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## El Cruce

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### Abstract

The following reflective essay describes the literal journey of an undocumented immigrant who left his family in Jalisco, Mexico, as a teenager and eventually became a bilingual educator who earned two master's degrees and a Ph.D. in the United States. Within this narrative, the author not only describes the challenges in crossing into the U.S. but also weaves in lessons he has learned as an educator of other bilingual immigrant children. The *AMAE Journal* is proud to publish this compelling essay posthumously. Miguel passed away on November 25, 2015, after three months of battling liver cancer. He is survived by his wife, Aracely, and two sons, Miguel Alejandro and Andre. *El Cruce* is the opening chapter of Dr. Alvarez's unpublished 2015 dissertation, *The Role of Language in Students' Reading Trajectory: Exploring a Summer Reading Enrichment Program*. Miguel Alvarez earned his PhD at the University of Texas—San Antonio in the Department of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies.

When I began my journey of earning a Ph.D. and completing my dissertation, I knew it would be difficult; however, I was confident that I would succeed as I recalled an arduous past experience, which I named *El Cruce*. The crossing of a border is a complex process that requires planning, resources, time, patience, courage, and most of all, luck. The following narrative describes my own experience crossing the U.S.-Mexico border as an undocumented teenager during the spring of 1990. Although my narrative starts on a bus to Tijuana, my reflections during this bus ride allowed me to go further back in time to describe the forces that pushed me to test my luck in the United States, and the circumstances that made it possible for me to undertake such an enterprise. The trip and the crossing experiences were filled with difficulties and sometimes setbacks, but these experiences became enlightening and enriching. It is fair to say that despite having an original plan to reach the city of Chicago, and

failing miserably to carry out this plan, my border crossing experience resulted in a better than expected outcome; sometimes what looks like a failure becomes a victory.

One afternoon in late April of 1990, I found myself in the company of two teenage friends riding a bus from Guadalajara to Tijuana. Our objective was to get to the city of Chicago in the United States; we were going to cross the border illegally. Apolinar, who was 19 years old, was our guide (he had been in the United States before); his brother Cesar was 16, and I was three weeks short of becoming 16 myself. My original plan was to work for a year or two in the United States in order to save enough money to come back to Mexico and start a small business. As I was traveling I felt nervous, but at the same time I was excited and full of hope.

### **Challenging my Father's Authority**

The afternoon expired and as it became darker, I started to reflect on the last conversation with my father before I left home. He became very upset when I told him I was coming to the United States and in his rage he told me that I would not be successful.

*“Solamente te vas a meter en problemas y luego voy a tener que ir por ti para rescatarte y traerte de regreso,”* he told me. But I was determined to prove him wrong and I told him that he would not be able to stop me. I also told him that I was fed up with the situation he had created at home. For years, my mom had to work as a dressmaker to support the family because my father's business was unprofitable.

My mom had turned a large room in the second floor of our house into a *taller de costurería*, a shop where she would spend her days making dresses. She also turned our garage into a *tienda de ropa*, a boutique. At the age of ten I started to work at *la tienda de ropa* after school hours. Sometimes I would make the sales, or if the clients were interested in buying several garments, I would just call my mom to come down stairs and deal with them. Three years later, my mom started to make bed spreads instead of dresses and we closed the store. I started to help my mom cut fabric, and I even learned to use the industrial sewing machines in the shop. Working very hard, my mom's business picked up and we saved enough money to expand. We had plans to purchase more equipment and materials, and we also planned to hire a couple of seamstresses. My mom and I were very proud of our work, but one day my father asked my mom for a “loan”; and a few days later he asked for more; and he kept asking until he depleted her savings.

Frustrated with this situation, after finishing *secundaria* (middle school), I decided not to work in my mom's shop and I took a job at *la panadería*, the local bakery, because I wanted to save money to start my own business. For nine months I worked very hard and saved most of my money; unfortunately, every once in a while my father would ask me for "loans" that he would never pay back.

I also observed my older brother go through a similar situation. After working for five years in the city of Guadalajara, he had managed to save enough money to buy a pickup truck, but one day my father asked him for the title of ownership and sold it. My father promised to replace the truck but never followed through with his promise.

The situation with my father made me grow very disappointed. It made me start thinking that I needed to stay away from him in order to prosper. This was how I came to take the decision to immigrate to the United States in search of better economic opportunities.

