

# Crossing Two Rivers

Aleida Contreras

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Read about *coyotes* in the box on the next page. Do you know anyone who hired a *coyote*? What happened?

## Life in Mexico Was Hard

In Mexico, my family was very poor. After my father died, life was even harder. I lived with my mom and five siblings in a small wooden home. I shared a bed with three of my sisters. We got water from a deep family well. It was my job to clean garbage from the well. It was not easy because there was no ladder. I had to sit on a small wood swing while someone dropped me slowly down into the well.

Our family did not have much money. It was difficult for me for me to go to middle school. The school was one hour away from my home. Because we did not have money for the bus, I had to walk to school. I had to walk on mountain roads and across a river. Sometimes, the river came up to my stomach. To keep my uniform dry, I carried it in a plastic bag.

## I Wanted a Better Life for My Daughter



When I had my daughter, I knew that I did not want her to live this kind of life. I wanted to have a better job and more money to take care for us. I decided to go to the United States. I found a *coyote*. I asked him how



much we had to pay. He said the price was \$4,000. When I saved \$4,000 dollars, we packed a little bit of clothes and said goodbye to my family.

I remember the day we crossed the Rio Grande. I was very scared. I heard that many people die when they cross. When we walked into the river, the water came up to my chest. The *coyote* had my daughter on his shoulders. After we crossed the Rio Grande, this *coyote* went back to Mexico. Before he left, he told us what to do. He said, "Run five minutes and find a park. Sit in the park and relax and play." He wanted us to play so the police would think we were locals. Then we took a taxi to a hotel. We stayed in the room and waited.

I remember we had to wait in the hotel for many days with many people. People brought us

\* Two versions of this article are available: intermediate (pp. 8-9) and advanced beginner (p. 7).



food every day. One day, another *coyote* came, and he told me, “You come with me, but your daughter has to go with a different lady. In San Antonio, Texas, you will find your daughter.”

My daughter became very nervous. She remembers nothing from the trip. Now she says, “I think they gave me something to make me sleep.” I remember those many hours away from my daughter felt like an eternity. It was terrible to be separated from my daughter. I thought the worst would happen. But everything happened like they said. And my daughter and I were together again.

### Finally, We Felt Safe

The *coyote* brought us to my brother’s house in Arkansas. But one week after we arrived, my brother said he didn’t want to support us anymore. I felt

### Coyote

The word *coyote* is Mexican Spanish, from an Aztec root, *cóyotl*, or “trickster.” A coyote is a canine related to dogs and wolves. In the U.S. and Mexico, *coyote* is also slang for someone who guides or smuggles immigrants across the border to the U.S.

very sad to hear that news. I did not want to go back to Mexico, so I called my friends in Rhode Island. They told me, “Come to Rhode Island, and we will support you and your daughter.” Finally, we felt safe with them.

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. What two rivers did Aleida have to cross? Why do you think she chose that title for this essay?
2. Notice the sentence, “Because we did not have money for the bus, I had to walk to school.” Rewrite it so the second clause goes first. Write several of your own sentences using “because” in both ways: at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence.

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