Our New Series on Immigrants and Immigration:

Our new school-year publishing schedule is designed to make each issue available enough ahead of the upcoming semester to help you integrate the content into your planning:

Issue #56, August 15, 2022: “Our Immigration Stories”
Issue #57, November 15, 2022: “Creating New Community”
Issue #58, February 15, 2023: “Finding Our Voices”

We want to thank an anonymous funder for their generous support of the Immigrants and Immigration series of The Change Agent and the Transforming Immigrant Digital Equity (TIDE) project. The TIDE project proposes an ESOL ecosystem that interweaves digital equity, immigrant and refugee inclusion, and language justice. The Change Agent is a partner in this effort by bringing the voices of immigrant and refugee English language learners to the center of the conversation.

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The cost is just $30 per teacher per year. Teachers can share their online access with all their students. Have 25 or more teachers? The price goes down to $20 per teacher per year.

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Big Thanks to the Editorial Board for Issue #56:

From left to right, starting at top: David Buchalter, teacher at Genesis Center, RI; Ebony Vandross, World Education; Cynthia Peters, Change Agent editor; Jamie Harris, World Education; Shirley Doan, World Education; Helen Paola Almanzar Comas, student at Genesis Center, RI; Zuanping Zeng, student at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC); Amiee Mestaz, teacher at Gila Crossing Community School, Laveen, AZ; Hwi Young, student at BCNC; Sergio Hyland, Change Agent contributor, Philadelphia, PA; Katie Edwards, Howard Community College, Columbia, MD; Andy Nash, adult education advocate, Cambridge, MA; Katie Hamel, teacher at BCNC; Raven Lewis, student at Gila Crossing Community School, Laveen, AZ; Emily Flores, San Antonio Public Library, San Antonio, TX.
I looked up *equivocarse* in the dictionary because I make so many mistakes in this city, in this language, that I want to be sure how to err correctly.

I need the vocabulary to go wrong to slip up with everything the grammar to trip up and forget about the illusion of perfection.

Embracing the flaws being vulnerable is the lesson accepting that nothing is more perfect than my daily imperfection.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Based on the context, what do you think *equivocarse* means? What does “slip up” and “trip up” mean? What is the main idea of this poem? What do you think about it? Share a time you had to “forget about the illusion of perfection” or “embrace the flaws.”
My Mom Is a Brave Woman

Maria D. Martinez Cruz

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a brave decision your parent made? Or that you have made?

A Hard Decision
One day, Mom sat down in a chair and told us that we were going to the United States to live with our dad. Mom made the decision because she knew that my sister and I were in danger. I was 11 years old. My sisters were nine years old and five years old.

Gangs, Thirst, La Migra
We took the bus to San Luis, Sonora. That is where we met the coyote. He would take us through the desert to the U.S. On the first day, we started walking through the desert. We walked at night. Everything was okay until the third day when gangsters assaulted us. The gangsters took all the money and everything that was valuable.

The next day was worse. We encountered a gang called “Los Burerros.” They are a gang that kidnaps people. Thank God we were able to hide and escape from them. Unfortunately, this gang caught another group of people. As we were running away from them, we could hear shooting and people screaming.

On the fifth day, when my sister wanted to pee, I took her behind some bushes. When we came back, everyone had disappeared. We were very scared because we didn’t see our mom and sister or the coyote. After a couple minutes, the coyote grabbed us and pulled us behind one of the bushes. He told us to stay quiet since la migra was around. I didn’t know at the time what la migra was.

On the sixth day, we were out of water. We were very thirsty. After a couple of hours, we found a cow’s stable. Mom took water from the cow’s trough and gave it to us. She didn’t say anything at the time, but I still remember the smell and the taste of the water. The next

Migrants cross the desert on foot to reach the United States. Photo from: https://pages.vassar.edu/realarchaeology/author/chkremer/.

* Two versions of this article are available: intermediate (pp. 4-5) and advanced beginner (p. 6).
morning, mom looked bad. She was crying and sat under one of the trees. She told me we were almost there. She removed her shoes and her feet had a lot of blisters. They were bleeding.

**Stacked Like Wood in a Truck**

The last day, we were waiting for a truck to take us to the place where we were going to stay until we could see our dad. When the truck arrived, they piled us on top of each other as if they were stacking wood or pallets. My sisters and I were at the top. They took us to a farm near Houston. The people in charge of the farm gave us water and food. That was my first time trying a cheeseburger and fries. One of the ladies took us on a walk through the farm to meet all the animals. We stayed there until they reunited us with our dad.

**Reward**

I still ask myself what would have happened if we had stayed in Mexico. It was a hard journey to come to the United States, but now we have new opportunities, and we have learned another language and culture. Every effort and achievement has its own reward, and I can say that Mom already has hers. My mom is a brave woman.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. The author says her mother is a brave woman. What evidence does she share in the text to back up her claim?
2. Read another story about crossing the desert (p. 7/pp. 8-9), this one from the perspective of a mother. How are the perspectives of the writers similar? How are they different?

Maria D. Martinez Cruz is an ESOL student at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, OR. Her goal is to improve her English to attend college and study accounting. She has three children. She loves making tamales.

**Border Angels in the Desert**

My Mom Is a Brave Woman

Maria D. Martinez Cruz

A Hard Decision

One day, Mom sat down and told us that we were going to the United States to live with our dad. Mom knew that my sister and I were in danger. I was 11 years old. My sisters were nine years old and five years old.

Many Hard Days

We took the bus to San Luis, Sonora. We met the coyote. He was our guide. On the first day, we started walking through the desert. At first, everything was okay. Then, on the third day, gangsters assaulted us. They took all the money.

The next day was worse. We saw another gang. This gang kidnaps people. Thank God we were able to hide.

On the fifth day, my sister wanted to pee. I took her behind some bushes. When we came back, everyone was gone. We were very scared. Suddenly, the coyote grabbed us and pulled us behind one of the bushes. He told us to be quiet since la migra was around. I didn’t know what la migra was.

On the sixth day, we were out of water. We were very thirsty. We found a cow’s stable. Mom took water from the cow’s trough and gave it to us. I still remember the smell and the taste of the water. The next morning, mom was crying. She removed her shoes. Her feet had a lot of blisters. They were bleeding.

