

My Best Friend's Dad

Luzneisha Madera Perez

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Study the title, the sub-headings, and the images. What do you think this essay will be about?
2. Share what you know about the Spanish words *coyote* and *la bestia*. (See p. 9 for a definition of *coyote*.)

We Asked Him to Tell His Story

My story is about my best friend's dad. He was born in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Once, we were watching a movie about how people from Mexico crossed the river to come to the U.S. He said to us, "Look, what you are seeing in this movie is a reality. It is not easy to go to a new country with nothing, only with your faith and dreams." His daughter and I were

They were only children with a big dream on their shoulders.

surprised because he had never said anything about his life before he got married. We wanted to hear his story. We asked him to tell us how he came to the U.S. He explained that his family didn't have enough money. He was fourteen years old. He decided with his cousins and some neighbors that they should come to the U.S.

A Coyote Took Them to a Forest

They collected enough money to pay a *coyote* to take them across the border. They were so ner-



Migrants jump on a train car of "la bestia" (the beast) to cross the border into the U.S. Photo by Emmanuel de la Vega <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

vous to start the trip, but they needed to go. The *coyote* took them to a forest near the border of Guatemala. He told them to walk through the forest. They only had a little backpack with some fruit, water, and money. The walking was awful; they were exhausted and scared.

They were only children with a big dream on their shoulders. After some hours in the forest they finally got to the other side, and they saw a man was waiting for them.

One Chance to Jump on the Train

This man said, "I am going to take you to the train tracks. A train will come by. You have only one chance to jump on the train." They were petrified, everybody talked about the big train. They called it "La bestia."

He waited with his cousins for the train. First they heard the sound of the train from far away. Then suddenly it was there. They had just a few

seconds to jump into one of train cars. Somehow they did it. At this point, they couldn't look back. They hid on the train. They were scared, but they couldn't wait for the moment when they would jump out in the U.S. They finally crossed the border, and they ended up living in Miami, Florida.

Working All Kinds of Jobs in Miami

They lived in a cramped apartment with ten other people. One of them had been in Miami for two years, so he gave them advice on how to avoid ICE and how to steer clear of trouble on the streets. They started to work in all kinds of jobs, such as washing dishes, working at a car wash, and doing deliveries.

It was hard, but he always tried to stay positive. He wanted to make something of his life.

They stayed together almost all the time, but one day ICE caught one of his cousins and he was deported. He decided to change his life. He moved to New Jersey where his sister lived. There, he met his wife and they moved to Boston.

He told us he felt so homesick.

English, Citizenship, A Career in Nursing

He told us he felt so homesick. It wasn't easy. Nevertheless, he took classes to learn English. He was working as a janitor when he met the woman who would become his wife. She was American, they had a relationship for years but he never wanted to be a citizen through marriage. So, he studied and took the citizenship test. He did it!

He Became a Nurse

Are you interested in becoming a nurse, too? Read stories in this [packet](#) by *Change Agent* contributors who wrote about a career in nursing.

Plus: see sample career pathways in the field of health care.



The author (right) with her best friend.

Now, he is an American citizen. He has a Master's degree in nursing. He is a very happy person. He says, "If you have one opportunity to learn something, do it! It doesn't matter if it's hard for you. The opportunity might happen only once in your lifetime." He is an example for his family. His wife and daughters are nurses too.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does the author feel about her best friend's dad? How do you know?
2. What role does figurative language play in these two sentences? "They were only children with a big dream on their shoulders." And: "At this point, they couldn't look back."

Luzneisha Madera Perez is a student at East Hartford Adult Education in East Hartford, CT. She is studying English and she wants to get a Bachelor's degree. She likes to learn new things every day and share those things with her family. She is married and has two boys.