On the trip to Tijuana, I had mixed feelings about the confrontation with my father. On the one hand I was proud of myself for challenging my father's authority, and on the other I felt that I was doing something wrong. Following the tradition of *los hijos ausentes*, I was supposed to depart from my hometown with my parents' blessings: *encomendado a los Santos y con la bendición de mis padres*. But instead, the confrontation with my father felt like a bad omen; "*a un hijo desobediente no le va bien en la vida*" people would say. This was not just my father's way of thinking but also the collective thinking of the people of *San Miguel el Alto*, my hometown. Thus, by challenging my father, I was also challenging the social norms of my community. In retrospect, it seems that I was not only escaping from my father's authority, but also rejecting what Anzaldúa (1987) refers to as "cultural tyranny" which she describes as "[d]ominant paradigms." According to her, these paradigms are "predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through culture" and "[c]ulture is made by those in power" (p. 38). According to the cultural tyranny practiced in my hometown, I was wrong for rejecting my father's authority.

"Was I unfit to live in *San Miguel*?" I pondered. That night on the bus as I reflected on this issue, I started humming *el corrido del hijo desobediente*. I had listened to this song a thousand times, but all of a sudden, its lyrics took a different meaning: only bad things can happen to a disobedient child.

### **Corrido popular del hijo desobediente**

Hijo de mi corazón,  
 Por lo que acabas de hablar  
 Antes de que salga el sol  
 La vida te han de quitar  
 (anonymous, n.d.)

### **The Checkpoints along the Way**

Early in the morning the next day, as the bus made its way across the state of Sinaloa, the bus made a stop at a police checkpoint on the side of the road. A sergeant of *la Policía Judicial Federal* asked all males on the bus to grab our belongings and get off the bus. We were asked to line up on the side of the road in front of the checkpoint shed where another three policemen with semiautomatic weapons observed us. The *Sargento* stood in front of us and told us that he “knew,” that since the bus was destined to Tijuana, all of us (the male passengers in the bus) were going to try to cross the U. S. border illegally. And then he stated that this was a crime. (In my mind I thought that while this may have been a crime in the U.S., there wasn’t any law in Mexico that prevented its citizens from getting out of the country, but I kept this to myself). He said that he would have us all arrested for that, but, if we each paid a small fee of approximately ten dollars, he would let us get back on the bus. At that moment I made a very quick decision; I had to pay the ten dollars or these *rateros con licencia para robar* would have me arrested for a crime that I had not yet committed. The *Sargento Judicial Federal* walked along the line collecting the money, but he came to a stop when a man refused to pay the bribe. This individual stated that he would not pay any money for a crime that he did not commit and that asking us for money was an abuse on the part of the authorities. (Secretly, I wished I had the guts to do what this brave citizen was doing). One of the *Judiciales* with the semiautomatic weapons asked the man to accompany him to the shed. After that, with a twisted smile on his face, the *Sargento* asked the rest of us if anyone else wanted to also be “interrogated” at the shed. No one else decided to challenge the “authorities,” and after the *Judicial* finished collecting the money, we were instructed to get back on the bus. We left the

courageous (and perhaps inept) man behind. As we were getting back on the bus, I overheard other passengers saying that this guy was probably going to receive a beating at the shed.

This was the first of several checkpoints along the way where we were robbed by the *Policía Judicial* or the *Ejercito Nacional*. In my mind I cursed Apolinar (our experienced guide) for not warning us about this issue. Considering all the bribes that we had to pay along the way, I figured that it would have been a lot cheaper, faster and safer to fly to Tijuana instead of traveling by land.

In between the checkpoints I had plenty of time to reflect on the system of corrupted authorities in Mexico and wondered how it would be in the United States. I wondered why the Mexican government became so corrupt, but I could not figure the answer. Years later, taking Mexican history classes in college, I came to the opinion that Mexico's long tradition of corrupt authorities originated with the imposition of the *encomienda*, an abusive colonial system imposed by the Spaniards after the conquest of Mexico (Meyer & Sherman, 1995, p. 131). Seeking fortune, the *conquistadores* subjugated the indigenous population, placed themselves in positions of authority and utilized this authority to enrich themselves with an abusive system. This tradition of abusive authorities in Mexico has persisted all the way to the present times (Meyer & Sherman, 1995, p. 131).

### **Meditation on Authority and Law**

My other concern about immigrating to the United States was the act of crossing the border illegally. Although, I must admit that I was a little concerned about getting caught, what made me uncomfortable was the fact that I was going to break the law. Since I had never broken the law before, I had to find a way to rationalize my intentions. With this in mind, I resorted to reviewing the Mexican narrative of the "stolen territory." I grew up in a place in Mexico where most people believed that the Southwestern territory of the United States was "stolen" from Mexico, and therefore it would be justifiable for any Mexican citizen to reclaim this territory. I pondered about this issue all the way to *Baja California*.