The last day, we rode in a truck. They piled us on top of each other as if we were pieces of wood. My sisters and I were at the top. They took us to a farm near Houston. The people there gave us water and food. That was my first time trying a cheeseburger and fries. Finally, we were reunited with our dad.

Reward

It was a hard journey to come to the U.S. But now we have new opportunities. Every effort has its own reward. My mom has her reward. My mom is a brave woman.

AFTER YOU READ: What evidence does Maria provide to show her mother is brave?
Crossing Two Rivers

Aleida Contreras

Life in Mexico Was Hard

In Mexico, my family was very poor. I shared a bed with three of my sisters. We got water from a well. It was my job to clean garbage from the well. I sat on a small wood swing while someone dropped me slowly down into the well.

It was hard for me to go 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 decided to go to the United States. I paid a coyote $4,000 dollars. We packed a little bit of clothes and said goodbye to my family.

When we crossed the Rio Grande, I was very scared. The water came up to my chest. The coyote had my daughter on his shoulders. After we crossed the river, the coyote told us to go to a hotel.

We waited in the hotel for many days with many people. People brought us food every day. One day, another coyote came. He separated me and my daughter. My daughter was so scared. It was terrible to be separated from my daughter. 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. But my brother did not want to support us. I felt very sad to hear that news. I called my friends in Rhode Island. They told me, “Come here, and we will support you.” Finally, we felt safe.

AFTER YOU READ: What are the two rivers Aleida had to cross? Why do you think she chose that title for this essay?

Aleida Contreras has been in the United States for 17 years. She is a student at the Genesis Center in Providence, RI. She works as a nanny, and is the mother of a middle-schooler and college graduate.

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

Aleida Contreras has been in the United States for 17 years. She is a student at the Genesis Center in Providence, RI. She works as a nanny, and is the mother of a middle-schooler and college graduate. She enjoys cooking and finding great deals when shopping. She is vice president of women’s affairs at her church and is passionate about immigration, encouraging others through her story.

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.
(A Fragrant Life of) Food, Poverty, and Immigration

Anselmo B. Taborda

BEFORE YOU READ: What does fragrant mean? Give some examples of fragrant foods you eat or products you use. Use fragrant (adjective) and fragrance (noun) in sentences.

Growing Up on One Meal a Day

When I was 12 years old, my father died. It was 1982. I miss him. In July of 1989, I stopped studying, so that I could work to help my mom. We didn’t have anything to eat. There was nothing on the table. I didn’t have any shoes. I had almost no clothes. I used to eat one time a day, usually rice and beans. We used our fingers to eat. Sometimes, I ate a Senegalese soup called canja, which has rice and a lot of other things like pork and oysters.

On June 7, 1998, a war started in Guinea-Bissau. Any war is bad. I remember the fighting. People died in the street. This memory is in my mind all the time. Thank God, I didn’t die, but my friends and family died. There were bombs. Nobody could help you, because everybody tried to go to a safe place, to save their own lives.

I worked for a pastor, who tried to help me move up in life. His name was Father José Enrique Marquéz. He was a good pastor. He sang. He wrote history books. He helped the community get food, and he ran a church choir for boys. He had a person working for him who showed me how to fix and paint houses and do plumbing and electricity. We used those skills to rebuild, to help the community, especially poor people. This work did not pay much.

New Foods in Dakar and Cape Verde

After the war was over, I went to Dakar, Senegal. Dakar is beautiful; I like Dakar. I had my first child there. That is where I tasted my first thieboudienne, a food they cook with different meats, like fish, and also yucca, carrots, and a type of radish.

Later, I traveled to Cape Verde to find work and have a better life. My job was in construction. In Cape Verde, I ate cachupa. There are two kinds of cachupa, “cachupa rico” (rich cachupa) and “cachupa pobre” (poor cachupa). The rich version has vegetables, pork, and beans. The poor version only has corn and some fried eggs. For flavor, they might add fried yuca.

Because I had work in Cape Verde, I was able to buy clothes. I usually wore blue and white, because those are the colors of my favorite soccer team in Portugal. I like that team because, when I was young, my father liked that team. We listened to the games on the radio together. Nobody back then had a television.

The first friends I made were at my job. They didn’t speak my language, Guinea-Bissau Creole. It is different from Cape Verdean Creole, but we could still understand each other. I also met people at church. They were from Nigeria,
Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Ghana, Liberia, and Cape Verde.

**French Fries and Fragrances in America**

A lot of my friends said, “Oh, you are a good worker. Try to get a visa to go to America.” In September of 2001, I got a visa to go to the U.S. I moved to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and I started a new life by working for a trash-removal and recycling company.

The first food I tasted in America was pizza. It was very good! It’s an easy-going food, because you call the pizza shop, and it’s ready five minutes later. That was new for me. My friend from work took me to MacDonald’s one Sunday. He showed me French fries and chicken nuggets. He said, “Now you’re American!”

Everybody in Africa has a different smell. But Americans try to help you make a new life. They bought me deodorant, shampoo, and nice cologne. Now I use Bleu de Chanel, which I keep at work. But when I go to church, I use a cologne called Coach. All these fragrances were new to me.

In the morning, I worked on the garbage truck, and at night, I cleaned schools, offices, and houses. I did these jobs for eight years. Then I started working at a pallet company. I got married and became a permanent resident. Then, after two years, I had an interview for my Green Card. When I got my Green Card, I looked for a good job. Now I work at the Plastics Group of America. It’s a good job.

**Many People Have Helped Me**

I miss a lot of things from home: food, hugs, and more. I especially miss the best food from Dakar, *thieboudienne*. But in my long journey, a lot of people have helped me. I want to say thank you to the people who helped me in my ESL class at the Pawtucket Library. I don’t want to stop learning. I want to keep doing everything I can to move up in my life. For almost 20 years, people have tried to help me. They taught me: this is good, this is not good. Thank you for helping me again and again.
A Sad and Hard Story
Will It Turn Out Well?

Stefany Merino

In El Salvador, there has been a lot of violence and unemployment. Many people decide to immigrate to the United States. One of these people was my mom. And then, 13 years later, I followed her.

My Mom Left When I Was 9

In 1999 my mom made the hard decision to leave us with my grandma. I was nine years old, and my sisters Joseline and Abigail were three and one. Three years later, our grandma died. My mom could not come back to El Salvador, and she had to ask our aunt to take care of us. While we lived with my aunt, the father of my little sister showed up. He decided to take her, and so he separated us. Then my aunt decided to emigrate too, leaving us alone again.

