

Who tells your story?

“I was born in Cuba, Durango, Mexico in 1974. It was a small rancho, there were just 40 families. It was like a family, all one, because we all knew what we were supposed to do, where we would go, each other's birthdays, our activities. It was very dry, there wasn't any vegetation, but it was very warm with the people. My rancho smelled like humid dirt and like dry dirt. It is a bit incredible, but my rancho has a smell that makes you want to eat it. That's why every once in a while we tasted the dirt. When it would rain I could smell it because it doesn't rain a lot, so when it would rain we would all go outside to smell it because it smelled delicious. It also smelled like peach blossoms and a lot like cilantro, because people would grow their own cilantro. It had many smells. The smell I liked most was the smell of dirt, whether it was dry or wet. I can't explain to you how dry dirt smells, but I know.

My favorite thing was that I was a daughter with siblings with a dad and a mom, in a house. I still conserve this memory because it will never be possible again. It felt secure. Just being in my rancho makes you feel like happiness really exists. When I was there I was really small, so I only remember times when there wasn't much worrying. I didn't know what paying for water was because the water was free. I don't remember a time when my parents would worry about house payments because that house was ours. My dad made it. We didn't know what worrying and social pressure was. We just had happiness. We weren't always satisfied, but we were thankful for what we had, and whatever the earth gave us is what we had.



My job was making sure to feed the cows and horses. That was my responsibility. After, I would harvest the food during the seasons so we could have them during the time that they wouldn't grow. I would also make dry foods in el campo. Everything that was el campo belonged to me. At home I would wash the dishes around 3 pm. If it rained, I had to take the wood inside so that we could have fire to make the food because we didn't have a stove. I would help my mom with the errands and take care of my younger siblings. But my main thing was the animals. I liked it, and I had fun with it. I was very alert so that when the cows would have their babies the coyotes wouldn't eat them. That was my big worry, but I had a lot of fun taking care of them. Sometimes the animals chased me around. I think that they were mad.

They thought “Here comes this girl to bother us.” But I enjoyed caring for the cows. I would also milk them so I could take some home. At a young age they would teach me how to milk the cows. I would be in charge of making sure that the calves would drink some of the milk, and I would take some to my house. I would do it from the time I was 8 until I was 14 or 15.

I have seven sisters and three brothers. I have five siblings older than me and five younger than me. I am the middle child. We all had very big age gaps, but with the one older than me and younger than me, we were the closest. The one that was older than me was a bit crazy because she was older than me. The one younger than me was very cheerful. We were happy and playful. We would play bebeleche with la gloria. We would play jump rope, we would also play what you guys call ‘softball.’ We would play hide and seek, and that was our favorite part because we would play late at night and they would let us leave the pueblo. We also played el bote volado. We would hit a can and run for it. We had many games without them being how they are now. No electronics; there weren’t any during that time. Our games were made with things out of our own pueblo. We would also make balls out of newspaper if we didn't have any. I think that bebeleche was my favorite because I would always beat my siblings when going around. I was really good because I could even make it nine times around without losing. So I liked it because I liked winning.

I love my parents and I respect them, but it wasn't a relationship that I liked having with them. My dad was an alcoholic for most of his life, so there wasn't really a relationship. With my mom, she had many kids, and I think that sometimes it's

hard to have a close relationship when there are a lot of us. But she was calm, just calm, but not really close. She wasn't really someone I trusted to the point where I could say “This is happening to me.” It was just a basic relationship. My parents brought benefits to my life so I could know that, first of all, I never wanted to marry a drunk man. It also taught me that with my daughters, it is important to know that they are all different and to have different relationships with each one. I also wanted to have them closer to me as much as I could. My relationship with my parents would sometimes affect the way I felt. I would sometimes feel a bit sad when I was growing up and as a young woman. I think that was why I wouldn't smile as much, because sometimes I was worried. When my second oldest sister got married, she found a husband that was very sweet, a bit calmer, and that helped me be a little more calm when I was near them.

I went to elementary school, and I think that they put me in 1st grade. There wasn't a kindergarten when I went to school. I finished elementary school, but after that there wasn't anything else. They just had elementary in my pueblo. It was small. There was also a time when I felt very stressed because sometimes I wouldn't get to school at 8, and I would get there at 8:15 sometimes. That made me mad. After that there was a program for teenagers. We started to try to get a middle school. It was 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. The government told us that if we got 20 people together they would send us a teacher, and we did get enough together! But the parents needed the kids to continue helping out with the animals, and people started to leave and leave, until we were the only two girls left. But the other girl was going to leave, and I was going to stay by

myself. I begged her to not leave because if she left, I would be alone, and they wouldn't leave a teacher just for me. They told me the teacher wouldn't be able to stay if she left, and since she didn't leave, the two of us graduated and they made us a graduation.