## Hiring the Coyote: A Dangerous Business

Upon our arrival to Tijuana, at the bus station, from a public phone Apolinar called a *coyote* who went by the nickname of “*el Gigante*.” This individual was originally from the small city of *Jalostotitlán* which is about 18 miles from my hometown. Apolinar also called his parents back in *San Miguel el Alto* to let them know that we had arrived in Tijuana safely and that *el Gigante* was going to arrange our crossing. I must say that these measures gave me some comfort. I felt that it was important to know that our *Coyote* was someone who we knew and could trust, and that our relatives knew him as well. There were too many stories about immigrants who got robbed or even murdered by individuals who pretend to be *coyotes*. I remember that at the bus station while getting off the bus, at the payphone, and even while we were waiting for *el Gigante*, we were approached numerous times by different individuals who openly asked us if we needed a *coyote* “*pa’ pasar al otro lado*.” I tried to imagine how people who didn’t know anyone in Tijuana must have felt: “What a leap of faith it must have been to hire a stranger as your *coyote*!”

*El Gigante*, a man about my height of 6’1, met us at the bus station and took us to his apartment in Tijuana that afternoon. I learned that he was the leader of a band of *coyotes* and one of his men would take us across the border very early the next morning. Cesar and I waited in a room while *El Gigante* and Apolinar talked in another room. In a few minutes they came back and Apolinar asked me to hand three hundred dollars to *El Gigante* for my crossing. I didn’t think too much of the situation and complied with this request.

As we waited in the apartment, other customers arrived. I remember vividly a young mother and her two children. She was around 23, petite, and very pretty. She had a two-year-old toddler and a baby; she looked very calm, and I admired her strength and resolution. At one point there must have been around twelve prospective immigrants in that room. We were told to get some rest because we would leave at two in the morning the next day. We lay on the floor and used our backpacks as pillows. But sleep didn’t come easily; there were just too many things going on.

## The Day I became a Standard Mexican

At two in the morning we were awakened by our *coyote*; a short man with a mustache who wore a baseball cap. He looked calm and projected confidence. As we walked out of the

apartment, he instructed us to walk individually, following each other, at a half a block distance in order not to attract the attention of the police. He explained that if we walked in groups, the police would detain us and ask for bribes or search us in order to take any money we had. (I remember thinking that the *coyote* seemed more worried about the police on the Mexican side of the border than the border patrol in the U.S!). The *coyote* sent one of his helpers ahead to guide the group and after he walked half a block, the *coyote* sent someone from our group to follow. I waited for my turn and then I had to follow the immigrant ahead of me at half a block distance for about five minutes; we had been four blocks away from the border all this time and I had not even realized it!

When I first saw the actual physical border, I must admit that I was a little disappointed. I imagined the border of the most powerful nation on earth superbly protected, but instead, there was a flimsy and rusted chain-link wire fence separating the United States from Mexico. I remember walking along the fence where there would be individuals holding wire cutting pliers on one hand and pulling the net of the fence to make an opening with the other; they were asking walkers for two dollars to go through their portals. But our *coyotes* had their own opening and we followed them to the place where we would make the crossing. The *coyote's* assistant held the galvanized steel fabric to make an opening to allow us to cross. When it was my turn, I went through the opening and with one small step I was on the other side.

The little step that took me to the United States made feel transformed; I felt that I became what I would at that time classify as a standard Mexican. Back in Mexico there were distinctions between social status, race, and culture. But after crossing the border, I felt that in the United States all these things didn't matter. It wasn't important anymore that I had attended a very good private Catholic school as a child, or that I was raised with middle class values; I was just as poor and unprepared as everybody else. On that day, I also became a fugitive and an unwelcome guest; I could not speak English and I wasn't familiar with cultural practices in the United States. In Mexico, since I had worked for so many years and had the ability to earn a man's salary, I was considered a man, but here in the U.S., I was reduced to the status of a child; I was a minor.