At 17, I Was in Charge

As a 17 year old, I had to take responsibility for me and my two sisters. (My little sister had come back to us.) I didn’t have anyone to give me advice or tell me what to do. When I was 19 years old, I got pregnant and became a single mother of a beautiful boy. I worked at a beauty salon. While I was working, a day care took care of my son, and my sisters went to school.

As a big sister, I tried my best. But all I did was not enough. My middle sister started to have bad friends. If I gave her some advice, she would get angry with me. My mom from the U.S. could not do anything either. One day, we received a call asking us for money. They knew we had family in the U.S. They were members of a gang. They said if we did not pay, something bad would happen.

My Sister Is Kidnapped

On December 21, 2012, my middle sister Joseline, who was 17 years old, disappeared. This Christmas was the saddest Christmas for us. Five days later, I decided to go to find her. I went to the police, the hospital, and also the morgue. I found her at the morgue. Gangsters had killed her. They hit her hard on the head, suffocated her, and burned her face. I felt a pain so strong that even after 10 years, it is still there.

Escaping to the U.S.

With the pain of having lost my sister Joseline, I decided to come to the U.S. with my three-year-old son. My little sister Abigail had to stay there with her father’s family who took care of her. While my son and I traveled through Guatemala
and Mexico, one cartel kidnapped my group. But a miracle of God happened: they let me and my son go free.

I was tired and exhausted from a month of traveling, but finally we arrived safe and sound. I can’t describe the happiness of seeing my mother after 13 years. She had a new family, a husband, and two sons. They made me feel at home again. It was another country but a new beginning. My sister Abigail arrived in 2015. Her safe arrival made me feel calm and happy.

When I Close My Eyes...

I started to work at a beauty salon. My boss and coworker made me feel comfortable. Now I have been working at the same place for nine years. They are like a family to me. After a few years, I have a new partner, and we have a four-year-old girl.

It was hard to adapt to my new country. The homes and streets were different, and I didn’t like the climate. Sometimes, I closed my eyes and felt like I was in my old country. I wanted to go back in time to when my sister was alive.

Applying for Asylum

One of my goals was to study and learn English and to know other cultures.

This country has opened doors to big opportunities for me and my family. Unfortunately, I do not have documents. I applied for asylum, but the lawyer only took my money and then disappeared. My case was closed. Only my son had a special case and he has been able to get documents. I would really like this sad and hard story to turn out well and that a miracle of God can happen to help me get some documents.

AFTER YOU READ: Write a letter to Stefany reflecting on her story. Refer to specific details you read in her essay. Share a story from your life that shows how you can relate to her story.

Stefany Grandos Merino is a student at Chelsea Public School’s Intergenerational Literacy Program in Chelsea, MA. She was born in San Miguel, El Salvador, in 1989. She is the mother of two children and has been working as a stylist for 12 years. She is passionate about everything she does, and she values each person in her life.
When the Taliban Took Over Afghanistan

Sayed Shuaib Amanzad

BEFORE YOU READ: Share what you know about the Taliban and about the war in Afghanistan.

The Day Everything Changed

I will never forget that day.

Just imagine on a beautiful morning you wake up, eat your breakfast, put on your clothes, and get ready to go for the first day of university. Then, right before leaving the house, your parents tell you not to go. Why? Because a group of militants has taken over the country, the president has fled, and the university is shut down—forever to many.

That day actually happened in my life. It was August 15, 2021. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, all the progress that we had made in the past 20 years was reversed. Girls were not allowed to go to school anymore. People lost their jobs. Banks were closed or had limited money, and people could hardly find food. Many people starved. Some people sold their children to buy food for the rest of the family.

We Left Our Belongings and our Hearts Behind

Just like many other Afghans, my family decided to leave the country. It was not easy. We took a public bus to the northern province of Balkh. From there, we got into a chartered flight organized by American volunteers to Doha, Qatar. While leaving the country, we took only four backpacks containing clothes for seven members of our family. We left behind everything we had built. We did not only leave our belongings behind but our hearts as well.

What Is the Taliban?

The Taliban is a conservative, fundamentalist Islamic group that held power in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. In August 2021, they regained power when the U.S. withdrew after its 20-year war in and occupation of Afghanistan. Taliban is a Pashto word meaning “students.” Pashto is the language spoken by the Pashtun people, which is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.
We spent over a month in the refugee camp in Doha and then another two months in a refugee camp in Virginia (in the U.S.). After that, we moved to Portland, Oregon, to restart our lives.

I Remember the Challenges

As we are building our new lives in the U.S., I reflect on the journey that got us here. We fled injustice and cruelty. We are just like thousands, maybe millions, of other immigrants in the U.S. who fled injustice and cruelty in their country. As much as I feel lucky to be here, I still wish things didn’t turn out as they did for Afghanistan. I wish that millions of other Afghans had the opportunity to go to school, have access to basic needs like food and healthcare.

Throughout our journey, I learned that challenges can make us stronger. I remember the challenges every day and consider them in my decisions. I am more determined, more hopeful, and more grateful for every tiny opportunity I receive. Today, I am determined to become the best lawyer and to serve everyone, especially those coming from challenging places like Afghanistan.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what happened on “the day that changed everything”?
2. Tell or write the story of what happened to Sayed and his family.
3. Do you agree of with his statement that “challenges can make us stronger”? Describe how challenges in your life have affected you.

Sayed Shuaib Amanzad is a student at Portland Community College in Portland, OR. He works part time and pursues his dream of becoming a lawyer. He lives with his parents and three siblings.
Our Stories

Quest for Survival and a Better Life

Nada H. Alhashimi

BEFORE YOU READ: Study the title. Think about the word quest. What does it mean? What sorts of quests have you been on in your life?

A Dark and Terrifying Night

When suddenly darkness fell over a city dominated by the sound of cannon fire and gunfire, innocent lives were extinguished. Their souls flew high into the sky. It was June 9, 2014, in the city of Mosul. On that day, my family and I, including my parents and all my relatives, left our town under heavy gunfire. My children were so scared on this dark and terrifying night. All we could hear were gunshots, and all we could see were people rushing, screaming, and trying not to get killed. My kids asked me, “Why did you take us out of our rooms while we were sleeping?” They were screaming and crying when they saw the horrific scenes. “Mama,” they asked, “What’s going on? Are we going to die?”

