if they also moved to the United States. She can remember the fight her older sister and their parents had a few days before they were going to leave. Her sister wanted to take her beautiful dresses with her, to take them to show off their culture to the Americans, but their parents argued that they had to pack lightly for the trip was going to be long. At that moment, my mom can still remember the confusion she had about this trip, but she felt scared to question her parents. My mother choked back on her own words. I can't say I felt the same way when I was younger and we just moved towns, she had moved across distant lands that seemed like a dream to some people. She had a hobby to read books, those that were written in Spanish were obviously her favorite, but since she came to the United States, she would try to avoid those books and read the ones that were written in English.

All to remember from that day was the crying.

It was five in the morning when they went off to start their trip. They had to leave as early as possible. The kids had fear in their eyes, trembling not knowing if it was because of the cold early morning or because of their fear in their small bodies. Each kid holding a small backpack filled with clothes and some toys they were able to fit. Their father holding a bag filled with his clothes and a smaller bag filled with whatever money he was able to save up, and lastly the mother carrying multiple bags including her own baby daughter. My mother can recall all the thoughts running through her head, but what about the rest of her family? Was her brother thinking that he was becoming a man after this trip? Was the older sister angry with her parent's decision? What were the parents thinking, were they complicating and contemplating if this was the right choice for their kids?

And so, the Navarro family started their journey to walk over 1,595 kilometers from Guanajuato Penjamo, Mexico to Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The trip took over about twelve days and eleven nights. The Navarro family had no choice but to take this rigorous journey, just to start a whole new life. They had to limit how much they would eat, ration it and keep it hidden away so different animals wouldn't be able to smell them. Had their parents thought this through hard enough? Did they think of the dangers that lied ahead in the desert, the vast land of cactus and other dried plants, animals such as rat-

snakes, scorpions and the coyotes that roamed the night looking for their next meal?

My mother mentioned that throughout the entire walk, her father was in the lead and no one could pass him. It was her father in the front, her brother behind him, the oldest sister, herself holding her second youngest hand and followed by their mother holding the baby in the back. The men had to be in front of the women, as a way of showing that the men will protect them if there was danger to come at them. Their father had told them that if he were to die during this trip, then their brother will become the man of the household. Although my mother loved her brother dearly she couldn't imagine how this journey to the new land could've taken away not only her only home but also her only father figure. My mother couldn't decide which was the hardest part of the trip, the day when the blazing heat of the sun would shine its rays onto the family, having to use their bags as shades and my mother having to withstand the hot sand as it would seep into her sandals. Her second youngest sister would cry to her family on how the sand burned her feet, my mother can still remember the frustration and somewhat anger her father was holding in his eyes and in his posture, he demanded to his son that he should carry his sister to stop her whining. And so, the son listened and obeyed and carried his baby sister until the night fell. The temperature would reach over ninety degrees, the blazing sun hitting the Navarro family, sweat covering them from head to toe as if it were a second skin to them.

In the middle of their travels, my mother can still remember seeing other families also traveling to the United States by foot. As she was a young girl, she tried to avoid eye contact. Their father had warned them that some families will play the part of being desperate and then strike! They would have tried to hurt you; steal your money and valuables and they will leave you in the desert. They shall lay on the desert sand, bloodied and hurt, being left behind like some trash by your own people, being left behind for the migration police or border patrol to find you and throw you into jail, or that's if the coyotes or the vultures grab you first. The siblings kept that in their minds. I'm sure the image of them laying on the desert floor, crying out in pain or crying out for their parents while the sand burns their skin or while the coyotes in the distance are preparing to strike the unsuspecting family would be burned into their memories.

As they walked and saw other families, my mother and her siblings avoided their eyes and to the point where they avoided their cries of help, for food and water. My mom would go with her mother for reassurance but alas, her mother

claimed the same thing. Those families don't mean anything to them, and they don't mean anything to her, either. Of course, at fourteen years-old, my mother saw that as the cruelest thing to do, but now that she is a mother herself, would she tell my brother and I the same thing?

At nights, the Navarro family would huddle together to keep each other warm. Her mother and father would take turns to stay awake at night to keep an eye out. My mother can still feel the drastic change in temperature on her tan skin. The day would go from low nineties or to the high one hundred degrees, while at nighttime, it would fall to below thirty. At fourteen years-old, still living in the middle of her childhood and here she was, sleeping on the cold desert sand hearing the howling at night trying to distinguish if it were the coyotes or just the wind. All my mother and her siblings had to cover themselves was a blanket that their mother had knitted them. They huddled together and held on to one another as if the winds were going to separate the siblings.

I questioned my mother if she ever doubted this trip. As I asked that question it seemed that it shifted some gears with her. She stared at the television, not really paying attention to the Spanish novella that was on. She seemed to be gathering her thoughts. She gulped as if she was finding the right words or much rather, trying to find where to start. My mother seemed to be trying to connect to the past – trying to connect with her fourteen year-old self – trying to connect to the thoughts in her head.