Years later, I would change my opinion about my early classification of immigrants. Besides the physical border that immigrants cross, there are the borders of race, class, and gender. Fox (1999), for example, points out that a border is a "marker of hybrid or liminal

subjectivities, such as those that would be experienced by persons who negotiate among multiple cultural, linguistic, racial or sexual systems throughout their lives” (p. 19). When I crossed the border as a teenager I wasn’t able to anticipate that later on in life I would constantly use my appearance, gender and middle class upbringing to my advantage; in other words, there were some borders that I didn’t have to cross. I didn’t realize then that certain attributes that I possessed would help me later on in life to obtain employment and certain educational opportunities.

### **Border Odyssey**

Once everyone in the group was on the other side of the fence, the *Coyote* instructed us to hide under some bushes and stay quiet. I think that he wanted us to become aware of our surroundings. Far in the distance we could see a light tower that projected a sweeping light beam across the field; this is the type of light tower that you see in movies in which inmates are trying to escape from a prison. We could also hear some helicopters in the distance.

After a few minutes the *Coyote* told us to stand up and follow him. As we started walking, I remember seeing another group of immigrants walking in the same direction; they were just a few yards from us. Then I observed another group, and another, and another. There must have been at least 20 large groups near us; hundreds of people crossing the border simultaneously (I remember telling myself: “These Americans are pretending that they don’t want us here, but they are actually letting us in!”).

We walked another 150 yards and there was a small creek we had to cross. There were individuals who had built improvised bridges with wooden planks at the creek; they wanted to charge one dollar to anyone who wanted to use them. “*Órale compas, pásenle por aquí pa que no se llenen de lodo al cruza*” one of them said. The *Coyote* guided us to one of these individuals and handed him a five dollar bill. For this amount the man allowed the whole group cross the creek on his improvised bridge.

Just as soon as we crossed, the *coyote* told us to hide behind some bushes nearby. Once again, it was time for the observation tower to point its sweeping beam of light across our location. After the light was gone, the *coyote* instructed us to now get under the bushes because he could hear a helicopter coming. And sure enough, a helicopter equipped with powerful lamps illuminated some terrain next to us (in retrospect, considering the amount of

immigrants in that field, it seems that the immigration officers on the helicopter were working really hard to intentionally point their lamp lights to places where they wouldn't find anyone). We waited for a while and once the helicopter was gone we continued walking another three or four hundred yards until we reached a brick wall. This was the last barrier on a stretch of land used by the Border Patrol to perform their show—a show in which the United States pretended it didn't need the cheap labor of disposable workers.

### **The Mission**

The beige brick wall was over seven feet high and too tall for most of the people in my group to climb. The *Coyote* approached me and commanded: “*Oye compa, hay que echarle una mano aquí a todos tus paisanos.*” I nodded and started to help my *paisanos* ascend and overcome a barrier (It didn't occur to me then that maybe this could be my mission in life). When it became the turn of the young mother and her children, she placed her baby on my hands and said “*hay se lo encargo*” (Curiously enough, in my present job as an elementary school bilingual education teacher, I hear these same words all the time, especially at the beginning of a school year when parents bring their children into my classroom: “*Maestro, hay se lo encargo*”). I lifted the baby very carefully and handed him to another person on the other side of the wall. I repeated this procedure with the two-year old brother and then I helped the young mother and the others in the group to climb.

### **On Attributes and Obstacles**

Climbing the wall and jumping to the other side was a lot easier for me than to the others. Later on in life I would come to the realization that some barriers are not as difficult to overcome if one possesses certain attributes. Sometimes the barriers that stand in the way of progress become less challenging not only if you are tall but also if, for example, you are a male, if your skin is lighter, if you are literate, if you dress well, and if you know how to act according to the expectations of others. A person who possesses certain attributes can obtain easy access to the opportunities that are denied to others.

Another important lesson that I learned was that the degree of difficulty in crossing borders or barriers actually depends on the unfairness of dominant groups who set borders or barriers as tools of exclusion.

## **The Highway**

To my surprise, on the other side of the wall there was a highway. When I climbed and was on top of the wall I could see that the last person I helped climb was running across it and join the others. I could not follow him immediately because a lot of vehicles were passing by. I descended from the wall and waited for what seemed an eternity for cars to stop coming in order for me to cross the road. After a few minutes I had my chance and I ran as fast as I could to rejoin the group. When I got there, I was instructed to hide behind some bushes and wait for a vehicle that would take us to a safer place. As we waited silently, I could observe the vehicles that passed along the freeway and, on a couple of occasions, I saw green immigration patrol trucks passing by. I was very anxious and wanted desperately to get out of there.