After I finished middle school I took another course. There was one that was offered to people in the pueblo, and if you took the course, you could help be a teacher so that new opportunities could be opened for kindergarten children. When I went to take that course, all I wanted was the education in the pueblo to grow. I took a course and it took me about 8 months to finish it, then they gave me my certificate and I was able to teach kindergarten. I was able to give classes for two years. But my parents didn't think that it was anything big because my dad didn't believe that education was for women, so I had to obey and stop teaching. Plus, he also said that the money I earned was too little, and since children always needed pens and supplies, I would buy them and return home without money. Children are people who we need to take care of like plants. Like a planted seed, you need to make sure that it grows well, that they have their water, their sun.

I like school. One thing that has hurt me the most throughout my life is that people don't believe in education for their kids or for their family. But if you don't have an education, you don't have a voice. I always wanted to go to the city to go to school. When I finished elementary school, I wanted to go to a good middle school, at a school that was everyday, 8 hours a day. I wanted to do a lot of homework, read a lot of books, but that was something I could never do. My dad didn't let me go to the city. I didn't really know what a city was

like, but all I knew was that there were schools, so that was enough, knowing that there were books.

A teacher in my pueblo had a closet that had a lock, and in the closet there was a big history book. It made me want to have it in my hands. Sometimes when we would get out of recess I would go to the classroom first. I would get close to the teacher's desk and I would pass by and check if the closet was locked, and it was locked. One day I wanted to steal the book, but I never could. The day that I saw the closet open, I wasn't able to commit the robbery. I loved school. I always wanted to feel as if I was there.

I was a quiet girl. I was happy inside, but I wouldn't express my emotions a lot. I enjoyed being alone en el campo most of the time. I also liked to know more things to help my community. I think I was a bit of a rebel because I wanted to go beyond and explore things. I was always looking for what else there was, even though I was happy. I knew that on the other side of the mountains there were more things. When I got to know the United States, I thought, "This is what I would think of when I was little. What else is there? This is what there is."

I didn't want to come to the United States. I am very patriotic and I still love my homeland. I still smell it like I did when I was there. But when my older sister was over here and she got married, she needed help taking care of her kids, so my mom sent me to help her out. I was 12 years old. They sent me, but I didn't want to come, and after they sent me one time they kept sending and sending me. By the time I was about 18 years old, everyone else had come here, so I couldn't really go back

unless I wanted to be alone. My mom came for some time, along with my dad. They were all living here. But I never wanted to come.

The thing that made me want to stay in Mexico were all the projects I had for my pueblo. I was giving classes to little kids so they could learn to read, and there were also some adults who didn't know how to read either. I had personal projects, but when you are a daughter, you can't really disobey, so they sent me here. When I first came here I didn't really like how the families were really small. They were really closed up in their houses. They wouldn't really talk to their neighbors. I could never knock on someone's door to meet them. I also always had to call or make an appointment at places. Everything was different when I came for the first time, and I didn't like it. I realized that when I would go to my pueblo they would always offer me to come in and eat, but when I came here I couldn't even stand at my neighbor's door. I had to knock. Over there we don't knock, we just yell. The door was usually open. Here they never offer you anything. The people are really "just them." In my pueblo, if they saw that I fell and my knee would start bleeding, they would say, "Come here so I can put something on it," and they would put a piece of onion on it and clean it. Here, the neighbors don't ask "Are you ok?" You just don't exist. That's how I felt. Everything was cold. That's how I felt and I still feel it.

I come from a small pueblo and the houses are made by yourself with your own materials. Here, the houses are modern. Here, no one makes their own houses. You have to pay a company to make it for you. Over there it's a bit difficult to find the basic nutrition, no matter how much you work.

Here, if you find a job, you can find your own food easier. Here there is also a lot of access to tools to inform yourself and to be able to go to school. Here students don't work, they mostly dedicate their time to school work. Over there you had to do what you could with your time. It's totally different.

I wasn't excited to come to the US because my dad worked here during the 60's. He told us a story that one time his boss made them shower in water that had chlorine. They had put about 20 people in a room, and with a hose that had chlorine, they washed them as if they were cars. I never wanted to face a situation like that. I never wanted to imagine how it was. I was also leaving my friends. I left everything.

The day I left seemed like the others, but it was one of the saddest days because I didn't want to leave my pueblo. I left everything. I left my personal things, I left my family, I left my friends, I left my school, I left the dogs that would pass by everyday. It was sad. When I left my pueblo, for some reason I felt like it would be for a long time, and it was. I felt sadness when I heard the sound of the car when we were leaving and the roaring engine. After we were in the car, I got onto a truck, and the truck roared even sadder than the car because it moved even farther away. I couldn't recognize anything. That was how leaving was; the sounds just sounded like sadness and forgetting.

When I crossed, a big river was in view, and it panicked me a little. When I crossed the first time, immigration officers got me and took me to jail. After I passed some time later, the people I went with told me "You have to change your name," and that was the first time I changed my

name so that if I were to cross again, they wouldn't return me so fast. I remember being scared because when you are crossing, you don't cross with your family, you cross alone, and I was a 12-13 year old girl. They left me alone with a man that was taking me in an inflated tire, and everything had to be very fast. I remember it was hard to climb over the fence, and they got me, and they took me back to Mexico again. After that, I tried to pass again, and obviously I passed.