Of course she doubted this trip, from the start of her parents telling her to cut ties with her friends, to say her final goodbye to them, to watch them disappear as she went off to the distance. She wasn't sure if they were whisked away by the wind or if it was her. She doubted this trip when she was told to pack lightly and she wasn't allowed to bring any of the small toys she had or anything that seemed 'Mexican' although the bottom of her bag had some candy, a small playing deck of cards and a small doll. The first time she truly questioned this trip was when they ignored the other migrant families in their traveling. My mother said she would try to push these thoughts away and try to fill them with the fantasy that this new land will provide better for her. The thoughts still lingered in her mind, that little immature fourteen year-old mind of hers, filled with the thoughts of just turning back.

To turn back to her home.

She wanted to turn back – she had to turn back – back to her small home at the edge of town. Back to the small icy water lake. Back to the soul crushing thought that she can't go back. It's all behind her – it's all behind her as she

continued to be forced to push her small legs to keep walking. At nights, the thoughts became more prominent in her dreams. She feels her siblings get closer to her to keep warm. She can subtly hear her parents talk in harsh whispers, but all she could hear was the wind. This time she knows it's the wind - it feels nice and it relaxes her, although she gets goosebumps on her arms and legs. The fourteen year-old black haired, tanned child laid on the floor, closed her eyes, and focused on the wind and her heartbeat.

A sudden thought comes from within the depths of her brain. If she were to die while on this trip, she doesn't know whether or not she feared it. What's scarier, going to a mysterious land with no knowledge of and with a language barrier, or what if you don't even make it? Would being dead better? She sensed that it would be an escape from the blazing sun burning her skin, burning into her scalp as the memories of this trip burned into her brain. The way she sensed death would be as an escape, an escape from the walking, escaping the harshness of her parents telling her to run away from the desert dangers, escape the constant fear of the coyotes, or as they were called English, the 'smuggles.'

They would get paid to help transport your family to the new land but don't ever try to double cross them or they'll be searching for money that they never received, escape the constant nights of sleeping on the desert floor and waking up with sand all over, escaping this, escaping the travel that changed her life. She thought, that little fourteen year-old mind of hers thought of being at peace.

I stared at my mother in disbelief, at such a young age to be having thoughts of being at peace when she was finally dead. My mother couldn't look at me in the eyes, I looked too much like her. My mother was scared that she would've seen herself if she looked at me. We shared the same eyes - we share the same way our emotions are seen in our eyes. A beautiful display of the eyes being a window to the soul. Now, being in the desert, she had her eyes closed. There was no way to see what emotion my mother would've been showing in her eyes. The moment that thought of being back home in peace was the same way that death would be, that would be shown in my mother's eyes when she laid on the desert floor. I did wonder if the siblings shared the same thought as my mother, or even if her parents had these types of thoughts. The thoughts would have flown between the family, like the gust of wind that would tremble the family. The thoughts of wanting to stand up and stare back at their home, the roaming thoughts that they would wake up and it would all be but a distant dream. The haunting thoughts of just wanting to wake up and be at home. They just wanted to be home and wake up to the smell of home-made food cooked by their

mother or their grandmother. The thoughts of being at home, safe with one another and sitting together. Atlas, they woke with sand all over, the blazing sun hitting their already sunburnt skin, and to their father telling them to get up and to start walking. It was all just a thought in the wind.

It was her older sister that yelled out the cities name Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. It was 1993, The Norte newspaper started its publication. The Museo Historico De Ciudad Juarez or known as The Historic Museum of Ciudad Juarez in English, opens to the public to explore its history of the city. The Mormon Temple is built as well, at that time it was the 71st temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During this time, there was all time high of young women and children getting kidnapped for human trafficking, these women and girls were usually the unsuspecting immigrants that were either away from their family with no contact or were desperate for food and money. According to Ronald L. Mize in *Interrogating Race, Class, Gender and Capitalism Along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Neoliberal Nativism and Maquila Modes of Production*, he states, "The Subsequent criminalization of 'illegal aliens' rests upon US citizens' racialization of those residing south of the border and disproportionately endangers Mexican women and children. The callous view of viewing Mexican women as disposable bodies is on display in Ciudad Juarez where the maquiladora murders have resulted in the brutal murders of 300 women from 1993 to 2005 (Mize)." My mother can remember arriving at the National Visa Center late at night, somewhat relieved that the walking was over, but she felt a heavy sense of guilt resting on her shoulders.