We ran away from our neighborhood with a small bag containing our personal documents and some spare clothes. We came across some neighbors. They were in their car. They said, “Come with us. Let us take you to a safe place.” We got into their car and drove together.

A 58-Hour Journey by Bus

We reached the outskirts of Mosul and stayed there until the morning. After that, we rented a car and drove to the city of Erbil in northern Iraq. There, I sold all my jewelry and bought five tickets for a bus that took us to Turkey. It was me, my husband, and three children on a 58-hour journey to Ankara. We were sad, devastated, and desperate. We were going into an unknown world. We couldn’t imagine what we would see. We didn’t know whether we would survive or find refuge. Everything was dark at that time. All we knew was we had to flee our home in Iraq.

Learning Turkish on YouTube

When we arrived at the United Nations office, they greeted us. They understood our story. They sent us to a safe place to stay until we got permission to go to the United States. We went to Samsun, Turkey, and we settled there for about two and a half years. I started learning Turkish via YouTube. I joined my Turkish neighbors in all their activities, and I pushed myself to learn a lot from them. As for my husband, he worked as a waiter in a restaurant. I didn’t want to talk about

Find Iraq and Turkey on this map. Identify other countries.

In this photo, refugees flee by bus.
my suffering, the loss of our warm home in Iraq, or how ISIS erased our memories and *demolished* our homes. We watched the news and cried about what was happening in Iraq. All these things make me feel pain now.

Only three months passed, and life began to improve. I’ll always remember the *virtues* of my new neighbors, who helped me learn Turkish and supported us in our new life. As my language skills became stronger, I became more independent and began working with a charitable organization that supported refugees with food, clothing, and housing. During that time, my boss suggested that I help the Arabs and translate for them in the city’s hospitals. At first, I was afraid because this was a big responsibility. People’s lives would be in my hands. To improve my skills, I studied medical terminology when I came home in the evening. I trusted that God was with me. I *triumphed* over my despair and succeeded in my work. Gradually, I gained strength. The Arab people that I helped were proud of me. I became a role model for women in a country of *expatriates*.

**An Indescribable Joy**

In November 2016, we received a call to resettle in America. We *rejoiced* to meet my brother and his family after a long separation of twelve years. They had already been living in the U.S. for five years. It was an indescribable joy to see them. We rented a beautiful house in South Portland, Maine, enrolled my children in American schools, and my husband and I started to work. The beautiful days kept increasing little by little. We felt safe, stable, and free. We practice our religion without fear. The sun always rises after the night. We must feel hope, no matter how painful and unjust life is.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. Study the vocabulary in bold italics. Can you define the word based on the context?

2. The author says, “The sun always rises after the night.” This is a figurative statement (as well as being literally true). What does it mean in this context?

*Nada H. Alhashimi is a student at Portland Adult Education in Portland, Maine. Her birthplace is Mosul, Iraq. Currently, she lives in Portland, Maine, with her beautiful family consisting of her husband, son and twin daughters. She is very happy to be a U.S. citizen now.*
Better Future
At Home, There Are No Jobs, The Cities Are Unsafe, and the Rivers Are Dry

Hortensia Reza

BEFORE YOU READ: In your experience, what are some of the problems at home that push people to immigrate?

Trying to Forget Everything Bad

We have lived here, in El Paso, Texas, for only two years. Thank God, we have our house, and we have jobs. My husband started a business as a contractor, and I work cleaning houses. Day by day, we are becoming part of this community.

We are trying to forget everything bad that we lived with in Juárez. My mom was sick and we couldn’t find good health assistance and she eventually died. Also, finding jobs is really difficult over there. On top of that, it was an unsafe city.

Still, it is where I grew up. And I took care of my mother there when she was sick. She had a long illness. For five months, I took care of her. Then we had the chance to leave, and so I left her behind. Ten days later, she died. That was devastating for me and my family. We came here for a better future, but I lost my mom. I could not be at her funeral, because of my immigration status. That was awful.

We Have Many Goals

But life continues. My husband and I work very hard, because we have many goals. For example, I never before thought about studying, and now I have my GED diploma, and I study English. I want to obtain my Microsoft Office Specialist certification in the next six months, and enroll in the Quickbooks certification, because my final goal is to open a small business with my husband.

We Are Two of a Great Many

We know people from different Latin American countries. They are immigrants to the U.S., because in their countries, they do not have jobs. People do not have land for farms. The rivers are dry, and there is drought everywhere, so they can’t grow anything even if they have land. They worked on the land and that was not enough to support their families. My own family in Chihuahua-
hua, Mexico, work on the land. They are in the same situation. They do not have a decent life. That’s why they come to the U.S. as immigrants.

Climate change is part of the problem. In Juárez City, in an area called Anapra, people used to benefit from the Rio Bravo. They used the water for their lands, but the river doesn’t have as much water anymore. There are not many job opportunities. This is one of the reasons why people leave. They are looking for better jobs and security.

I believe that in the U.S., the majority of people are immigrants or they are descended from immigrants. The only people who are originally from this country are the Native Americans. My generation of immigrants is just one of many.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what are some of the reasons she came to the U.S.?
2. The author says that climate change is part of the problem. Explain.
3. For more information about drought in Mexico, read the article and study the maps on pp. 20-21. Also, click on the articles linked in the captions on pp. 18-19. Read and listen (3 minutes of audio) to this article: https://www.npr.org/2022/07/21/1112663036/extreme-drought-in-northern-mexico-has-left-millions-of-residents-without-water.
4. How do you pronounce drought? (Hint: rhymes with out.) Compare it to brought (rhymes with shot).
Climate Refugees

Efren Macias Ojeda

BEFORE YOU READ: What is the difference between immigrant and refugee? Discuss.

The climate is changing all around the world. In some countries, it is too hot or too dry. In some countries, there is flooding. The sea level is rising. People who live near the coast are losing their homes. They have to move. Many immigrants, like me, move to a new country for better economic opportunities. Now, immigrants are also moving to find a better climate.

Why is the climate changing? Because we burn fossil fuels, and that is bad for the environment.

We need to be more careful about how we use energy. We need to care for the water and the environment. We need to protect the planet because if we do not do this, some countries could disappear. Some countries will be impossible to live in. Many people will be refugees looking for a new home. They will be climate refugees.