## **The Lift**

At last, a van pulled out on the side of the road. One of the individuals in the van got out and opened the side door and signaled us to get in as fast as possible. There were no seats in the back of this vehicle and the individual told us to lie down on the floor and be quiet. In less than a minute we were packed in that van like sardines in a can. The van took off, but just after about ten minutes we started hearing the driver and the man on the passenger seat arguing. They spoke Spanish with a very strong Central American accent and uttered at least two obscenities per sentence. All the sudden the van came to a stop on the shoulder of the road, and we were told to get off the van and hide behind some bushes. At first I could not understand why we were doing this, but then I realized that the van had a mechanical malfunction. We hid quietly, and although no one said anything, but just by looking at the expressions of the people in my group I could tell that everyone was thinking that we were going to get caught. But that's not what happened. After about ten minutes, our Central American Coyotes asked the sardines to get back inside the can.

## **The Border beyond the Border**

We got back in the van and our drivers took us to a house located some place north of San Diego where we would wait for the next three days. No one had explained to me that there was another immigration checkpoint in San Clemente that we had to pass before we would get to Los Angeles. At this point I was very confused because I didn't see the necessity

of going to Los Angeles. “¿Por que no tomamos un avión a Chicago del aeropuerto de San Diego?” I asked Apolinar. He sheepishly replied that he had not told his brother-in-law in Chicago that we were coming, and that he had no money for the airplane tickets, so we had to stop in Los Angeles because he had a cousin there. Later on, I would also learn that he didn’t even have the money to pay the six hundred dollars he owed the *coyotes* for helping him and his brother Cesar cross the border. As it turned out, his cousin in Los Angeles had to borrow money to come up with enough cash for their ransom (I wanted to kill this Apolinar!).

We waited for three long days, captive in a house that was managed by a couple. The *Coyota* told us not to make too much noise because she didn’t want the neighbors to report to the police or to the immigration authorities that this place was used to house illegal immigrants. During our time in this house, we slept on the floor, we ate sandwiches, and we drank tap water. We were only permitted to take one shower “*para conservar la agua*” the *coyota* would say, and we would spend our days sharing our stories and listening to others because there were no televisions in this house.

On our third night at the *Coyote’s* den, we were awakened at midnight. Apparently, an informant that they had at the San Clemente checkpoint had given them the green light to get the people across. Somehow the *Coyotes* knew that we would not be stopped at the checkpoint and they asked people to get in different cars. Apolinar, Cesar, one of the other immigrants and I got in a car driven by a stubby individual with a mustache. I remember being very nervous about this incident, but our *Coyote* drove us through the checkpoint without even having to stop.

I have always wondered if the *coyotes* had bribed one of the immigration officers at the checkpoint. To this day I don’t know how our *coyote* managed to evade detection by immigration, but the important thing is that he managed to get us Los Angeles.

After the checkpoint, our *Coyote* kept driving for the next two hours. We first stopped at the parking lot of a strip mall to drop off the other immigrant. I saw how his relatives handed the *coyote* some money before embracing the man. At that point I realized how naïve I had been by allowing Apolinar talk me into paying *El Gigante* in advance for my crossing when we were in Tijuana. After witnessing the transaction at the parking lot I realized that it was a lot safer to have a person in the United States pay for the crossing; an immigrant who pays the *coyote* in advance runs the risk of being left behind during the crossing.

After the transaction took place, the immigrant and his relatives shook hands with the coyote and suddenly I realized that this immigrant had made it; shaking the hands with the coyote marked the end of a complex process of crossing a border. I also realized that for me it would be a little more complicated; it would not be over until I reached Chicago.

### **The Bargain**

It is funny to look back at these incidents because in those days I thought that I had paid *el Gigante* too much money for helping me cross the border (back in those days, 300 dollars represented a small fortune for me). What I didn't realize back then was the complexity, sophistication, and riskiness of his operations. After all, *el Gigante* had to have solicitors at the bus station, an apartment in Tijuana to house immigrants, someone to take them across the border, a van and drivers to take them to North San Diego, a place in North San Diego to house them for a few days, people at the house who made sure that the immigrants would not escape without paying, a spy monitoring the checkpoint in San Clemente (and perhaps a corrupt immigration officer who would let coyotes and immigrants go through), and drivers to transport immigrants to Los Angeles (who were also responsible for the collection of money and for stabbing anyone who refused to pay). All of these things for the bargain price of 300 dollars!

