



# **THE HIGH PRICE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM**

Stories of Childhood and Immigration

Luther Burbank High School

Parent University Scholars

## THE JOURNEY

The students in Tuesday night English class and I have been working together for two and one half years. When we heard at the beginning of this year that we would have some grant money for an intensive writing class, I challenged us all to start writing stories that we would like to see published. We've had enough time with each other to feel comfortable, and, for the most part, safe. They took me up on the challenge.

We started last fall with a timeline of our lives and began brainstorming around the topic of childhood memories. We used common Autobiographical Incident brainstorming questions and got our ideas and responses down on paper. We worked without a lot of rules about what the stories would look like and how they might be organized. I wrote models that we read together and we talked about paragraphs and other important "guidelines" for writing. We talked about "drafts" and revision and we had a lot of one-on-one conferences in the classroom. Alma Avalos and I were a true team as we worked to provide meaningful feedback to the writers.

As the weeks passed, the students decided that they wanted to include holiday stories and "crossing over/coming-to-America" narratives in the mix. We discussed sensory details and sequencing of events. Much of their writing happened almost organically. I wish I had a step-by

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-step, how-to guide that discusses the finer points of how we got to our finished stories. Mostly, I just got out of the way and gave them time to write. A few wrote their first drafts in Spanish. They, almost all, gained more confidence with each story they wrote, and Alma and I provided encouragement and “you can do this” cheers along the way.

For me, this process speaks to the power of simply encouraging individuals to write their lives. Our group has worked hard to learn more English and the students sometimes want me to teach more grammar and talk more about rules. I shared with them that the best way for us to learn the rules of the language is to USE the language authentically—through reading and writing. I believe that this is one of the strategies that helped them to see that writing in English was something that was accessible to them, that they *could* do it. I wrote my own short memories/stories and showed them my own writing process. Sometimes we wrote class stories together.

The adult students taught me a lot about teamwork and collaboration. I really enjoyed watching them work together to share their writing, and to help each other with revision and translation. Our classroom became a community of people who grew to like each other and care about each other. I saw that they were willing to take risks as writers because we had all worked together to make the classroom a non-judgmental and comfortable space.

I am honored that the school parents and other

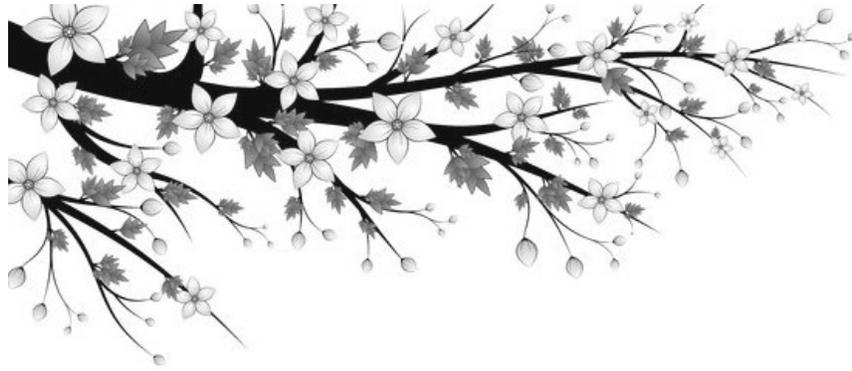
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adults who came to our class trusted me enough to walk with them on this journey. I have a lot of respect for their courage and tenacity. We will come back together next year to work again on our writing. I hope that we can encourage some more adult writers to join us.

Dana Dusbiber  
Luther Burbank High School

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## SANTA CRUZ

Santa Cruz is a housewife in Sacramento. She enjoys caring for her granddaughter and grandson each day. She also enjoys cooking and keeping her house clean. She listens to American and Mexican music, she especially likes Spanish station 92.1. In her free time she enjoys dancing, trying new kinds of food and taking daily walks in her neighborhood. She lives with her husband and four children, ages 24, 22, 17 and 12.

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When I was growing up in Guerrero, Mexico, Christmas Eve was a very happy time. My whole family—my mother and father, six brothers, two sisters, and uncles—along with our neighbors, celebrated the night together.

It is warm in that part of Mexico. Our town, Cruz Grande, is just inland from Acapulco, in the southwestern part of the country. We would spend some of our days around the holiday at the beach. Our Christmas Eve celebration began in the evening, after it got dark.

My mother cooked a big dinner. She made *pozole*, *tamales*, and we drank *ponche*. We also ate mixed candies. After dinner we danced to Christmas songs and the children broke the piñata. Everyone was happy.

Christmas Eve is a beautiful memory for me. I really enjoyed this time because we were all together. I was very happy then.

## **A CHILDHOOD MEMORY**

I grew up on a ranch in Cruz Grande, Guerrero, Mexico. My father and my brothers worked on our ranch to take care of the animals. We raised cows, goats and pigs. My father also grew the vegetables that we ate.

I remember when I was 6 years old my favorite place in Cruz Grande was the river by our house. I liked to swim in the river and pick fruit from the trees. Mango, papaya, coconut and tamarind grew on the trees next to the water.

Years later I had to go to the school for big kids. I did not see the river as much. I had to stay in school and study with the other kids.