Another time I passed they almost got us because we passed under a fence through a hole. After we crossed, it was the center of Texas, El Paso, and we went into some stores to look, just to waste time and wait for someone to come for us. But they weren't arriving, and they were taking a while. The people that were in the store were starting to see us as suspicious, and a person told us, "You have to get out of here, go to the back!" We went to the back, and the officers were passing in their cars, so they put us inside of a trash can. They hid us there, each person in their can. It was smelly there, and we waited there for a long time. It was also summertime. It was very hot and the trash smelled bad. Someone finally knocked on the can and they helped us out. They said "Come out, come out!" but I couldn't come out, so another person had to help me out. They took us out of there and we were just walking when we saw the immigration officers, and other people told us, "Run, they can shoot you!" That day I practiced what I already knew: even though you are scared, you have to run. That is the last resource to save your life. When I was at the rancho, the same thing happened because sometimes toros would chase you and they have huge horns, but you knew you needed to run. One day I went to feed them, they were mad, and they stood up and threw me.

Even with fear, you still have to do it, do it, do it. I was just running and I told myself, "They are going to shoot, they are going to shoot." I felt that at any moment a bullet would pass through me. I felt as if the bullet would go through my left side, but it never did.

Another time we passed by the train tracks, but when I got onto the train there were two muggers hidden. One got me and he grabbed me close to him and put a knife to my neck and said "Give me everything you have!" I didn't have anything, only 10 dollars for my trip and a ring that I got for my 15th birthday, and he took it. It hurt me to lose it because those were special memories. Thank God that he didn't hurt me, because he checked everywhere. Those are experiences that I've lived through. One day I think of returning to my pueblo. I want to feel the dirt on my feet. I want to be in the places where I grew up. I was born there. I grew up there. I was formed there. Everything that I am as a person comes from there.

The first time I came to the US, I came to my older sister's house. I didn't really know her because she had come here at a young age and she was married, so we couldn't see each other a lot. It was a little difficult because we didn't have that relationship. When I came here I started to go to English classes for about 6 months. I didn't learn a lot but enough. Then I went to a school here and studied for my GD. I worked as a babysitter. I took care of kids and cleaned houses when I would come and go. When I officially came for good, I worked at three or four companies that were dedicated to killing animals and packaging meat. Many people say that it's a very heavy job because it's very cold, but I was

fine with doing it because it was the closest thing that was related to what we would do in my pueblo. I was used to seeing how animals were killed for the pueblo's food. I think that's why it was much easier. I don't think I would have liked it if I hadn't had that experience. I also worked in restaurants as a waitress. I worked at a buffet in charge of baking all the desserts and cakes. I also worked doing inventory for companies like Home Depot. I worked at a place that assembled parts for computers. I also worked at a dry cleaner, hanging clothes. That was easy because in my pueblo we would wash the clothes by hand and they would give us the wet clothes to hang, so my hands were accustomed to it. When I worked at the meat place, the manager was rude because he knew that I had changed name and he kept saying "You, whatever your name is." Sometimes he wouldn't give me a name. He spoke Spanish and English. He was from here. He knew both of my names, but he mocked me. But I'm glad I didn't get in any trouble because one time I got really mad, and I grabbed his neck and tightened it with his shirt. I let go and he was out of breath. He said "You are crazy," and that was the most difficult thing because I had gotten so mad that it made me do something that I didn't want to do. Now, I think that if I would have known many years ago that I had my rights, I could've called the police or an organization to tell them that he was bothering me. I still thank God that I didn't take the air out of him permanently. After that, he didn't continue mocking me.

More than anything, I think that socializing, the language, and the food were some of my biggest struggles. The people here are more reserved. They also take away your identity because after some years you don't have one. You don't even

remember how your life was, where you left your clothes, where the things that you loved and got dressed with everyday are at. One of the things that we struggle with in this country, this happens to a lot of latinos, is that in order to get a job you have to change your name due to different circumstances. Imagine, you already have a lot of struggles, and then getting your name changed. Sometimes you don't even respond to another name because it's not your name. It takes a part of you away. Before you realize, a lot of years have already passed and you are like an empty piggy bank, hollow, because they already took away many memories, many things that belonged to you, and sometimes even your identity.

I met my husband at a job. I arrived to ask for a job and he was working there. I was waiting for them to attend me because I had an appointment for an interview. He left to go to the bathroom and he found me on the steps and he said "Miss, have they attended you?" and I said "Yes, thank you." He left and they hadn't even interviewed me when he came out again. That's how we met. After they gave me the interview and they hired me, we kept seeing each other. He greeted me and they also put us in the same department to work together. I think that I liked how respectful he was ever since we first met. For our first date he invited me to eat dinner and I thought it was a formal dinner, but he invited me to eat burritos. I was a bit like "What?!" but it was all fine. After that we started to get to know each other a little more. It wasn't love at first sight, but with time it grew like a plant and bore fruits and many years later, we have three daughters together.

