



Puzzle

Sara de la Rosa

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a puzzle? In this piece, the author says her life is “like a puzzle.” What do you think she means by that?

Puzzle Mom

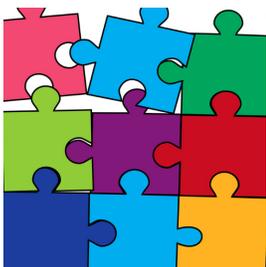
Fifteen years ago, my life was like a puzzle. But I couldn’t find the right pieces. When I got one piece of the puzzle, it didn’t fit with the others. I felt frustration, sadness, and guilt. But I also felt strength and determination. Above all, my dream was to give my children a safe home where they would not be scolded or hungry.

At that time, there was a project in El Paso called Working Woman. They opened a restaurant in the market that employed women in difficult situations. After several interviews and training, they gave me a job as a cook.

When I started working at this job, my three children were small. They were five, seven, and ten years old. I had no one in this country to support me. I became a puzzle mom: my children needed a home, food to eat, and clothes to wear. They needed to go to school, medical appointments, and extracurricular activities. And I needed to work. I thought I would break into a thousand pieces.

Always Running

On those days, my day started at 4 a.m. I left for work at 4:40 a.m., and I started working at 5:00 a.m. With deep sadness and full of concern, I left my children asleep and locked in the house. My supervisor knew my situation. She said that as long as I did my job, which was to make breakfast for the clients, I could leave at 7:00 a.m. to attend to my children. This was my “lunch



hour,” which I used to run home in my Mazda truck.

My kids got breakfast at school, so I didn’t have to feed them in the morning. I just had to wake them, get them dressed, and rush them out the door. I dropped them off at their school at 8:00 a.m. and then ran back to the restaurant to continue working. The restaurant had a menu that changed daily. We cooked typical Mexican food. I had to cook that day’s menu and also prepare the ingredients for the next day’s menu.

In the afternoon, I used my break time to run out and pick up my children from their school. And then I returned to work in the same way – running. Now I had my children with me at work. I would sit them at a table or put them in a little corner to draw and wait for me to finish my work. Sometimes, if I had enough money, I could give them a snack or something to drink. Sometimes, we had



to wait until we got home. Sometimes, there were activities for children in the market, and this was fun for them. Other times, they fell asleep. They got tired of waiting for me. This filled me with guilt and sadness.

At the end of my day, I collected my things and my children. With the little strength I had left, I returned home and continued breaking like a puzzle.

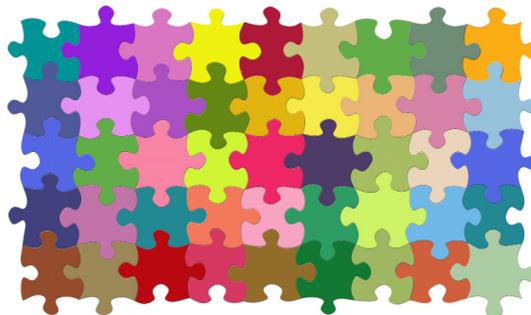
Laughter and Despair

When we got home, we all ate together as a family. This is when I had my first meal of the day, but it was in the company of my children, and that was my reward. I could see them play, smile, and tell me stories about their day. This time with my children gave me the energy that I needed to not give up. Every day, we said, "I love you." We shared hugs and kisses. They helped with the chores while I prepared the food for the next day. They took their baths, while I organized the house a bit. After leaving everything ready for the next day, we would all lie down in the same bed to watch television or play or tell jokes. This was the best moment of the day. We laughed so much together until it was time to sleep.

Sometimes, it was hard for me to watch them sleep. I questioned my role as a mom. I could not be the mom I wanted to be. I didn't like leaving them alone and locked up. I hated that I was always in a hurry, hungry, and tired. It felt like when I solved one thing, three other things got more complicated. Sometimes I felt despair.

We Are a Family

This is how my life passed, and suddenly my children were no longer children. They already finished high school; they were already working. I had been able to keep my promise: we had a safe home and we had not been hungry. We weren't millionaires, but we were rich in memories. We are a family who loves each other, supports each other, and respects each other. Not all the memories are good, but we learned lessons that help us value life and what we have achieved.



I am proud of my children and the adults they have become despite so many hard times. They have managed to get ahead. But I am also proud of myself because I put all the pieces of the puzzle together. Although I still have a long way to go, today I can say that my sacrifice and that of my children was worth it. I am at peace.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does Sara use critical and creative thinking as a mother and a worker? Point to specific examples in the text.
2. Sara uses *puzzle* as a form of figurative speech. Find the different uses of the term in the essay. Is it an effective metaphor? Why or why not? What is a metaphor that describes your life?

Sara de la Rosa is an ESL student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She has three adult children. The oldest two have a technical degree and own their own business, while the youngest is attending El Paso Community College and wants to be a lawyer. Sara says she attends YCLC "because now I have the time and my children's support to learn English, which has always been my dream. I am proud of myself and my children."