## **FLOR PEDRAZA**

Flor Pedraza has lived in Sacramento, California for eighteen years. She is a housewife and business owner. She has owned her business for almost 14 years. She is the mother of a 15 year old son. She loves animals and owns 2 cats and 2 dogs. She loves to read, and history books are her passion. She takes walks in the early morning and enjoys good coffee, music and cooking. Flor considers herself lucky and blessed to have an amazing family and wonderful friends. She enjoys life to the maximum!

## **THE ZOO**

I remember when I was 10 years old, I went to the zoo with my family. It was an amazing experience for my brother, my little sister, and me. It was our first time visiting the zoo.

The zoo was located in the city 3 hours away from our hometown. The name of the zoo was Parque Zoológico Benito Juárez. It was in the big and beautiful city of Morelia in Michoacán. I had never seen so many buildings, tall trees and green parks. I was astonished by everything that I saw that day.

After our drive, we arrived at the zoo. I was very impatient! The only things that I wanted to see were the elephants! First we had to wait in line to buy the tickets. I picked my grandfather as my partner, so we decided to begin our walk through the zoo. First we saw the monkeys and the giraffe. I was very impatient, and kept telling my Grandpa to “hurry up!” because I wanted to see the elephants. I think he was tired of me because I kept saying the same thing over and over and over again!

Eventually he said to me, “Let’s sit for a little while. I know that you are excited to see the elephants. I have been listening to you repeat the same thing for the last hour.” He asked me to promise to be patient, that we would be there soon. Then he kissed me on the cheek.

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Finally we got to the place where the elephants are kept. I had strange feelings—a mix of emotions and excitement. I couldn't believe the size of the animals. It is a shame I didn't have a camera, to capture that moment with my grandfather.

This memory makes me very happy every time I think about it, but it is also bittersweet. I get sad because my grandfather is no longer with me. Unfortunately, he died the following year, on April 30<sup>th</sup> of 1989. He was a very important person to me and I am glad that I had the chance to experience the zoo and visit the elephants with him.

## **COMING TO AMERICA**

When I was 15 years old, I came to America. The year was 1993, and I left my family, my town, and many memories behind in Michoacán, Mexico.

We left in the middle of the summer. My father had taken a job in Garden Grove and we had to arrive in California by the beginning of August.

When we arrived in Garden Grove, the first impression I had was, "What a beautiful town, with so many beautiful flowers!" It was nothing like my home town, which is very simple. The houses are not fancy. But even with those feelings, I still missed my home town of Villa Morelos.

In Garden Grove, I lived with my father, Ignacio Pedraza, my mother Maria Chavez, my older brother, Ignacio Jr., and my sister, Noemi. My brother was 17 and my sister was 11. It was hard for all of us, because we didn't speak English. It was a real adventure for the 5 of us, and funny at times!

This memory makes me feel happy. Because now I can look back and say to myself, "Who would have thought that I could accomplish so much?" I never in a million years believed that I would be able to speak English and write it and read it. Like my grandfather always said to me, "If you dream it, you can do it!"

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## **NAZEELA Nazir**

Nazeela Nazir is an ESL student living in Sacramento California. Nazeela has been working at a Subway restaurant for the past two years. She loves traditional and halal food, music, poetry and international travel. She also loves to pray and recite the Holy Quran. Aside from all this, Nazeela can create beautiful henna tattoos.

## **CHILDHOOD MEMORY**

Once upon a time when I was seven years old, I had my first visit to the hospital. I was with my family at my uncle's house in Rawalakot , Kashmir. Rawalakot is a big city in Kashmir and my whole family lives there.

My mother, grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, my brothers Tayyaib and cousin Amina were all there. We were enjoying the weekend and we were all happy. My cousin Amina and I were playing together and that's when the accident happened.

She pushed me accidentally and I fell down and hit my head on the rocks. My head began to hurt and bleed. Amina cried and went to tell my mom. My mom and everyone else ran to see me. After they saw me my mom and uncle took me to the hospital and the doctor put stitches in my head.

When I came back home I was in the bed and my mom gave me special treatment. She gave me lots of care and my favorite foods to eat. All of my relatives came to see me and they brought me candies and fruits and other foods.

I felt sad because everybody else was so sad. My mother and Amina were very sad. They worried that my head was going to be badly hurt. In the end, everything was fine and my head wasn't permanently injured.



## MARGARITA RUIZ

Margarita Ruiz is married and lives in Sacramento. She has two sons and two daughters. She feels blessed because she has a wonderful husband! She enjoys cooking, being with her children, and travel. She also likes romantic music. She takes adult classes in English and computer literacy. Her goal is to learn English.

## **CROSSING THE BORDER**

When I was 17 years old my husband and I came to America. It was 1988 when we left our village in Jalisco. We left on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July.

When I left my house I left my father alone with my sisters and their families. I was sad because I didn't know when I would come back. When we arrived in Tijuana my husband and I went to a hotel to wait for my brother-in-law. He brought our things to us. Before the coyote took us, I had to buy some pants and a pair of jeans. I didn't have any pants, before that I only wore dresses!

At 5 pm the coyote came to take us across the city in a bus. When the bus stopped we walked out of the city until we arrived on top of a hill. There was a little cabin there. There was a woman selling tacos and sodas. When it became dark, there was someone outside selling jackets and shoes.