I want people to know that immigrants are strong, hardworking, and that many times their hearts are

divided into two. You want to return to your land, but you don't want to leave your kids here, and you don't want to take away the opportunities that they have. Immigrants' hearts cry inside, not only their eyes. Many times their hearts cry but people can't see. Don't think that all the heart knows how to do is pump blood. Immigrants constantly struggle every day. It's a struggle of working, of impotence for the salaries that are badly paid. You don't have enough time for your children. You would like to do more for them. Many of the tears are internal, but immigrants still try to stay as cheerful as they can and strong for their families. Many moms and dads feel like that. Almost all of us have those tears in the heart. It's the reality of life. Being an immigrant, most times it's hard to sleep, not knowing if when you wake up you will still be at your own house or not. You never know if it will be the last night you spend with your kids. Those are things you sometimes don't want to tell your kids so they don't get worried, but it's difficult to know that at any moment you might not be able to return to pick up your kids at school. The uncertainty of not knowing when, that is a worry that millions of immigrants share.

I have found good things here too, like the education is within reach, and I fight so that my daughters don't have a destiny like me. I would never say that education is not for women. Education is for all human beings. It's not about men or women. I am very happy that everyone in this country can get education, no matter what sex they are. If you want to, the doors are open.

My favorite part of my day is making sure that my daughters eat breakfast and take them to school. It's like their water, their sun, their air as a plant. That's what they need in order to bear fruit. I

make sure they have food, and that they have a roof to protect themselves. Like plants, if it snows, we cover them. We are part of the world and vegetation. I feel like we are like plants, except we talk and laugh. But there are times when the day seems so long until my girls all come home that I start to feel sad because I want to see them. But that is my favorite part, taking them to school, bringing them back, making sure that they have their breakfast and dinner, and asking them "Are you ok?" and "How was your day at school?"

I am most proud of being able to give my daughters an education. That's the biggest thing I have done in my life. I am proud of knowing and respecting that my daughters are human, not puppets that you move all the time. I am proud to see how they are growing, their growth as my daughters, everything that they do. I'm proud of everything they are able to experience and taste in life. If you taste many things, you get to pick your favorite food. My greatest pride is my daughters. I am happy and proud that they speak both English and Spanish, and that some speak three languages. I don't have anything else that makes me as proud as my daughters. If at this moment I were to die, that would be the biggest legacy I would leave."

story told by: Tadia Hernandez

¿Quién cuenta tu historia?

“Nací en Cuba, Durango, México en 1974. Es un rancho muy pequeño, solamente 40 familias. Era como una familia, todas una, porque todos conocíamos lo que hacíamos, a donde íbamos, los cumpleaños y las actividades de todos. Era muy seco porque no hay vegetación, pero muy cálido con la gente. Olía como tierra húmeda y a tierra seca. Es un poco increíble pero mi rancho tiene un olor que dan ganas de comértelo. Por eso había veces que probábamos la tierra. En cuanto llovía podías oler la tierra porque no llueve muy común, así que cuando llueve, todos salimos a oler porque huele delicioso. También huele a flor de durazno y huele mucho a cilantro porque la gente siembra su cilantro. Durango tiene muchos olores. El que más me gusta es el olor a tierra ya sea mojada o seca. No te puedo explicar cómo huele la tierra seca pero yo sí se.

Mi cosa favorita era que yo era una hija con hermanos, con papá y mamá en una casa. Aún conservo eso porque nunca más será posible. Se sentía como seguridad. Solo estar en mi rancho te hace sentir que realmente existe la felicidad. Cuando vivía allí era muy pequeña así que solamente recuerdo tiempos donde no te preocupabas. No conocía que era pagar agua porque el agua era gratis, no conocía que mis padres se preocupaban por un pago de casa porque allá teníamos una casa de nosotros. Mi papá la hizo. No conocía tanta preocupación ni presión social. Solo teníamos felicidad. No era un plan de conformismo pero era un plan de agradecimiento de lo que tienes, y lo que la tierra dio es lo que tenemos.



Mi trabajo principal era encargarme de darle de comer a las vacas y a los caballos. Después me encargaba de cosechar la comida de temporada para que tuviéramos en el tiempo que no había. Todo lo que era el campo me pertenecía. En la casa lavaba los trastes como a las 3 de la tarde. Si llovía, tenía que meter la leña para que tuviéramos para hacer el fuego para comer, porque no teníamos estufa. Ayudaba a hacer los mandados que mi mamá quisiera y a cuidar a mis hermanos más pequeños. Pero mi trabajo principal eran los animales. Me gustaba y me divertía. Estaba muy alerta para que cuando las vacas fueran a tener sus bebés no se los comieran los coyotes. Esa era mi gran preocupación, pero me divertía mucho cuidando a los animales. Hubo algunas veces cuando me corretearon los animales, yo creo que

estaban enojadas y pensaban “Ya viene esta niña a molestar.” También le sacaba la leche para llevar a la casa. Desde muy niña me enseñaban a sacar la leche a las vacas, me encargaba de que sus becerritos comieran una parte y yo me llevaba otra parte a la casa. Hice esto desde los ocho años hasta los 14 o 15.