AFTER YOU READ: According to the author, how is climate change creating refugees?

Efren Macias Ojeda is a student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas.

Countries Most Affected by Extreme Weather Events

Study the two maps of Mexico. What do you notice? Write several true statements about the information in these maps.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_change_in_Mexico

**Explore Further**

Study the article and maps on pp. 20-21. • Read the article on pp. 18-19; follow the links to additional resources. • Check out Issue #27 of The Change Agent to learn more about climate change. • Research about climate refugees online. • Present what you learn in a slideshow, essay, or oral presentation.
Failed Escape

Kim Ly

BEFORE YOU READ: Share what you know about the U.S. war in Vietnam.

First, My Brother

When North and South Vietnam were unified in 1975, many people tried to leave the country to find freedom. My family was one of them. In 1979, my older brother escaped. For the price of twelve golden bars, he could leave Vietnam by ship. That was expensive for my family; therefore, my father could only send him.

Then, My Turn

Two years later, my father told me and my youngest brother that he had a plan for us to join a group that was escaping from the country. We paid a deposit on the trip, and we would pay the balance after we reached a new country.

On the night of our escape, it was dark. There was no moonlight. My group was my little brother, my best friend and her younger brother, and our teacher. We followed our guide deep into the village and waited until dark to go out to the beach to join the other groups. At the beach, our guide told us to hide in the bush and wait for the signal.

I was hiding and waiting for one hour, then two hours. Suddenly, I heard whispering. Someone said, “The plan is not working.”

“Shhh...! Be quiet!” someone said. “Do you guys want to get caught?”

And then it was quiet again.

“You’re Under Arrest”

After a while, I wondered if anyone was there. Was I all alone? It was dark and quiet. I could hear insects flying around me. My heart beat faster. And then a strict voice of a man said, “Everybody out! You’re all under arrest!”

I thought I would rather get caught by the police than get lost in this dark place. I wanted my father to be able to find me. So I left my hiding place with two hands over my head. The policeman shined a flashlight in the bushes, and slowly, one by one, people appeared. I was happy I found my little brother, my friend, and her brother in that group, but I couldn’t find my teacher.

The policeman directed us to the police station about five miles away. We had to lie on the
grass in front of the station waiting for the next morning. At 8:00 am, the station’s door opened, and they let us go inside. I felt better when I was in the room because it was too hot outside, and we were thirsty and hungry. They gave some water to the children because they cried a lot. I was surprised to see all the people were women and children, no men. All the men must have run away.

A Lucky Failure?
The police had 95 of us. They processed us, and then they put us in trucks and transferred us to a prison camp in the next city. At this prison camp, they set us free because the prison camp was too small to hold so many people.

I felt lucky to get caught by the police because our guide said there would be 35 people on the boat. In fact, there would have been more than 95. It was a small boat. Imagine what would have happened if we all got on the boat!

Eventually, my family made it to the U.S., but as you can see, it was a dangerous journey.

Imagine what would have happened if we all got on the boat!

AFTER YOU READ:
1. How does the author feel about her failed escape? How do you know?
2. Notice the use of “therefore” in this sentence: “That was expensive for my family; therefore, my father could only send him.” Write several of your own sentences using “therefore.”
3. Notice the phrase, “I would rather get caught... than get lost...” Write your own rather/than sentences.
4. Compare this story with the one on pp. 28-29.
5. Was there a time in your life when you had a “lucky failure.” Tell the story out loud and then write it down. Get feedback and write a second draft.

Kim Ly is a student at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. She appreciates the teachers and tutors who give their time to immigrant people in need. She feels lucky to live in the U.S. where there are good programs to support people. She is a daughter in a family with nine children. She is proud her family because they always support each other. She believes, “Together, we can be strong!”

Coming Home from War
Read more Change Agent articles by students affected by the war in Vietnam, both Vietnamese refugees and U.S. veterans of the war. Find stories by immigrants from other countries who were also affected by war, such as the one on p. 53, “War and Emigration Break Up Families.”

“Coming Home from War” (Issue #30) can be found here: https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-30/.
To access the issue, you need to subscribe: https://changeagent.nelrc.org/subscribe/.
Many Kinds of Violence against Women

Michelle Flores

BEFORE YOU READ:
1. Study the words femicide and feminism. What root do they share? What do they mean?
2. What is sexism? Share examples of sexism.
3. Note that this is an important article about a disturbing topic. Set up a way to debrief with others about the emotions this article may bring up.

I Left Mexico Because of the Violence

Why leave from a country that has the best tacos in the world? Why move to another country where you still drink tequila and margaritas, but they just cost more? Why play the migration game, which requires as much endurance as an Olympic sport?

I left Mexico because of the violence, specifically, the violence against women. According to Forbes, violence affects 7 of 10 women in Mexico. There can be many kinds of violence against women. The worst is femicide, which is the killing of women and girls simply because they are female. In 2021, more than 1000 Mexican women were victims of femicide. Most of the time, the aggressor is someone they know—their husbands, boyfriends, relatives, friends, or colleagues.

One thousand femicides a year is a lot, but this is just the number of bodies that were found. According to an article in Forbes, the number of femicides is much higher. More than 2500 women are missing, and many of them could be dead.

Was this information hard to read? Let me give you another fact: only 5% of the men who committed these murders have been convicted. These numbers are only the official numbers. Many more femicides have not been reported.

There exist two kinds of victims: 1) the ones who experienced the crime, and 2) their loved
ones. Think of all the children who lose their mothers, and all the people who lose their sisters, daughters, partners, and friends.

**Sexism Makes Violence Possible**

I’m lucky. I have not been a victim of extreme violence. But I have experienced the kind of sexism that makes it possible for this violence to exist. I was ten years old when I was first harassed by a man. I was walking from school to my grandmother’s house. I was wearing my school uniform and carrying my backpack. A man started touching himself. I crossed the street to avoid him, but he followed me. He got very close to me and lifted up my skirt. Then he just left. I arrived at my grandmother’s house crying. After that, she made sure that one of my cousins would walk with me on my way home from school.

As I grew up, I experienced other kinds of harassment. When I was 22 years old, I worked in a company that was 90% men. My job was to inspect the work of the mechanics. The mechanics did not like having a woman inspect their work. They told me it was not my place. One man threatened to hit me, and then he did it. My boss and my colleagues, they did nothing. I was alone there. It was easier for me to quit my job than to try to make a formal complaint.