I remember it was so cold, my ears felt frozen. I had nothing to cover my head. We waited until midnight when the border patrol changed shifts. Then, at 12, the *coyote* told us we needed to run very fast because we didn't have much time. We ran for one hour. We ran down a big hill, it was very slippery. I was very tired, but I couldn't stop my beating heart.

Finally we arrived in San Ysidro. There, we needed to cross the freeway. There were holes under a chain link

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fence and we crawled under it. Then we got into the *coyote's* car and didn't stop until we arrived at my brother-in-law's house in San Fernando.

We stayed in the San Fernando Valley and lived there for 11 years. I had my first three children there. In 1999 we moved to Paso Robles. Four years later, in 2003, we moved to Sacramento. I had my youngest son here and have lived here happily ever since.

## **TAKING CARE OF THE PIGLETS**

My mother was a pig farmer while I was growing up in Las Pintitas, Jalisco, Mexico. I lived on a big ranch with my mother and father, sisters and two brothers.

I remember my mom had a lot of pigs. The pig pen was all different sizes for all the different ages of the pigs. Some stalls were 6 feet long. The pig pens were made of concrete with metal doors. Inside were two squares of concrete—one was for food and the other one was for water. Every morning my mom, my sister and I cleaned the pig stalls and helped to bring the buckets of water for the pigs.

I remember the time the female pig gave birth to the piglets. My mother stayed in the pen until the piglets were born. Three days later the female pig died. I don't know why the mother pig died. I was surprised when my mother told me, "You have a new responsibility." She said, "You need to feed and care for the 10 little piglets." My mother went to the store and bought six bottles so that my sister could help me.

I got up very early in the morning and ate my breakfast while my mother was filling the bottles. After I fed the piglets I had to wash the bottles. After I finished my homework the piglets needed to eat a second time! Then I took shower and ate my lunch before I went to school. When I got back in the evening, I fed the piglets the last time. Then

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I watched T.V., ate dinner and fell into bed exhausted.

I couldn't play with my cousin or do anything else fun until the piglets learned to eat for themselves. I remember that it was a very hard job, but I was proud because I helped my mother when she needed it and weaned a litter of pigs on my own!



## **ISABELA DE LA ROSA**

Isabel De la Rosa is a single mother. She came to this country from Mexico 24 years ago. She enjoys cooking, reading, writing traveling and getting to know different cultures and places. She has worked hard to raise her two children, teaching them Spanish, Latin roots and family values. Her dream is to keep studying and become more prepared in English each day.

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My name is Isabel De la Rosa. I am a single mother who lives in Sacramento, California. I came to the United States 24 years ago from a small town in Mexico called Cihuatlan in the state of Jalisco.

I studied to be an accounting clerk in the Port of Veracruz. I was hired to work before I completed my studies. The Institute recommended me for a position because I obtained good grades in my courses. I worked in different companies while at the same time continuing school. I completed an assistant nursing course. Although I studied in high school, I did not graduate.

When I came to this country and had to work, I realized that what I had studied in Mexico, did not help me here. During this time I was jumping from job to job. I did a lot of different things, such as: sewing, dishwashing and cashiering in a fast food restaurant, which I did for 16 years.

While working hard, I was able to raise my two sons, who were born here. I taught them as much as I could and raised them to be responsible. My oldest son is 23 years old and has been in the U.S. Navy for 6 years. My youngest son will graduate from high school on June 13. He is preparing himself to attend a University.

I come from a family that although it is separated by distance, is very close. I am proud that I have raised my sons with family values. I am proud of what we have each accomplished here.

## **HOLIDAYS**

For part of my life I lived with my paternal grandmother. Her name was Rita Saldana. She had a big imagination and was always arranging and decorating to make a beautiful space.

We lived in the Port of Veracruz, Veracruz, Mexico. It is a very lively city and at Christmastime it acquired a unique and bright colorfulness, as if in a dream. Everything became a cacophony of music and song. The bustle was felt in everything and everyone.

As Christmas approached, my grandmother kept us all busy making preparations for the Posada by making ornaments we would use to decorate. We collected foils of different colors, chocolates, sweets and candies and bottle caps of all kinds. We even visited some shops and restaurants to see if they gave away the bottle caps.

Once we gathered a good amount, we would smash each one until it was completely flat. After smashing it we would make a hole in the middle of the caps and string them together to form a bracelet. They were called “sonajas” and they made a rattling noise that we as kids enjoyed.

We also selected pine cones and wrapped them in metallic paper. We would form sphere-like figures and we hung them up on tree limbs wrapped in strips of cotton. Each neighborhood formed a group and created their own

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decoration called a “rama.”

Each group visited each house in the neighborhood singing Christmas carols, and the families gave them a small gift. After we received our gifts, or donations, we went back home to celebrate the holiday with our family. These holidays with my grandmother were very special to me. I remember them with joy.

## **THE SUMMER VACATION**

When I was 10 years old I went on vacation with my family to my grandmother's house. She lived in a small town in the state of Jalisco called Cihuatlan. Her house was on a river called Marabasco, which divides the states of Jalisco and Colima.

My cousins and I woke up early in the morning to watch the adults milk the cows. The children would form a line with a glass to get fresh milk. I remember the milk would be very warm and foamy and had a different taste. It was very delicious. All of the children enjoyed this because we would see who had the biggest mustache! We all laughed and joked. We had fun being on the ranch—riding the horses, feeding the cows and playing rodeo to herd the calves.