Tengo siete hermanas y tres hermanos. Tengo cinco mayores y cinco menores, soy la del medio. Con todos era muy diferente porque todos teníamos mucha diferencia de edad. Pero con la que estaba mayor que yo y menor que yo, éramos las que estábamos más pegadas. La que era mayor que yo era un poquito loca porque era mayor que yo. La menor que yo era muy alegre. Éramos felices y juguetonas. Jugábamos al bebeleche con la gloria arriba, jugábamos a la cuerda, a lo que llaman ustedes el ‘softball’ la pichada, y jugábamos a las escondidas- esa era nuestra parte favorita porque jugábamos durante la noche y nos dejaban salir al pueblo. Jugábamos al bote volado, tocábamos un bote y había que correr atrás de ello. Teníamos muchos juegos que no eran como ahora, nada de electrónicos, no había eso en ese tiempo. Eran puros juegos de cosas hechas con el mismo pueblo. También hacíamos pelotas con papel periódico si no teníamos. Creo que el bebeleche era mi favorito porque siempre les ganaba dando vueltas. Yo era muy buena jugando porque podía llegar a hacer 9 vueltas y no perdía. Eso me gustó porque me gustaba ganar.

Amo a mis padres y los respeto, pero no era la relación que me gustaba tener con ellos porque mi padre fue alcohólico toda su vida así que no había una relación. Con mi mamá creo que era muy difícil en ocasiones tener una relación muy cercana porque éramos muchos. Era tranquila pero no era

muy cercana. No era alguien en que confiara hasta el punto para poder decir ‘esto me está sucediendo’, era una relación nomás básica. Mis padres trajeron beneficio a mi vida para saber que, primero que nada, nunca quería casarme con un hombre borracho. También me enseñó que con mis hijas es importante saber que todas son diferentes para hacer una relación diferente con cada una. Me enseñó que debo tenerlas cerca de mí lo más que pudiera. Causó que en ocasiones me sintiera triste cuando estaba creciendo ya de jovencita, y creo que por eso no sonreía mucho porque a veces estaba preocupada. Cuando la segunda de mis hermanas se casó se encontró un esposo que era muy suave, más tranquilo, y eso me ayudó a estar un poco más tranquila cerca de ellos.

Estudí la primaria, creo que me pusieron en el primer grado. No había kindergarten cuando yo fui a la escuela. Era muy chico. Hubo un tiempo donde me sentía muy estresada porque a veces no me daba tiempo de llegar a la escuela a las 8 y llegaba a veces 8:15, eso me enojaba mucho. Después hubo un programa para que los jóvenes pudiéramos tener una secundaria de séptimo hasta noveno grado. Nos dijo el gobierno que si juntábamos 20 jóvenes nos mandaban un maestro y si nos juntamos! Pero los papás ocupaban que los hijos siguieran ayudando con los animales, se fueron saliendo, y saliendo y solo nos quedamos 2 niñas y luego se iba salir la otra y me iba quedar sola. Le rogué mucho que no se fuera porque si se iba me iba a quedar sola, y no iban a dejar un maestro para mí solita. Me dijeron que ya no me podían dejar al maestro si ella se salía, y como no se salió nos graduamos 2 niñas y nos hicieron una graduación.

Después que terminé la secundaria tomé otro curso, había un curso que ofrecían a la gente del pueblo para ayudar como maestra para que se abrieran nuevas oportunidades para los niños del kindergarten. Creo que yo quería que el pueblo tuviera mas crecimiento en educación. Tomé ese curso y me llevó 8 meses terminarlo tiempo completo y luego me dieron mi certificado y pude dar clases para kindergarten. De esa manera pude dar clases por 2 años. Mis padres pensaron que eso no era una gran cosa porque mi padre no creía que la educación era para mujeres, entonces tuve que obedecer y parar de dar clases. Aparte me dijo que el dinero que ganaba era muy poquito, y como los niños siempre ocupaban plumas, yo los compraba y llegaba sin dinero a la casa. Los niños son los seres que debemos de cuidar como las plantas. Como una semilla, cuando lo plantas te ocupas asegurar que crezca bien, que tenga su aguita y su solecito.

Me encanta la escuela, una de las cosas que más me ha dolido a través de mi vida es que mucha gente no cree en la educación académica para sus hijos o para su familia. Si no tienes educación no tienes voz. Siempre quise ir a la ciudad para estudiar. Cuando terminé la primaria quería irme a estudiar la secundaria bien en una escuela que fuera todo los días, 8 horas, hiciera muchas tareas, leyera muchos libros y eso fue unas de las cosas que nunca pude realizar. Mi papá no me permitió irme a la ciudad, yo no conocía realmente de ciudades pero yo nomas sabia que había escuelas so eso era suficiente, saber que había libros.

