

*Written by Yeny, 21*

Hello, I am going to describe a little bit about my experience.

I was born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, in July 17, 1988. Then, because of economic reasons my parents saw the need to move. As Ciudad Juarez was a very prosperous city back in 1993, my parents decided to take a chance. So leaving everything behind in Monterrey, we moved to Cd. Juarez hoping for a fresh start. I was about five years old at the time. My mom got slightly involved in politics, and my dad started his own business. My parents were able to buy a house, in a brand new lower-middle class neighborhood within a year of moving. My siblings were born in Juarez: Jazmin in 1993, Esmeralda in 1995, and Roberto in 1999.

My father had his own business as a glass retailer, and he did quite good at the start, but again, in 2002 the economic situation forced my father to move to the United States as a farm worker. He moved to Las Cruces, NM, in April 2002. During that time, he would send us about \$150 dollars weekly. For the first time in a long time, we were able to afford a comfortable life, free of worries.

I would like to tell you a little bit about my mother. She is the most unmaterialistic person I know. She sacrifices everything for our family, just as most mothers do. I never have once seen her buy anything for herself, not one piece of jewelry, or a new pair of shoes, or a nice shirt. She never really cared for material goods as long as we were well fed and dressed. My parents deeply love each other. After 22 years of marriage they are still together; a rarity in today's society.

When I was 14 years old, two months after my father had moved to the US, my mother felt we needed to be together, like a family should. My dad would call us three or four times a week, and he would cry, say he missed us. Every time he called, he always said he was one step closer to coming back, that my mom just had to say the word, and he'll be back in the blink of an eye. But my mom would say, no just hang on, the situation here is bad, really bad. She based this on the fact that the neighborhood had turned into a nest for drug dealers, the hot spot for prostitutes, and gangsters, and girls of 15 or 16 were getting pregnant all around us. My mother did not want that future for me, or my siblings.

Then, one night, we heard shots in the distance. The shots were getting closer and closer. I woke up, and ran to the window, and I could see that there were people gathered around something. My mom of course told me to go to bed right away. In the morning it was the news of the whole neighborhood that someone had be shot to death right by our house. I think that was when my mother decided to get away from all that mess.

A week later, we were in Las Cruces, NM, reunited with my father.

I was one month short of my 14th birthday. I remember clearly how it was the first time I set foot in the Land of Opportunity, the Other Side, also majestically known as The United States of America.

I remember how confused I was, and how much I did not want to be there. I remember how hard it was to try to not cry, as we left everything behind once more: our house, our car, our furniture. We didn't tell anyone about the move, just my mom's family. I was young back then, but I remembered I was thinking about how much I would miss my family, my friends, my school, being the president of my class, math champ, Spanish literature champ and violin classes. I remember being angry at my mother for taking me away from what was familiar and dear to me. I remember being angry at myself for not sharing the happiness that everyone else felt when we finally saw our father after two months of absence. I didn't want to be there. I begged and begged my mom to let me stay with my grandma (who took care of me since I was born), that I would be fine; but she was to stay firm in her decision: we are a family, and we have to stick together.

We first came here with the family that my dad was staying with. It was a two-bedroom trailer. I remember asking myself: people live in these things? We only lasted a week there, as my mom rented another nearby trailer. Then we were to be enrolled in school. I was enrolled in Mayfield High School, and I was to start as a freshman. My younger sisters were enrolled in a nearby elementary school, and my little brother in Head Start.

The trip to my first day of school was disastrous. I only spoke the basics of English: colors, what's your name, how are you, fine, thank you. The school to me seemed, not like a school, but more of a hospital: polished floors, lots of rooms. I had never been there before, and my mom wasn't there with me. So I ventured into this gigantic building trying to find the main office so that they could give me my class schedule. As expected, I got lost. Everyone was already in class, so no students were out in the halls. I was scared, I wanted to cry. Then some teacher must have sensed my confusion, and she asked me something in English, and all I replied was: I don't speak English. Luckily, she spoke Spanish and she was able to take me to the office and show me my classes. I was then taken to a little classroom, far away from the building, that was supposed to be the bilingual education class. There, a tall and skinny woman welcomed me. She started asking me questions, and I just kept quiet. She then proceeded in Spanish. She assigned me a seat, next to an Asian girl. I still laugh to this day, because I was so amused that I was sitting next to a Chinese girl, since I had never seen an Asian person in my life. I also remember being amused during that first lunch hour: I had never seen so many blond people in my life. So that first year went by without much ado, and within a year, I was sent to regular English classes.