The other places we went to were Melaque and Barra de Navidad beaches. We all played in the sand and made sand castles. I remember I would bury my body in the sand and my family would make me into a mermaid figure. My family and I would do many things like chase crabs, collect sea shells and swim.

Our family vacations were always very happy and I will always remember them.



## **MA. TERESA OROZCO**

Teresa Orozco was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico on December 27, 1984. She did all of her studies in Mexico. In 2007 she came to Sacramento with her husband Fernando to find a better future for her two sons, Alejandro (6) and David (2). Teresa loves photography—as a way to not forget happy memories—and decorating. This year she decided to continue her English studies by participating in “Parent University.” She believes the best way to overcome challenges is through education

## **A CHILDHOOD MEMORY**

I remember a special visit to my grandfather's house in 1994 when I was 10 years old. That year in the month of August, during my summer vacation, I went to my grandfather's house and my cousins were also there. My grandfather's beach house was in Nayarit in the town of Lo de Marcos. It is a beautiful small town and the beach is always clean and quiet.

In the mornings I walked along the beach with my cousins and we found shells in the sand. At nights we ate in the restaurants around the town. The weather was always perfect. On the last day we bought souvenirs and took photos.

My parents, Maria Teresa and Jose Luis, and my brothers, Jose and Javier, and sister, Cristy all enjoyed our week with the cousins at that beautiful place. We love the beach at my grandfather's house.

I miss my family vacations because those times were unforgettable. My childhood memories are always in my heart.

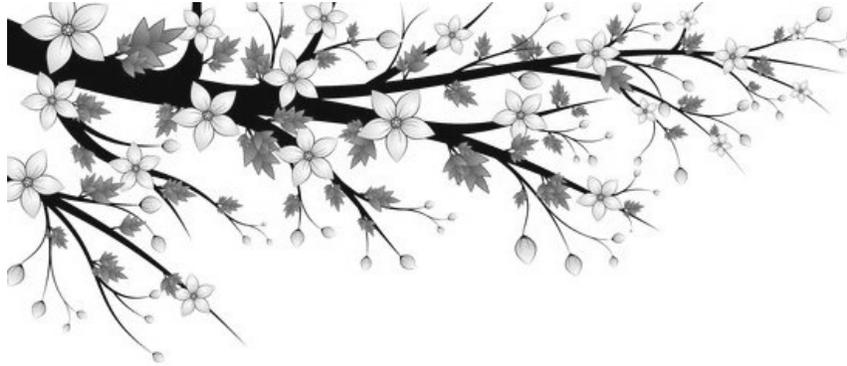
## A HOLIDAY STORY

When I was growing up, we had a celebration on December 12 every year in my town. “Lady of Guadalupe” is a religious celebration that is very important in all of Mexico, but in my town, Ixtlahuacan del Rio, in Jalisco, it is really special.

I remember when I was 7 years old, in 1991, I participated with my traditional Mexican dress. I felt very emotional because all of the people, including my family were there. There was a lot of Mexican food, like tacos, *pozole* and *churros*.

During the nine days before the big celebration, every neighborhood participated by walking the streets with the image of Lady of Guadalupe. We carried candles and played music and ended the route at the church to have Mass. Afterward, we enjoyed the fireworks.

I really loved participating in this celebration because it showed the identity and feelings of our entire town. We kept alive our traditions and values of family, friendship and faith.



## **TERESA HERNANDEZ**

Teresa is a survivor of domestic violence and a widow for the past 6 years. She is a proud mother of three daughters and one son ranging in ages from 12 to 19. To support her family she works cleaning houses. On Sundays she spends time watching movies with her children. She also enjoys a delicious cup of coffee when she wakes up each morning! One of her goals is to speak and write English fluently and she currently attends adult school at Sac City College. Her other goal is to get her Tuesday night classmates to go to college and complete their studies in English. She likes to encourage everyone around her to keep going and advance in their lives.

## **FIRST COMMUNION**

In 1970 I was living in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. I lived with my parents, brothers and sisters and my little dog named "Motita". I remember the Saturday that I had my First Communion. We lived very close to the church where I would celebrate this special day. The church was called Maria Auxiliadora and it was on Revolucion Avenue. I was in the second grade when I had Catechism class with my friends.

The night before the event, I remember I had to sleep propped up in my bed. I had tubes in my hair. I had very long hair that went down to my knees! It was very difficult to manage because back then we didn't have curling irons. My mother told me not to touch my hair because I would mess it up and she paid a lot of money.

On the morning of my First Communion everybody woke up early. My mother took out my tubes and my hair was very beautiful and curly. My dress was very beautiful and white.

When the ceremony in the church was over, everybody went back to my house. We had a big breakfast. There were churros and chocolate milk for the children and hot chocolate and bread for the adults. Later in the afternoon, we had salad with chicken, potatoes, peas, and carrots with mayonnaise and cream. The children didn't want to eat because we were having too much fun playing.

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That night my grandmother brought a group to sing for us at the party. I was very excited and happy because all of my family and my best friends were there. The most special thing for me was that my mother was with me for this important moment in my life.

## COMING TO AMERICA

Perhaps my story is not as sad or tragic, like many other undocumented people or how some call us; “chickens.” However, all of us are following each other’s path so we can succeed in this country, in the so called “land of the free,” United States of America. In order to achieve this dream, we need to travel past the zone where anything can happen.