Los maestros allá en mi pueblo tenían un armario que tenía una llave, y ahí tenían un libro de historia muy grande. Todos los días trataba de robarlo. Siempre checaba si había dejado abierto y

no. Ese libro lo guardaba como si fuera algo tan grandioso y me daban ganas de tenerlo en mis manos. En ocasiones cuando salíamos del recreo entraba primero y me arrimaba a su escritorio, y pasaba para checar si estaba el armario abierto, y estaba con seguro. Tuve toda la intención de un día robarmelo y nunca pude. El día que vi el armario abierto ya no pude cometer el robo. Me encantaba la escuela. Dije me gusta porque siempre quiero sentir que estoy allí.

Fui una niña muy callada, era feliz por dentro pero no era muy expresiva. Me gustaba estar sola en el campo la mayor parte del tiempo. Me gustaba saber más cosas para ayudar a mi comunidad. Creo que era un poco rebelde porque quería ir más allá y explorar cosas. Aunque estaba feliz, sabía que de aquel lado de las montañas había más cosas. Cuando conocí aquí pensé “esto es lo que pensé de niña, qué más hay? Esto es lo que hay”.

Yo no quise venir a Estados Unidos, yo soy muy patriota y yo sigo amando a mi tierra. La sigo oliendo como cuando estaba allá. Cuando mi hermana mayor se casó ella ocupaba ayuda cuidando a sus hijos y mi mamá me envió para darle una ayuda, yo tenía 12 años. Me enviaron pero yo no quise venir. Después que me enviaron la primera vez me siguieron enviando y enviando. Hasta que yo tenía 18 años, para entonces todos se habían venido para los Estados Unidos, así que ya no podía regresar, ya estaría solita. Se vinieron mi mamá y mi papá a vivir un tiempo, acá estaban viviendo todos. Pero yo nunca quise venir.

Lo que me hizo querer quedarme en México es que yo tenía proyectos para mi pueblo. Estaba dando clases a los niños chiquitos para que aprendieran a leer y también le daba clases a los

adultos que no sabían leer. Tenía proyectos personales pero cuando eres hija de familia no puedes desobedecer así que me mandaron aquí. Cuando vine acá no me gustó mucho que las familias eran muy pequeñas, muy encerradas en sus casas, casi no convivían con sus vecinos. Nunca podía tocar una puerta para saludar, tenía que hacer una cita o llamar y estar allí. Era todo diferente cuando vine la primera vez, no me gustó eso. Me di cuenta que cuando llegaba a mi pueblo me ofrecían pasar a comer y cuando vine aquí ni siquiera podía pararme en las puertas de los vecinos. Tenía que tocar. Allá no tocabas, nomas gritabas y la puerta estaba abierta. Aquí nunca me ofrecían nada. Las personas son muy “ellas.” Allá en mi pueblo si miraban que me caía y me sangraba una rodilla me decían “Ven para ponerte algo.” y me ponían un pedazo de cebolla y me limpiaban. Aquí los vecinos no preguntan ‘¿Estás bien?’. Nomas no existías, así sentí la vida, muy fría. Así la sentí y la siento todavía.

Yo vengo de un pueblo bien pequeño y las casas son hechas por ti mismo con tus propios materiales. Aquí son casas muy modernas. Aquí nadie hace su propia casa, le ocupas pagar a una compañía para que te la hagan. Allá era un poco difícil encontrar la alimentación básica aunque trabajaras mucho, aquí si encuentras trabajo puedes encontrar tu propia comida mas facil. Tambien aquí hay mucho acceso a herramientas para informarte y para ir a la escuela. Aquí los niños no trabajan, mayormente se dedican a estudiar. Allá teníamos que hacer lo que pudieramos con nuestro tiempo. Es totalmente diferente.

No estaba emocionada para venir a Estados Unidos porque mi papá nos había platicado una

historia que cuando vino en una ocasión sus patrones habían hecho que se bañaran con agua que tenía cloro. Habían metido 20 personas en un cuarto, y con una manguera habían puesto cloro y los habían lavado como si fueran carros. Nunca por ningún motivo del mundo quería enfrentarme a una situación así. Por eso nunca quería imaginarme cómo era eso. Tampoco quería dejar a mis amigos, pero tuve que dejar todo.

El día que me fui para venir a los Estados Unidos parecía como todos, pero es uno de los días mas tristes porque no quería salir de mi pueblo. Deje todo, deje mis cositas personales, mi familia, mis amigos, mi escuela. Deje los perros que pasaban todo los días. Cuando salí de mi pueblo por alguna razón sentí que sería por mucho tiempo, y así fue. Sentí tristeza cuando escuché el ruido del carro cuando salimos, y despues me subí a un camion y sonaba mas triste que el carro porque se alejaba mas. Así es el salir, los sonidos suenan como a tristeza y olvido.