**Not Our Fault**

One year later, on March 6, 2020, I was part of a feminist march in Mexico to reclaim justice. Feminism has taught me that violence against women is not women’s fault. And I can see now that violence against women has many different faces.

When individual men or the society in general try to control us or threaten us, when they harass us at work, at school, on the street, or even in our houses, these are forms of violence. When men or the society demean us or treat us like we are not valuable, when we can’t get a job or when we have to earn less money just because we are women, when we don’t have the same opportunities as men, these are all forms of violence.

I love my country and my culture. I miss my grandmother and the delicious food she made. I miss the way I feel when I meet my friends for coffee. I miss buying $2 beers on Thursdays.

But I don’t miss using my cell phone to send my location to friends just in case I disappear. I don’t miss the fear of being the last one on the bus. I don’t miss feeling like it was unsafe to walk outside in a skirt or dress.

**Sharing My Story**

Being an immigrant in the U.S. has not been easy. It is hard to adapt to a new country and culture. However, I feel lucky to be in the U.S. because here I feel a little safer. I can find more support and learn more about movements for civil rights. I know that violence against women exists here, too. We must fight against this violence everywhere. I will start by sharing my story. I know there are thousands of others like mine. I want women to know that we are not alone.

**AFER YOU READ:**

1. According to the author, what are the different kinds of violence against women?

2. Do you think it helps other women to share these kinds of stories? If so, how does it help?

Sources:


My Best Friend’s Dad

Luzneisha Madera Perez

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Study the title, the subheadings, 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 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 nervous 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.

**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!

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**He told us he felt so homesick.**

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.”

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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.

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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.
Our Stories

The Journey of My Life

Connie’s Story

In 2013, Connie’s life in Colombia was in danger. In her eagerness to escape, she gave thousands of dollars to someone who promised to escort her to the U.S. Instead, he brought her to the Bahamas where he left her. She was taken to a remote hideout where she lived in one room with 11 other travelers, all men. One night, they were put into a four-person boat destined for Miami. A thunderstorm raged and the boat leaked. Here is her story, excerpted and edited from “Immigrant Voices.”

Drifting on the Water

The idea was to take this little boat to Miami Beach. But the boat broke down in the middle of the ocean. There was an electrical storm that night, a huge storm with rain and lighting. We were drifting on the water. The night was really dark. It was terrible. The water was starting to come into the boat.

Everybody started to ask, “What are we going to do now? Do you have life jackets?”
No.
“Do you have at least a light or something?”
No.
“Do you have a phone, some way to call your friends to rescue us?”
No. Nothing.
At that point, we started to pray. Nobody said anything. We were just quiet and waiting. I said to myself over and over, “Thanks, God, for bringing me home! Thanks, God, for bringing me home.” I didn’t know what home meant. We were 12 people in one boat with the capacity for four.

“Consuelo, we’re going to die.”

Somebody behind me said, “Consuelo, we’re going to die.”
I said, “I don’t know. What can I do? Just re-lax. Nobody has died yet. Right now, we are alive and we are here. Do you have faith? Do you have a god and believe in something or somebody? So pray. That’s the only thing we can do now.”

God sent us the Coast Guard, and they rescued us. How? I don’t know. They took us to Palm Springs, Florida, and they put us in jail. I was in jail for four months. I told them the truth about why I was here, and I applied for asylum. After four months, I was allowed to leave. I flew to Boston to live with my friend.

I started to work in Boston as a housekeeper, and I studied English. I worked all the time. I am available to learn anything. Maybe I don’t know how to do something, but I have the ability to learn. Whatever you need me to do, I can do it.

I Am an Optimist

Living here in the United States, I learned to think positively. That’s why I love this country. In this country, I changed my mind, and I changed my life. In Colombia, I was always in the comfort zone. My whole life was drinking, smoking, dancing. Stupid things. It was not the best way to live. Here, my life is very different. I don’t have a lot of money, but I’m still richer than I was in Colombia where I had money. Being rich is not about how much money you have; it is how rich you feel that you are.

I am an optimist. I expect the best things in my life. No matter what, I’m not my circumstances! I don’t think about what happened to me. I think about what I can do with the things that happened to me. To be happy, to live in peace, is my decision.

Many immigrants come to this country alone, with no family. We have nothing and we feel bad.

Another Writer Seeking Asylum

Find out what asylum is, and read another story by an asylum-seeker on pp. 12-13.

But no. We have to find a way to feel better, to make our home wherever we are. I have hundreds and hundreds of friends that I haven’t met yet. I am not alone.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the author’s general attitude when she faces a challenge? How do you know? Point to places in the text where she reveals her philosophy of life.
2. The author says, “In this country, I changed my mind, and I changed my life.” What does she mean by that?
3. Read the story by Kim Ly on pp. 22-23. Compare and contrast these two stories.
BEFORE YOU READ: In your opinion, what is “the American Dream”?

My first impression of New York was “cold.” We arrived in January, a very cold month. All the people we met seemed to be cold, too, and unfriendly. Life in New York was difficult and lonely.

We came to the U.S. because of my husband’s work. He is an aviation mechanic. We arrived just when the Covid-19 pandemic started. I thought, “Should we go back to Korea?” But we stayed, and we survived. Now my 11-year-old son loves the U.S. He wants to stay here more than me or my husband.

My husband and I wondered what we should do. We asked, “Is it right to move for our child’s sake?” We like the schools here. We do not like the overheated and competitive education that our child would get in Korea. Eventually, we decided to stay. My husband got the aviation maintenance license that he needs to keep working here. I am trying to learn English. And my son is studying Korean. I don’t want him to forget his first language. I want him to be able to speak to me in Korean.

For so many immigrants, their “American dream” is the success of their children. The same is true for my family. But there is a cost.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what is “the American Dream” and what “price” has she paid for it?
2. Read the article on p. 31 by Carolina Salas. Compare and contrast the stories by these two moms. What is the same and what is different?
Crossing the Bridge
A Mexican Family Works to Send Their Son to a U.S. School

Carolina Salas

BEFORE YOU READ: What sacrifices have you or others you know made for education?