My story is very unlike others because I had no intention of coming here to the United States. It’s not because I was rich, but I was very happy in my country with my father, siblings and friends. I had everything I needed to be happy and I couldn’t wish for anything else. However, eventually I got married and exactly one month later my husband decided to go north, and I had no choice but to go with him.

The first thing we did was travel by bus for three days from Guadalajara, Jalisco, to Tijuana. At that moment I started seeing injustices put upon people who appeared to be poor, and people without respect nor education took advantage of them. Afterwards, when we got to Tijuana we saw that we had a sign saying “help wanted” because immediately many men came up to us offering their service. I did not understand much of the things that were happening, I didn’t even know what “passing” or “crossing the border” meant.

The next day, at 8:00 am they took us to buy a gallon of water and some cookies for the road and I still continued not knowing what was going on. Later on they took us to a house and they locked us in a stable, there was about twenty people in there. At one in the morning they told us that it was time to go and I thought we were traveling in a car, but we were actually traveling by foot. The night was very dark and I couldn't even see my hand, we could only hear each other. Some were saying "Go on! Go on! Don't hold yourself back". I don't know how long we walked, but the *coyote* was telling us to move, that we needed to take advantage of the dark. I fell down, once, then again. I don't know if it was because I was tired or because it was dark or because of both reasons. At one point I fell on a cactus, and I felt like I got injected by lots of needles in my legs, but since we could not stop, because we would be left behind, I kept walking.

Finally, as the sky began to lighten , we encountered the "migra". They told us to run, "Migra is here!" I had no idea what we were running away from but my husband pulled me towards him and we fell into a hole. We stayed there until the sun was out so we could find the path easily. However, when we got out, we didn't see anybody. We were alone, with fear and without water and we had no idea in what direction to walk. We walked until it began to get dark and I prayed to God, to let someone find us. There, in the middle of the desert, I remembered that I didn't like

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green beans, but I was so filled with hunger, I would have eaten anything. Even the idea of eating green beans was a dream.

Unfortunately, around six in the evening, the *migra* found us and took us to jail and kept us there until the next day. It took us about two months more of trying to enter the country, until we finally crossed over. I had completed my journey, one that was not planned nor desired.

After eight months, I was able to return to Mexico to see my family and friend but things did not go as planned and going back to the U.S. was mandatory. I really missed my home country. Coming back to the U.S., I called it my desperate journey towards hope. Contrary to the other time, this time it was a necessity to come to the U.S.

This time it wasn't just my husband and myself, but also my 6 year-old daughter, 2 year-old son and my month-old baby. We already had 5 months in Tijuana, and we couldn't find anybody who crossed children. We did not want our children to pass through the way we had to. However, we were running out of money and my husband needed to start working. Soon we found a lady named Zeferina, who was able to take my baby across the border in a safer way. We met her in a cathedral to give her my baby. My husband gave a kiss to my baby and said "Good luck, I'll see you later." When I got to the cathedral I looked for a woman in a black suit and a red hat, which was all the description I was given of her. I went up to the woman and

asked her if she was Zeferina and if she was the one who was going to take my baby to the U.S. She answered yes and told me to give her my baby and all information about the baby. My heart kept telling me not to give her my baby, but I knew that it was going to be the only way my baby was going to cross the border safely.

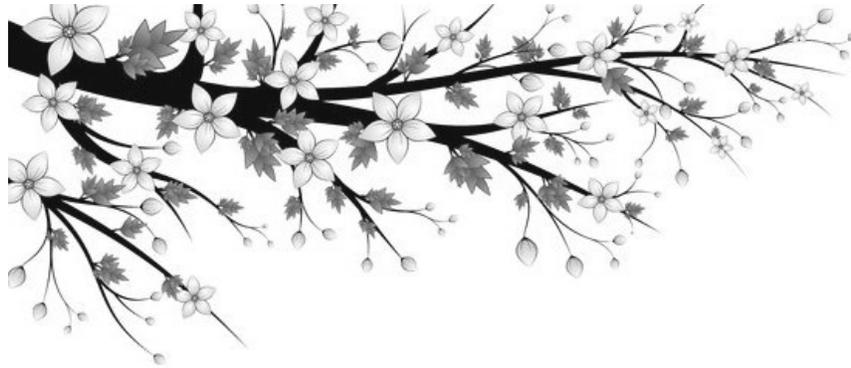
After much confusion and planning and back and forth with Zeferina, I finally trusted her enough to believe that could get my children to the other side. In October my children arrived in Los Angeles to stay with some of my husband's relatives. A week had passed and we weren't able to cross, my husband had already resigned from his job and we had sold the house. When the migra had caught us we had nowhere to stay, sleep, shower, nor did we even have a change of clothes. Time was passing and the likelihood of ever seeing my children felt nearly impossible. Contrary to the first time I arrived in the U.S., I now had a reason to want to be in the country and that was seeing my children.

My last attempt at coming to America, my husband nearly died. It was very cold and we were trying to escape the "mosco" — a helicopter that was trying to catch us. The only way it went away was to not look at it. We were without sweaters in the night. When the coyote finally told us to get up, he didn't move. One of the men told us that he was suffering from hypothermia. All of us worked hard to try to get him to move. We saved him, but another man died. It

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was terrible to see him there, like he was a person with no value. I turned around as we left and saw his body alone, and I didn't know his name, and knew that there was no one to bury him.