Cuando crucé se veía un río muy grande y me daba un poco de pánico. Cuando crucé la primera vez me agarró migración y me llevó a la cárcel. Después que crucé me dijeron las personas que me acompañaban “Ocupas cambiarte de nombre”, y esa fue la primera vez que me cambié de nombre para que si volviera a cruzar no me regresaran tan rápido. Recuerdo que me daba miedo porque cuando vas a cruzar no cruzas con tu familia, cruzas sola y yo solo era una niña de 12 -13 años. Me dejaron sola con un hombre que me llevaba en la llanta inflada y todo tenía que ser muy rápido. Recuerdo que me costó mucho subir de la barda y me agarraron, y me llevaron otra vez a México. Después me volvieron a intentar pasar y obviamente ya pude pasar.

Otra ocasión pasé y casi nos agarran porque pasamos por debajo de un cerco de un ollo. Una vez que cruzamos era el mero centro de El Paso, Texas, y nos metimos a unas tiendas para mirar, solo para perder el tiempo y esperar que lleguen por nosotros, pero no llegaban. Las personas que estaban en la tienda nos miraban como sospechosos y dijo una persona “Tienen que salirse de allí, vayanse atrás!”. Fuimos atrás y estaba pasando migración en sus carros, entonces nos metieron en un bote de basura, allí nos escondieron. Cada quien en un bote. Estaba apesada y allí esperamos mucho tiempo. Como era tiempo de verano estaba calientísimo. Alguien por fin tocó el bote y ya de allí nos sacaron, dijeron ‘Salgan, Salgan!’ pero yo no podía salir y me ayudó otra compañera a salir. Nos sacaron de allí, apenas estábamos caminando y estaba migración y nos dijeron otras personas “Corran! ¡Los pueden disparar!” y ese día practiqué lo que ya sabía, que aunque tengas miedo tienes que correr. Porque es el último recurso para salvar tu vida. Cuando estás en el rancho pasa lo mismo porque unas veces los toros van detrás de ti y tienen unos cuernos bien grandes pero sabes que tienes que correr. Un día me metí a darle de comer a los toros, estaban enojados, y me aventaron. Pero aun con miedo solo tienes que hacerlo, hazlo, hazlo. Yo iba corriendo y decía “Me van a disparar, me van a disparar” y sentía que en algún momento me iba a entrar una bala. Sentí como si la bala me fuera a atravesar en mi lado izquierdo.

Otra vez pasamos por la vía del tren pero cuando me subí al tren estaban 2 asaltantes escondidos. Uno me agarró y me puso un cuchillo en mi cuello y dijo “Dame todo lo que traes!”. Yo tenía solo 10 dólares para mi viaje y un anillo que era de mis 15

años y se lo llevó. Me dolió perderlo porque son recuerdos especiales. Gracias a Dios que no me lastimó porque me chequeó todo. Son experiencias de lo que he vivido. Creo que algún día pienso en volver. Quiero sentir la tierra en mis pies, quiero estar en los lugares en donde crecí. Allí nací, allí crecí, allí me forme, de allí viene todo lo que yo soy como persona.

La primera vez que vine a los Estados Unidos fui a la casa de mi hermana mayor. Cuando vine aquí comencé a ir a clases de inglés, fui unos 6 meses, no aprendí mucho pero lo suficiente. Después fui a la escuela y estudié mi GD aquí. Yo trabajé como niñera y limpiaba casas cuando iba y venía. Cuando oficialmente me quedé trabajé en tres o cuatro compañías que se dedicaban a matar animales y empaquetar carne. Mucha gente dice que es un trabajo muy pesado porque es muy frío pero yo estaba bien haciendo eso porque era lo que mas se relacionaba con lo que hacia en mi pueblo. Yo estaba acostumbrada a mirar como mataban a los animales para la comida del pueblo. Creo que por eso me fue mucho mas facil. Creo que no me gustaría si no hubiera tenido esa experiencia. También trabajé en restaurantes como mesera. Trabajé en un buffet encargandome de hornear todo lo que es reposteria. También trabaje haciendo inventarios para una compañías como Home Depot. Trabajé en un lugar que ensambla partes para computadora. Los que mas tuve fueron de la carne pero era muy buena haciendo eso. Tambien trabajé en una tintorería colgando ropa. Eso fue muy facil porque en mi pueblo lavamos a mano y nos daban la ropa mojada para colgarlo, so mis manos estaban acostumbradas a eso. Cuando trabaje en la carne, el manager era grosero porque el sabia que me habia cambiado mi nombre y

seguido me decía “Usted como se llame”. A veces no me daba un nombre. El hablaba español e inglés, era de aquí. Él sabía mis dos nombres pero el se burlaba de mí. Estoy feliz que no me metí en problemas porque una vez me enoje mucho que le agarré el cuello y le apreté con su camisa. Lo solté y estaba agitado, me decía “Está loca usted”, y eso fue lo más difícil porque me llegó tanto mi enojo que me provocó hacer una acción que no quería. Ahora creo que si yo hubiera sabido hace muchos años que yo tenía mis derechos yo hubiera llamado a la policía o a una organización para decirles que me estaba molestando. Le doy gracias a Dios que no le quité el aire de plano. Después no volvió a burlarse de mí.