When my son was born, I always wanted him to study in the United States. I knew it would be difficult and very expensive. When my son was 15 years old, he started at a private school in El Paso. My husband and I worked hard to be able to pay for his school, his student visa, and his passes from Ciudad Juárez to El Paso.

Every day, he crossed the bridge from Ciudad Juárez to El Paso. Regardless of the rainy, cold, or hot days, he walked across the bridge. Sometimes, there were long lines of one or two hours to get across the bridge. I left him at the bridge at 6:00 am. I worried about him being a victim of bad people.

It was tough to have Luis in private school in the U.S. I had to take a second job. I worked at a store in the morning, and in the afternoon, I took care of an elderly woman. When Luis left school in the afternoon, I was sometimes there on the Juárez side of the bridge to pick him up. I took him home and fed him. Then I went back to work. Other days, he took the bus to our house.

My son appreciated all the effort we made. He was a good student and athlete. His hard work paid off. He won a scholarship to a university in Texas. My dream finally came true when, after four difficult years, he graduated from the university. We are so proud of him, and we know that his accomplishments are also ours.

While he was in university, our other son, Esteban, who is a U.S. citizen, started the process for us to become permanent residents. It took two years, and in that time, Luis turned 21. So he does not qualify as a dependent of someone with a green card.

Because he does not have documents, he went back to Ciudad Juárez. Now he is there, and we are here in El Paso. We are still separated by the bridge. However, a company has offered him a job, and they will sponsor his green card. I am so happy and proud of him because he is accomplishing everything by himself now.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are some of the sacrifices this author made to support her child’s education?

2. Read the article on p. 30 by Taehwi Byun. Compare and contrast the stories by these two moms. What is the same, and what is different?

Carolina Salas Reyes is a student at Ysleta Community Adult Learning Center in El Paso, Texas.
Creating a New Joyful Community
From My Birthplace in Nigeria to a Refugee Camp in Benin to Our New Home in Tucson

Barinedum Mene-Bie

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Is there a story behind your name? Does your name have a special meaning? Share it!
2. Describe a joyful community you have been a part of.

My name is Barinedum, which means God Gives Life. I am from Nigeria, which is in West Africa. I came to the United States in 1999. I have five boys, all born here in Tucson. For me, what is important in a community is supporting each other. We build a community with love and acceptance. Food and friendship bring a community together.

Growing up in Nigeria

I grew up in a village called Nweol, in the tribe Ogoni. In Nigeria we have more than 500 different tribes that speak over 1000 dialects. The Ogoni people farm a lot, and they love God. Our major festivals of the year are for the harvest. We have them because everybody grows their own food. We bring food from our harvest to church to share it with each other. My family had a nice golden house in Nweol. The house was made out of mud-like sand. Everyone in the village works together to build the houses. The women prepare the food for the workers. In our house, we cooked outside on a cast iron stove, with firewood. We ate beans, cassava, yams, and a lot of fish—all cooked with many spices. All the kids would wash their hands and eat from one dish and drink from one cup. Everybody just helped themselves. When people walked by, if they saw us eating, we would invite them to join in. They washed their hands and joined us to eat.

When I came to the U.S. I thought it was weird that nobody ate together this way. One time in our house in Tucson, we invited friends to dine-
Our Stories

We are a family, and my husband and I ate from the same bowl and drank from the same cup. Our friends said, “That is very interesting.” But it was normal for us. It brought us closer.

Marriage

In 1998, my husband’s family heard about me. His mom said they wanted their son to marry me and move to America. In Ogoniland, most weddings take place on a weekend. On the Thursday before the traditional wedding, they slaughter three goats to honor our ancestors. They bake goat-meat soup, jefof rice (a special rice of Nigeria), yams made with dried fish. They buy the drinks: cans of Coke and Fanta, and some palm wine.

When we agreed to marry in 1998 my father killed a goat and bought some wine. But we didn’t have a traditional ceremony because at that time there was a war going on in Ogoniland, and we did not have the much money. Instead, in 2012, a traditional wedding was held for us in our town in Nigeria. My sister represented me. It takes a community to celebrate. A family cannot do it by themselves.

Life in the Refugee Camp

In 1998, my husband’s family paid a small part of the bride price, and I went to live with my husband in a refugee camp in Benin Republic, where he had been living for three years. There were over a thousand people in the camp, most of them from Nigeria. We shared one 10’x10’ room with three single men. I planted a little vegetable garden to make it feel a little bit more like home. I planted spinach and okra, but the okra did not survive. We women used to braid each other’s hair. We used to go to each other’s houses in the afternoon. We would talk and gossip with the ladies. The children played soccer outside.

There was one woman in camp who I went to prayer meeting with, and every morning we went to the water pump together. One morning she told me she wasn’t feeling well, so I went to the pump and got water for her. Because of that one day, she said she always remembered the good deed I did for her.

After we were together in the camp for about six months, we were all ready to come to the United States. When we were eating our last meal, we all ate together from one bowl. We were friends, and we had become a community.

Coming to the United States

We brought only the clothes we had on. It was a long flight. When we got on the plane, I was six months pregnant. I didn’t eat anything—I did not
like the food. It was not what I was used to. It was so plain. We ended up in Tucson. It was crazy hot. A lady named Roha picked us up from the airport and took us to a tiny studio apartment. There was some simple kind of food that I did not like. It was mostly canned.

The people in the church were very kind to our family. Every other Sunday they would invite us to their house for dinner. The food was new to me. I had to smell the food before I would eat it. Macaroni and cheese and mashed potatoes were different to me. In my country, everything was spicy, and here there was no seasoning in the food. I struggled with that. Now, when we get together in my church, people make fun and they say “too sweet, too sweet,” because that is what I used to say about every food. Even what they call pepper here is not spicy.

Our first son was born in September 1999. When you have a baby in Nigeria, your family and neighbors surround you, so you’re never alone. When I had my baby here, there was only my husband, the doctor, and one nurse. There was a lady from our church, too: Doris Williams.

Being a mother for the first time was scary. The baby was tiny. You had to work hard to take care of this little thing. A lady in the church named Tania came to visit. She braided my hair. Another lady in my church, Gwen, held my baby every time I came to church.

Finding Community

When we came here, our community started with food. I feel bad now that I always had to smell the food. But the people didn’t know that I didn’t like the food. They were loving people. They gave us a warm welcome. They showed me about American culture. They also supported me with my children. We have a saying in Africa: “It takes a village to raise a child.” It took the new community we have built to raise my family.