We were caught later that day by the migra and locked up one more time before we successfully crossed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. Although my story has some sad and very hard chapters, it has a happy ending. Today I live in this country that I feel is now mine, and which is helping me with the education of my children. So in their tomorrows they will be good, hard-working Americans. That is the hope that makes feel as if the long journey I took was worth it after all.



## **MARIA GUADALUPE AGUILERA**

Maria Aguilera is married and has two daughters. She has lived here in Sacramento for 22 years. She works at home and helps her husband with the paperwork for his lawn maintenance business. She likes all kinds of music and in her free time she enjoys walking in her neighborhood and taking care of the flowers in her garden. She enjoys cooking different kinds of foods for her family. She also enjoys travelling to Mexico when she can. Her goal is to one day speak and write English very well!

## A SCHOOL MEMORY

I remember when I was 12 years old I broke my hand on the swing at my school. I liked my school, it was called Melanor Ocampo. In was in Salmanca, Guanajuato. I remember playing *loteria* and I also remember my teacher, Estela.

In sixth grade, I remember being very impatient for recess. I liked to go to the swings. They were in the back of the school and there were also many beautiful trees there. My cousin Beatriz went to school with me and she was like my sister. She played on the swings with me.

One day we were swinging and she pushed me too hard. I fell down on the ground and broke my hand. I remember when this happened my mom was very angry with me because she always told me to be careful when I went on the swings. My sister Lilia was also at school that day and she was very scared when I fell because I was crying a lot because of the pain.

Now when I see swings it reminds me of that memory. I remember my broken hand, but I also remember that I always loved the swings!

## **COMING TO AMERICA**

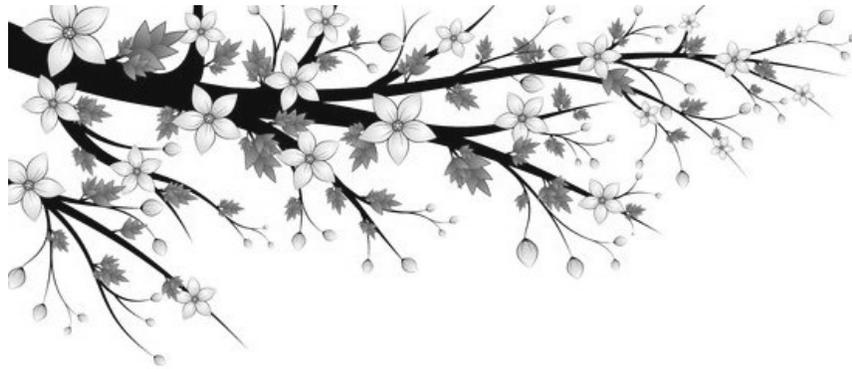
When I was 24 years old, I got married. When I got married, I knew that I would have to come to America with my husband to live with him and start our family. I was scared to leave Mexico, because I did not want to be separated from my family.

The first time I crossed the border I was returned to Mexico right away. I was very scared, but after one week, we tried again. We went to Texas, to the house of my brother, Jose Luis, and stayed two days with him.

Then we came here to Sacramento. I remember our first day here was June 21, 1992. After we had been in Sacramento for two days, my husband invited his family members to meet me. I remember that the house had a lot of flowers in the front.

It was very hard at first to live in America. I was frightened when I had to leave the house to go to the store. When I saw a police car I was scared because I thought they would ask me for my green card.

After one year, my first baby came. I had lived here a year, learned many important things about living in America and had more confidence. Leaving my country was difficult, but now I am used to life in America and I am working hard to learn English.



## MARIA GONZALEZ

Maria Gonzalez lives in Sacramento California. She is married and has nine children. The oldest child is married, one child studies at Sacramento State and the other children are at smaller colleges or in high school. Maria's goal is that all of her children study hard so that in the future they can have good jobs to take care of themselves. She also wants her children to be proud that she and her husband go to school so that they can learn English. Maria works hard all day taking care of her house and helping her younger children. When she has free time she goes to the park. Her favorite thing to do is spend time with her family when they are all together.

## **CHILDHOOD**

When I was young we lived in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico in a town called Indaparapeo. I lived in a quiet neighborhood with my mother and father and younger brothers and sisters. Our house was made from adobe and had a cardboard roof. Our house had a backyard built of bricks and it was next to the mountains. We did not play in the mountains, we were not allowed to mountain climb.

In 1973 I was five years old and started kindergarten. The elementary school was a half a mile from our house, down the hill. Sometimes the teacher didn't show up, or I didn't have transportation. It was very hard for me to go to school.

My mother worked in the fields. She was hard-working. My father worked cutting lumber and all my siblings went to school. I cooked meals for my parents and had to take the food all the way to the top of hills. I had to walk for one hour to get to them. My brothers and sisters helped my mother in the field when they were finished with school.

Thinking about my childhood makes me sad because my childhood was very difficult.

## OUR ENGLISH CLASS

Every week we go to English class to learn to read and write. Our class meets on Tuesday evenings from 5:00 to 8:00 pm. We like going to class.