Más que nada el socializar, el idioma, y la comida son unas de las luchas más grandes. La gente de aquí nomás es muy cortante. También te quitan tu identidad porque después de años ya no tienes, ni siquiera te recuerdas cómo era tu vida, dónde quedó tu ropa, donde quedaron tus cosas que tanto amabas y con las que todos los días te vestías. Unas de las cosas en las que luchas cuando estás en este país, esto le pasa a muchos latinos, es que para conseguir un trabajo ocupas cambiarte de nombre por diferentes circunstancias. Imaginate, de por si ya tienes muchas cosas difíciles y luego quitarte tu nombre. Unas veces ya ni respondes a otro nombre porque no es tu nombre. Te quita parte de ti. Cuando te das cuenta, ya pasaron muchos años y ya estas como una alcancía sin dinero, hueca, porque ya te quitaron muchas memorias, muchos recuerdos, muchas cosas que te pertenecían, y en ocasiones hasta tu identidad.

Conocí a mi esposo en un trabajo. Yo llegué a pedir trabajo y allí estaba trabajando él. Yo estaba esperando que me atendieran porque tenía cita

para mi entrevista. El salió al baño y me encontró en los escalones y me dijo “Señorita, ya la atienden?” y le dije “Si, gracias”. El se fue y todavía no me habían dado entrevista y él salió otra vez. Así nos conocimos, y cuando me contrataron nos seguimos viendo. Él me saludó y también nos pusieron en el mismo departamento para trabajar juntos. Creo que me gustó como era de respetuoso desde la primera vez que me conoció. Me invitó a una cena, y yo pensé que era una cena formal pero me invitó a comer burritos. Yo estuve un poco “Que!?” pero estuvo bien. De allí comenzamos a conocernos un poco más. No era amor a primera vista pero con el tiempo creció como una planta y dio frutos, y años después tenemos 3 hijas.

Quiero que la gente sepa que los inmigrantes son fuertes y trabajadores. Pero muchas veces los corazones están divididos en dos partes porque cierras regresar a tu tierra pero no cierras dejar aquí a tus hijos y no le cierras quitar las oportunidades que hay. Sus corazones lloran por dentro, no tan solo sus ojos, muchas veces el corazón llora y la gente no lo puede ver. No creas que solo sabe bombear sangre. Uno lucha constantemente todo los días, una lucha de trabajo, de impotencia por los sueldos que están mal pagados y no tienes tiempo para tus hijos, quisieras hacer más para ellos. Muchas lágrimas son internas pero aun así tratan de mantenerse lo más alegres que pueden y fuertes para su familia. Así son muchos papás y mamás. Casi todos tenemos esas lágrimas en el corazón. Es la realidad de la vida. Siendo inmigrante es duro acostarte y no saber si al despertar aun seguirás durmiendo en tu casa. Nunca sabes cuando sea la última noche que pases con tus hijos. Son cosas que unas veces no les quieres decir a tus hijos para no preocuparlos, pero es duro no saber si en algún

momento ya no regresas a recoger a tus hijos a la escuela. La incertidumbre de que no sabes cuando, eso es una preocupación que compartimos millones de inmigrantes.

Si he encontrado cosas buenas como que la educación está al alcance, yo lucho para que ustedes como mis hijas no tengan un destino como yo. Nunca les diría que la educación no es para mujeres, la educación es para todos los seres humanos. No se trata de hombre ni de mujer. Estoy muy feliz que todos en este país pueden alcanzar la educación no importa tu sexo. Si tu quieres hacerlo, están abiertas las puertas.

Mi parte favorita de mi día es asegurarme de que desayunen y llevar mis hijas a la escuela. Porque es como tu agua, tu sol, tu aire como una planta. Eso es lo que ocupas para poder dar tus frutos. Me aseguro que tengan tu comida, que tengan su techo para protegerte, como las plantas. Si neva las tapan. Somos parte del mundo y la vegetación, siento que somos como una planta, solo que hablamos y reímos. Pero hay veces que se me hace tan largo hasta que lleguen que me siento triste porque ya las quiero ver. Pero esa es mi parte favorita, llevarlas a la escuela, traerlas, y asegurarme que tengan su desayuno y cena y preguntarles '¿estás bien?' y 'como te fue en la escuela?'.

Yo estoy orgullosa de haber estado abierta para darle a mis hijas una educación. Esa es la cosa más grande que he hecho en mi vida. Estoy orgullosa de saber y respetar que son humanos, mas no títeres que los puedes mover siempre. También de mirar como mis hijas crecen, su crecimiento como mis hijas, de todo lo que hacen. De todo lo que pueden probar en la vida, para que elijan como la

comida. Si pruebas muchas cosas sacan su comida favorita. Mi orgullo más grande son mis hijas, estoy feliz y orgullosa que mantengan los 2 idiomas y que unas hablen 3. No tengo otra cosa que me hace más orgullosa como ellas. Si en este momento muriera, esto sería lo más grande que dejó.”

historia contada por: Tadia Hernandez