Being sent to regular classes meant being out of that little protected, segregated world in which the bilingual classes were located. Again, I was scared and excited at the same time because I still felt out of place, but I was eager to meet new people and learn new things. My mastery of the English language was still developing, and I acquired a strange accent that didn't sound anything like Spanish. Part of this is because I was learning English with my Chinese friend. We were together all the time, and her accent kind of got stuck in me somehow. We would try to speak in broken English, and when we couldn't get our point across we would draw. You can just imagine how hard it was to try to speak on the phone. As I felt more comfortable with myself, I also felt a little more of a risk-taker. Some teachers in high school were extremely supportive, and they saw potential in me. So they encouraged me to be in clubs and extra

curricular activities. So I enrolled in MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement), Robotics, ENLACE (a NM club for Hispanic students), Peace Jam, Spanish Club, and others as well.

As I began to grow a little older, and see my older friends go away for college, I began thinking to myself what I would do after high school. I began to worry. I wanted a college education so badly, and I knew that my parents could not possibly even afford a community college for me. So I began to really put myself into a rigorous study plan, so that at least, if I couldn't go pursue a higher education, I would be able to have some college classes in my curriculum before graduating high school. So then in my senior year, I took college courses of Spanish, Chemistry and Calculus. I ended up graduating with 18 credit hours. But anyway, my senior year was by far the most busy of all my high school years: I was doing math competitions in Mesa, I was selected student of the month, I received the honor of being the outstanding bilingual senior 2006, I traveled to Phoenix in a robotics competition, to Santa Fe to meet Lech Walesa (Nobel prize laureate), among other things. All of these achievements came from someone who did not even speak English three years back, but one of my teachers was particularly worried about me. Her name was Mrs. Cantu. Mrs. Cantu was one of the counselors of advanced education services, which was a program offered to gifted students who are selected through hard testing. I was selected, and passed the tests (scoring lower in English), and got into the program. Mrs. Cantu saw potential in me. So she told me to talk to the school principal, Mr. Ogas, to see what he could say about any type of help for students like me. So I went, and he said, no there's nothing you can do, I'm sorry. And several other people told me the same thing. I was discouraged by everyone, but Mrs. Cantu was always there to help me out, and cheer me up, every time I would come to her office in tears of discouragement.

I don't remember how I found out that people like me could get accepted into college, and pay in-state tuition. But I do remember how happy I was that at least there was some hope for me. With that in mind, Mrs. Cantu would drive me to the university, and back, she would pay for my college applications, and other stuff. On another occasion, I would say one of the happiest days of my life, she told me that New Mexico was the only state in the US that gave undocumented students state scholarships! You can just imagine now how happy, not happy, make that ecstatic, when I heard the news. I would be able to go to college finally, and I didn't even have to worry about the money! And all thanks to our dear governor Bill Richardson. So I enrolled in New Mexico State University, and registered as a Civil Engineering major. Several organizations gave me private scholarships to help pay for my books, such as Dr. Samaniego (a dentist), and the Lions Club of Las Cruces. With that being solved, my family and I had finally a little hope, and were extremely thankful for it. I ended up graduating in the top 10% of my class (a class of 559 students). It was one of the proudest moments of my life.

Now, three years later, I think back and I see how lucky I am to be in the position I am in now. How lucky I am that there were people willing to help me, and people who gave me hope, when others told me no you can't. It has not been easy, It has been a rough path, and emotionally tiring. Now I try to encourage other kids to go to college, and give a good example to my sisters who are now 15 and 13. I am a good example to society that if you really want something in life you can get it. I believed in myself, and I am getting somewhere. I am doing

good in my engineering degree, and I just have one more year left. However, the worry comes back once more: what am I going to do after college???