Our class meets at Luther Burbank High School on Florin Road. Luther Burbank High School is a big urban high school in south Sacramento. Luther Burbank offers many learning opportunities for parents and adults. Our class is in room D-6, Ms. Dusbiber's room. The classroom is clean and comfortable. Ms. Dusbiber is motivating and funny. We are comfortable together and we are very bright.

The students in our class are smart, motivated and like to laugh. We come from all over the world—Mexico, El Salvador, Kashmir, Pakistan, the Philippines and the U.S. We have a friendly team.

Sometimes in English class we are scared and confused. Learning English is hard work and we get impatient because we want to learn faster. It takes time to learn a new language and we understand that now.



## **FLOR RIVERA**

Flor is a single parent. She works as a prep cook at a French Restaurant. She is working hard to become a trainer at her job so that she can earn more money. She has a wonderful boyfriend and two children—one in high school and the other in college. She has gone back to school to learn more English so that she can better herself.

## COMING TO AMERICA

I came to the United States when I was 8 years old. I came from Matagalpa, a small town in Nicaragua where my family and I lived. In 1979, war broke out between the people because the president died. That same year my family and I left our country. I was scared because my father had died, and we had to leave our house.

I remember that it took 8 days on a bus to travel to the U.S. I was very tired and couldn't do anything but sleep. After 8 long days, we arrived in Los Angeles and lived with my aunt. I started to worry because I didn't know the country or language.

After 2 weeks my mother enrolled me in the fourth grade. The school was called Magnolia Elementary and it had a big playground. There, I learned to speak English.

It was very hard to live in a new country and try to learn new things. Looking back at my past now, I'm very glad that we got here safely and were able to become citizens of the United States.



## **RODRIGO LOPEZ**

I am from Aguiles Serdan, Michoacán, Mexico. My village is very small but very beautiful. We knew all of the people in the town when we left to come to America. We left our town to have a better life in the United States.

I was 12 years old, in 1980, when we left. I travelled with my aunt. First we went by bus from Zamora to Tijuana. We crossed in San Ysidro. We crossed in the trunk of a car. It was very dangerous. We rode that way for three hours. It was very, very hot. When they took us out of the trunk, we got to ride inside the car for the trip to Los Angeles. We stayed in Los Angeles for a while until my mother's friend picked us up for the long drive to Sacramento. I was happy because it meant that I would see my mother, who I had not seen in 5 years. When I saw my mother, we hugged.

I lived in a neighborhood in down town Sacramento with my mother and my stepfather. Our apartment was in an old building. I went to middle school for 1 and one half years. I never finished high school. That is why I never learned to write in English. Now I am back in school and am working hard to learn how to write in English!



## **ALICIA FERNANDEZ**

Alicia lives in Sacramento with her two children, Yazmin and Angel. She separated from her partner after ten years and now is an independent single mother. She has a sister who lives in Sacramento and another sister who lives nearby. She has many close neighborhood friends who she loves and respects because they are like her family. She is learning English and enjoys homework time with her children. She works as a server in a Mexican restaurant. She really enjoys her job but she enjoys being a mother to her children more. She enjoys cooking healthy and delicious food. She is a very happy person and likes to dance and listen to Opera music. She also practices Yoga in her free time. Her goal is to speak fluent English and be a role model to other people.

## **CHILDHOOD MEMORY**

In Mexico I lived on a small and beautiful ranch near Cuquio, Jalisco, with my parents, four brothers and four sisters. My mother took care of us while my father worked in the fields. My siblings and I grew up healthy and very humble. I learned at a young age how to cook and make tortillas. Being the oldest sister, I had more responsibility, like working in the fields and taking care of my siblings. I only finished elementary school.

My mornings started off by bringing water from the well and mixing the “nixtamal” for the tortillas. The mornings would sometimes be very cold but it was an amazing feeling to see the sun rising in the fields. I loved to wake up to the singing of the roosters. We had a large chicken flock, and nothing was better than having beans, scrambled eggs and fresh milk for breakfast. We lived very close to my grandfather, who passed by our ranch every morning with his own herd of animals.

On special occasions when we had family over, my mother would cook “mole rojo” made out of chicken and chocolate, and it was very delicious. These events that happened in my childhood were my most preferred moments. Remembering all these memories makes me very happy, because I lived a very happy childhood.



## MARICELA GONZALEZ

Maricela Gonzalez is a student at Sacramento City College. She also attends Luther Burbank High School for Writing and Math courses. She lives in Sacramento California with her two girls and one son. She likes music, dancing and spending time with her family. She also loves supporting her children on their sports teams. She enjoys helping others and spending time with her many friends.

Maricela's story will be published in next year's edition of our stories...

## **BACKGROUND & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The work in this volume is an expression of parent-scholars in the Advanced English Language Learner class at Luther Burbank High School (LBHS). LBHS is located in south Sacramento, an ethnically and linguistically diverse urban area. At the time this volume was created, I had provided support and partnership to LBHS through the UC Davis Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) for seven years.

Six years ago the Parent University program was created under the leadership of Principal Ted Appel, Assistant Principal Mai Xi Lee, Parent Liaison Elisa Gonzalez, myself, and with consultation from Harold Stewart-Carballo, who was with UC Davis Academic Preparation Programs at the time. This work is supported by the University of California's public service mission, as well as the mission and vision of EAOP.

After building the connections and trust of the LBHS community and finding a rhythm for Parent University, there was a desire to enhance what was currently being done. Ms. Gonzalez expressed a request from the parents to expand the evening course offerings.