AFTER YOU READ:
1. How does food play a role in the building of community in each place that the author describes—Nigeria, Benin, and Tucson?
2. Read the article on pp. 10-11, also by a writer from western Africa. Compare how both writers talk about food.
3. Write up and share recipes from your home country or that you grew up with in this country. What spices do you use? How much of each ingredient? Explain your cooking techniques. Create a class recipe book with pictures!

In my country, everything was spicy, and here there was no seasoning in the food.
What Pushed and Pulled Them?
Collect Information from this Issue and Organize It Here

Use this graphic organizer to take notes on what “pushed” immigrants out of their home countries and what “pulled” them to come to the United States. Organize your notes into an outline and write an essay about immigration. Use quotes and details from various texts; cite your sources. Share your essay, get feedback, and re-write.

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The Border Wall Runs through Our Home
Raven Lewis

Verlon Jose, Vice Chairman for the Tohono O’odham nation, says that having the wall on our land is like being cut in half. He asked the United States to feel empathy. “America,” he said, “let me divide your families, let me get an iron blade and drag it across your heart, then maybe you’ll know what we feel.”

The Border Crossed Us
For thousands of years, the Tohono O’odham people lived on land with no borders. But then, Spanish colonists from Mexico and English-speaking colonists from the U.S. fought over our territory and put a border through our land. That’s why we say, “The border crossed us; we didn’t cross the border.”

No Word for Wall
The Tohono O’odham people don’t even have a word for wall. And yet now we have a 27-foot-tall, 62-mile-long border wall cutting right through the middle of our land. This border wall divides our families, imperils plants and animals, and cuts off our access to water and resources. It has also caused rampant trespassing on sacred tribal lands by construction crews and border patrol. These lands have been damaged beyond repair.

* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 36-38) and advanced beginner (p. 39).
in Southern Arizona and extends 62 miles into northern Mexico.

In the past, some areas had low-rise barriers to mark the border, but these were nothing like the current border wall. I remember as a kid going through the reservation and seeing these barriers off to the side. It was not our choice to have this “border,” but it wasn’t overwhelming. We could still easily visit our relatives on the other side of the border.

**Now We Are Separated from Our Families and Our Land**

But today, we face a major separation. This separation has made a huge negative impact on our tribe, people, and culture. The U.S. government built the wall, and it separated families from one another. Many lost connections to culture and sacred lands for ceremonies. When you separate families, you also destroy culture and native traditions. For Native Americans, families provide the support system for our community.

Not only do we face the loss of family connections and culture, but also religious traditions and ceremonies. We O’odham people are also experiencing the loss of local plants and animals. Our ancestors relied on some of these plants as a source of food, shelter, and healing. Our elders have passed on these traditions. But the wall is disrupting our land. Our plants are being uprooted, such as the Arizona Saguaro Cactus, some of which are hundreds of years old, along with other sacred native plants. We O’odham people see ourselves as caretakers of the land. The homeland gives to us, so we give back to our homeland. We regard plants as a sacred connection to our ancestors. We understand that the land belongs to plants and animals, and we are all part of this earth together. We depend on one another. If one is destroyed, the rest will suffer.

**Border Wall and Genocide**

This wall makes us feel unwelcome in our own home. These are our homelands. They are supposed to be protected. We O’odham people have
Our Stories

dealt with a lot of tragedies, including genocide. This border wall is part of that genocide because it is destroying our land and culture.

Construction is at a standstill since Trump left office. But the damage has been done. For example, the sacred site of Monument Hill and the lands around it have been irreparably damaged by the wall. This represents an incredible loss to the O’odham people and the rest of the world. When will the government stop taking what is not theirs?

We Stand Together

How should we respond? I spoke with a couple of O’odham activists about this question, and I learned that no matter where you are or who you are, you must always stand together as a community to protect the land, water, plants, animals, people, and traditions. Amy Juan who works with the International Indian Treaty Council and is a cultural activist, told me, “We are the roots of America.” We have indeed been here for thousands of years. We belong here. We are still here.

Amy went on to say, “We O’odham have existed in these lands before America and Mexico were created in name and country. Both sides of the border are home, and our traditions and culture will live on through the teachings or our ancestors. We will continue to move across borders for sacred and ceremonial purposes, and because we have a right to, as caretakers of our land and himdag (way of life).”

AFTER YOU READ:
1. According the author, why is the border wall a problem for the O’odham people?
2. Based on the text and the photo (and caption) above, what are the O’odham people doing about the wall?


Raven Lewis a GED student at the Gila Crossing Community School FACE program. She is a recognized tribal member of the Tohono O’odham Nation. She lives on the Gila River Reservation where she grew up. She has big plans to be a leader who positively impacts her community and her child’s future.
The Border Crossed Us

For thousands of years, the Tohono O’odham people lived on land with no borders. But then, Mexico and the U.S. fought over our territory. They put a border through our land. That’s why we say, “The border crossed us; we didn’t cross the border.”¹

When Trump became president, he started building a bigger wall on the border. My people don’t even have a word for wall. Yet now we have a huge wall cutting through our land. This border wall divides families. It kills plants and animals. It hurts the land. It cuts us off from our water. The land belongs to plants and animals. We are all part of this earth together. We depend on one another. If one is destroyed, the rest will suffer. Verlon Jose, a leader of our nation, says that having the wall on our land is like being cut in half.²

We Stand Together

How should we respond? We must stand together. We must protect the land, water, plants, animals, people, and traditions. Amy Juan, a member of the O’odham Nation, told me, “We have lived on these lands before America and Mexico were created. Both sides of the border are home. We will continue to move across borders. We are caretakers of our land and our way of life.”³

AFTER YOU READ: According the author, why is the border wall a problem for the O’odham people?


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Write for The Change Agent

CALL FOR ARTICLES

THE NEXT CALL FOR ARTICLES will be published on our website in February 2023. Please look for it then. The deadline for that “Call” will be in early May 2023, and the articles we select from that set of submissions will be published during the following school year. Learn more at: https://changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us/.

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A small selection of the themes we have covered:

- Mental Health
- Stand Up & Be Counted
- Play
- Math
- Hair
- Indigenous People
- Career Pathways
- Talking about Race
- Pandemic