

# 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

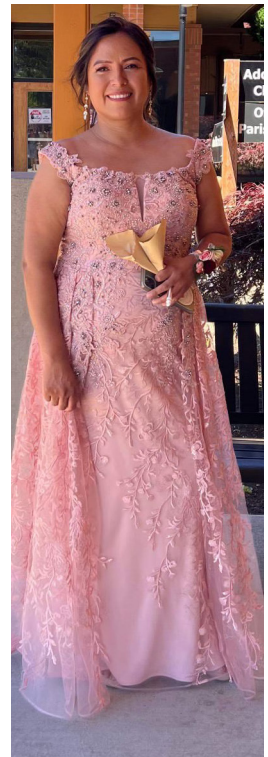
It was a hard journey to come to the U.S. But now we have new opportunities. Every effort has its own reward. My mom has her reward. My mom is a brave woman.

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

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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.

\* Two versions of this article are available: intermediate (pp. 4-5) and advanced beginner (p. 6).



# 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.



The author in Mexico (above) and in the U.S. with her daughter (below).

## 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).



# 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 farmer stands in a dry field, indicating with his arm how tall the corn should be. Photo from: <https://aztecreports.com/companies-are-draining-mexicos-water-supply-amid-drought-activists/2697/>.

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



A portion of the U.S.-Mexican border. Photo by Földhegy, CC 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



The dry river bed of the Rio Grande in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In Mexico, this river is called the Rio Bravo. Photo by phoca2004 CC/via Flickr. Read more about it here: <https://www.hcn.org/articles/climate-change-diverted-drained-and-dwindling-whats-the-fate-of-new-mexicos-rio-grande>.

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*).

Hortensia Reza Rodriguez is a student at Ysleta Community Adult Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She has been studying English for a year and she is not going to stop until she masters the language and become a U.S. citizen.





## Learn More about Climate Change

**Issue #27** of *The Change Agent* includes accessible articles and graphics that explain climate change.



# The Price of the American Dream

## A Korean Family Stays in the U.S. for Their Son's Education

Taehwi Byun

**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,

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**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.**

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“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. During the time I spend raising my child here, I can't see my parents getting older. That is the hardest part of life for an immigrant. I want the American dream, but the price is not being able to take care of my old parents, and sometimes feeling lonely.



**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?

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*Taehwi Byun is a student in the ESOL class at the City College of New York/CUNY in Great Neck, NY. She is a housewife and mother. When she learns enough English, she wants to find a job or volunteer work at the local library. She wants a new name for herself, beyond housewife and mother.*

# 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.

p. #	Author	Title	Notes about What Pushes and Pulls Immigrants