At that time, the UC Office of the President (UCOP) released the RFP for the University and Community Engagement (UCE) grant, a grant that had 3 main goals: to encourage engagement and collaboration between the univer-

sity and the community, fund new and innovative programs, and enhance educational achievement. UC Davis' grant proposal, "Harnessing the Power of Parents" was funded.

I extend my appreciation to UCOP's Office of Education Partnerships for their support of the program and its components. In addition to adding value to current programming, the grant supported the continuation and enhancement of Ms. Dusbiber's evening class. The time and collaboration with LBHS would also not be possible without the trust and support of my director, Michele Dyke.

This class followed the lead of the Harvard Family Research Project, "Parents Write their Worlds: A Parent Involvement Program Bridging Urban Schools and Families" (Hurtig, 2004). Hurtig (2004) found that participants, "...over time, come to see themselves as thinkers, writers, artists, and community leaders, and to incorporate these roles into their identities...". While evening classes for parents at LBHS were not a new concept or occurrence, the thought to publish the work and expand the reach of the Parent Scholars' voices and experiences was new and welcomed.

The initial goal of the class was deceitfully simple: cultivate the confidence in the parents that would prompt them to write and be willing to share. Over the course of the 2013-14 academic year, the Scholars attended a weekly evening class taught by Dana Dusbiber, with Alma Avalos

as the instructional assistant. Ms. Dusbiber focused on creating a safe space and building confidence. Ms. Avalos provided critical support, working one-on-one with the Scholars and providing translation support. As the class neared the end of the first semester, Ms. Dusbiber shared that the thought of writing something that would be printed was daunting to the Scholars, and asked that we put the project on hold. I was supportive of whatever direction the Scholars were comfortable with. However, by the end of winter there was excitement and enthusiasm. The Scholars soon wanted to know if they would receive enough copies to share with loved ones. This pride and excitement warmed me and was a reminder of how fortunate I am to witness a piece of their journey.

Initially there were three themes the Scholars could write to: autobiography, a childhood memory, and a holiday memory. However, over time, the Scholars expressed a desire to share their story of how they arrived in the United States and the immigration theme was born. Being the daughter of Vietnamese refugees, I feel the strong and yet covert role this has played in my understanding of myself. It's a story my parents rarely tell, and I have a profound respect and admiration to the Scholars for asking to tell the story, telling it in a language that is not their first, and agreeing to have this printed. I believe their children, students at LBHS, teachers, and staff will be enriched by their words. Therefore, rather than organizing this volume

The High Price of the American Dream

around the four themes, I chose to devote each chapter to the author and highlight their words and identity. Each piece is the product of hours and hours of brainstorming, reflection, writing, discussion, revision, and in some cases, translation.

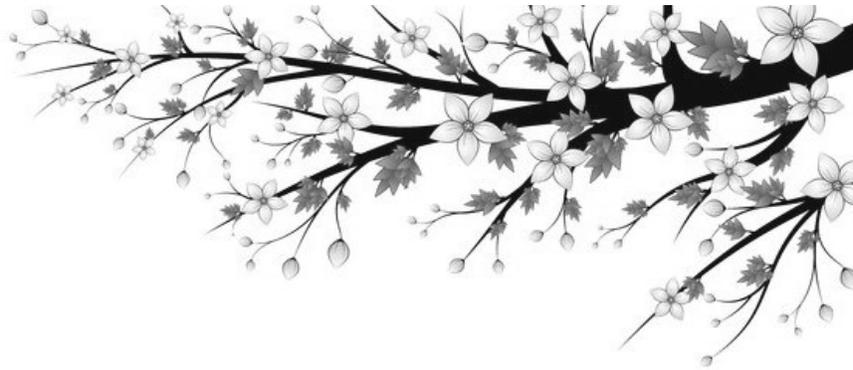
I hope anyone who picks up this volume, and whether one story is read or this is read in whole, will visualize the spirit, courage, and artistry of the Scholar who sat painstakingly with pencil and paper to write a piece of their world to share.

Hong Pham  
University of California, Davis  
Early Academic Outreach Program



## **DANA DUSBIBER**

Dana Dusbiber is a high school teacher living in Sacramento, California. Dana has been a writing consultant with the Area Three Writing Project at UC Davis for 20 years and has coached writers of all ages. She loves good coffee, music, poetry, yoga and travel. In addition to feeling blessed that she has had 25 wonderful years as an urban educator, Dana is also fortunate to have two happy college-going children and some really delightful friends .



## **ALMA AVALOS**

Alma Avalos is an Instructional Aide for the Adult Intermediate Reading & Writing class at Luther Burbank High School. Fluent in Spanish, Alma graduated from Burbank in 2008 and went on to attend college as an undocumented student at the California State University of Sacramento where she received her Bachelors Degree in Child Development. Alma aspires to one day become a teacher, while giving back to the Latino community. She hopes to one day be able to travel around the world and learn about various cultures. She enjoys helping others as well as spending time with her family.

**REFERENCE**

Hurtig, J. (2004). *Parents Write Their Worlds: A Parent Involvement Program Bridging Urban Schools and Families* ` (Family Involvement Research Digests) Retrieved May 15, 2014 from <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/parents-write-their-worlds-a-parent-involvement-program-bridging-urban-schools-and-families>