### **The Unhappy Cousin**

Our coyote drove us to another parking lot where we met Apolinar and Cesar's cousin Raul, who didn't seem too happy to see us. He paid the coyote for his cousins' ransom and shook hands with him. We also shook hands with the coyote, thanked him, and sent our regards to *El Gigante*: "*Dele las gracias de nuestra parte.*"

After the coyote was gone we got in Raul's car and he started to curse his cousins for showing up uninvited and forcing him to borrow money to rescue them. Cesar said "*¿Sabes lo que les hubieran hecho ese coyote si no consigo el dinero para pagarle?*" he burst in anger. Raul then told us that he didn't have a place to accommodate us. He worked as a horse trainer at the Santa Anita Race Track in Arcadia where his employer provided him with a little room right next to the stables. But he could not bring visitors overnight.

Raul had called and made arrangements with some friends in Costa Mesa to take us for a few days. He had also called Jose, Apolinar's brother-in-law in Chicago to ask for money for the airplane tickets for the two brothers. He also informed Jose that I was coming with them, but I had enough money for my airfare. Then in a very sarcastic tone Raul told Apolinar that his brother-in-law had said that he didn't have the money at the moment, and that Apolinar and Cesar would have to fend for themselves for a while. And then Raul turned to me and informed me that Jose had also told him that I would not be welcome in Chicago. As Raul drove us to Costa Mesa, I was in shock and could not believe that Apolinar had invited me to tag along with him and Cesar without first consulting Jose if it was "OK" for me to come.

### **The California Connection**

That afternoon in Costa Mesa, Raul asked me if I had the telephone number of anyone in the United States that I knew. I responded that I had. My friend Oswaldo who had been a classmate in elementary school in Mexico lived in Venice, California. He had been born and raised in Los Angeles, but at the age of nine, his parents decided to move to Mexico. Because he had not learned to read and write Spanish, the nuns at the Maria Martinez Catholic School in San Miguel decided to place him in first grade with students who were three years younger than he was. After three years in Mexico, Oswaldo's dad decided to bring the family back to California.

I kept in touch with Oswaldo because from time to time his parents would bring him to San Miguel to visit relatives and friends. I personally didn't want to call him to describe my predicament but for some reason I succumbed to pressure and handed Oswaldo's telephone number to Raul. Immediately, Raul called Oswaldo and very bluntly and briefly explained my predicament. "*Si no lo puedes ayudar entonces lo tenemos que mandar para México*" I heard him say. He asked if he wished to help me, and then made arrangements to meet at the parking lot of a supermarket in Costa Mesa the next morning. Then Raul hung up the phone and said "*relájese mi amigo, que todo va a estar bien.*" I hated him!

The following morning, one of the guys who lived at the house where we were staying in Costa Mesa (I don't remember his name), drove me and my friends to the supermarket's parking lot where we had agreed to meet my friend. When we got there Oswaldo was already waiting for us in his supped up black truck. When he saw me I turned as red as a tomato and

he started laughing. We hung around for a while and had a chance to chat with Apolinar and Cesar, and when it was time for us to go, Apolinar asked me for a 40 dollars loan and promised me that he would send me a money order as soon as he arrived in Chicago. Knowing fully well that I would never be paid for this loan, I handed him the money and I shook his hand. I also shook hands with Cesar and the guy who gave us the ride. And we said goodbye: “*Que les vaya muy bien en Chicago.*” This was the last time I saw or heard from Apolinar or Cesar.

Oswaldo and I got on the black truck and headed towards his home in Venice. I started to recount the misfortunes of the last few days, and he found my stories both amusing and humorous. He laughed all the way to Venice, but that didn't upset me at all! My good friend was genuinely happy to see me and glad that he could lend me a hand. For me, the ride to Venice in Oswaldo's truck marked the end of a very complex process: the process of crossing the Mexico-U.S. border illegally as a teenager.

After my arrival, I made my life here in the United States. I joined the military to serve my adopted country and then got my bachelor's of arts degree in accounting. Although I was an accountant, I did not feel fulfilled, and so I became a teacher. As a bilingual education teacher, I have had students and parents, who have had similar experiences and my mission in life has become assisting my *paisanos* overcome educational barriers in the United States. As a bilingual education teacher, I know that parents are depending on me, “*Maestro, aquí se lo encargo*” to ensure their children's educational welfare. As a bilingual education teacher, I saw firsthand how students often struggled with reading and that as teachers we noted a trend in summer reading loss in our dual language students. After much thinking, I wanted to design a treatment that would address summer reading loss. This desire and the recognition that I needed the knowledge and tools to conduct such a study motivated me to continue my education and pursue a doctoral degree.

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