The family decided to reside near the building for the night. There were missing persons signs plastered on fences and street lights of women and children. She didn't know why, but my mother felt guilty. I suppose she felt guilty that these women and children didn't get the chance to see the other side, that their travels didn't end in succession and in happiness. My mother can recall seeing other kids her age, but they were alone. She looked around the streets as she was sitting close to her father, and saw those kids sitting on the sidewalk alone. They had completed the journey alone. She felt sad for them even if she didn't know the reason for them traveling alone. I wondered why these kids traveled alone, there were parents that sent their kids to the U.S on their own because they couldn't afford the trip for the whole family or better yet, they couldn't afford to feed another mouth in the house. These parents have preferred to send their child to a land they knew nothing about rather than trying harder to keep their child.

There have been other cases of families being separated. If the Border Patrol would catch these families, the parents would yell at their kids to run away – to run away to the “promised land” – to run away from their own parents. Although they have traveled alone, others have traveled alone for their own benefit. My mother remembers that many kids in her area started to get involved with gangs. These kids would join gangs to be powerful, but others joined hoping to be able to provide some money and security for their family. My mother would try to remember a certain tattoo that these kids had to prove that they were part of a gang. These gangs would send children to smuggle drugs or weapons across the border. As written by both writers, Lilian Chaves and Cecilia Menjivar, *Ninos Sin Fronteras: Un Diagnostico de la Literatura Sobre Ninos Migrantes De Estados Unidos*, “Children have shown that they, too, are active social agents who take part in adult-like activities and who also make economic and social contributions. These social actors are often seen as powerless, passive, and fully dependent; however, these ‘new actors’ may assume several roles (as parents, providers, smugglers, migrants, children, etcetera) across borders, such as when an unaccompanied migrant teenager must find full-time employment to provide for her child (Menjivar).”

The interview at the border for her new life began.

My mother and her family had to separate to do individual interviews. She felt very small and that any tiny mistake will send her back to Mexico. My mother would recall that she was a fearless child, but the moment she sat on that leather chair, fear ripped through her small body. The older woman interviewing my mother spoke Spanish and English fluently, my mother felt a small bit of jealousy at the woman’s fluent English. The interview lasted about an hour, where my mother was mostly asked if she were to enter the United States if she would work or continue an education. My mother obviously wanted to help her parents, and she knew education would be better for not only herself but her parents. Thankfully, the whole family passed through the interview, the parents would work while the children would be going to school.

The family’s next destination was El Paso, Texas, United States. This time they were granted to travel by bus rather than walking again. The bus ride would only be about thirty-five minutes rather than walking for two hours and twenty minutes. The parents decided that they were tired of walking. Once they arrived at El Paso, Texas, there was a mix of Mexican migrants and citizens of the city. My mother’s father was able to rent a small apartment for his family. It was a bit cramped, but my mother was glad the trip was over. She was finally

able to rest and was grateful that her family stayed together.

The Navarro family had lived in El Paso, Texas for about three years. Her mother decided to move to Guadalupe, California, after an aunt had purchased a house there, but sadly had to leave back to Mexico, and offered it to her sister rather than selling it. It was 1996 when they moved to their new house and my mother was seventeen years-old and was a junior in high school. At this period, the U.S. had started a blockade towards Mexican immigrants because the Mexican population was getting too high and other Americans had the belief that these "aliens" were here to "take away the jobs."

It started on September 19, 1996 that the United States Border patrol began Operation Blockade. It had stopped over ten thousand immigrants from entering the United States. It was stated in a New York Times article written by Tim Gordon, *U.S. Blockades of Workers Enrages Mexican Town*, "Border Patrol statistics on apprehensions suggest that it has nearly halted the flow of illegal undocumented workers who have usually waded, walked or floated on rafts across the border (Gordon)." It had me wondering, what if my mom and her family had waited? Would Border Patrol still send them back even if they were headed to Ciudad Juarez for a visa? Bill Clinton was president at the time and was very tough on immigrants coming to the United States, so my mother does say that she was grateful for her parents doing their best for not only their future but also for the future of their kids.

Araceli Navarro, my mother, is a strong woman. Araceli was fourteen years-old when she had to leave her only home with her family. She had to leave behind her friends, her family members back in Guanajuato, Penjamo, Mexico, all for a new land that was promised to be the biggest change of her life. It was. Araceli would turn around and stare at the distance that held her home, her arm reaching out as if she can grasp back the imagination or thoughts of turning back. Araceli doesn't regret coming to the United States, she met her husband, pursued a higher education at Hartnell College studying for Early Childhood Development, and has two kids and a dog. Araceli has a loving family, an amazing home, and a job she loves. Araceli would still visit her home, she went back five years ago, and she can visually see herself being a child again running down the hall with her siblings behind her, all laughing and smiling. Araceli once dreamt of standing in the desert in front of herself being fourteen again. No words were said. Her younger self staring up at her adult self would ask, 'Did we make it? Did mami and papi keep their promise of the great future?' Araceli smiled at her child self and kneeled, being able to feel the hot sand, the

same blazing sun and the smell of sweat on her skin and hugged her small child form, 'Yes, we made it little one.'

Araceli Navarro is a strong woman.

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