

Niño

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By [Mario Orellana](#)



This column features stories from students exploring the intersection of creativity and technology through [Hive Learning Network](#) programs in NYC and Chicago.

I was born on July 30, 1996 in a small village in Guatemala -- Chicaman. My life as a child was hard, with a family composed of a mother and a father. My mother was only 19, and my father about 27 or more. I can't remember. She came from the same village where I was born, and a poor background. A girl who had to stay hungry, so that her seven other siblings could eat. My father came from an upper-class family. He was a lawyer, and his income could have been considered more than good. The perfect family, but life isn't always beautiful. I grew up watching my mother being beat by the man who I called father. I grew up seeing things, bad things, horrible things, wanting to do something about it! But I was young, too young. Many suns and moons passed, and my life continued without change.

I worked carrying bricks, mixing rocks with concrete, selling gum at the capital, and sometimes selling pupusas my mother had made. I was only six. Two months later, my mother had already left, she had started her journey to the north. I was left to live with my aunt, and grandmother, and her two other children. My mother sent money from the United States, but like always, I ended up getting nothing. And they never told me when she sent money or how much, but I always knew when. Every time I watched my aunt's kids going to the stores, and buying sodas, chips, candies, and sometimes toys, while I only sat and witnessed. I had a deep hatred for everyone, especially my father, a coward of a man, but I had the curse of being his son, the son of an alcoholic man, who beat women and abused his son. Until this day, I remember the voices who made fun of me, "Tu padre te odia! Y tu madre tambien por eso se fue!" My mother, the only shield I had, the woman who I would die for was gone. Every night I cried, remembering her image, while looking at the only picture I had of her. But every time I cried, it made me remember that I had to keep strong, for myself and for her. I knew time would catch up, and with that luck would as well.

In 2005 it did, when my mother sent money to bring me to her in the United States. Days after, the coyote sent people to get me, and that's when my journey began -- a journey that many have had and will continue to take. Days after that, a group of about 10 people and I crossed the Guatemalan border to Mexico, getting closer and closer to her. After this we traveled in buses, really good class, with soft seats, and small TVs in front of each one. I called them "Pulmas," because on the sides they said Pullman's buses. I was the only kid in the group, alone, which didn't affect me because loneliness it was something I grew up with.

Our journey continued from bus to bus, hotel to hotel, van to van, always getting closer and closer. Staying in hotels and houses not more than a day, or half of it. I brought a little book with me, a book I stole from my cousins. I didn't go to school while in Guatemala, but every time there was no one home, I would search for my cousins school books and learn words -- how to read and write. On this book I would draw, or write things I saw while going from city to city in Mexico. But when we finally got to the border in a couple of weeks, I had lost the book, and with it, my experiences.

We were packed into the back of a van that drove us to the desert. Once we were there, everyone got ready and the coyote asked everyone, "Si tienes monedas o algo que haga sonido al caminar, tirenlas ahora!" And that's what we did. Everyone threw their coins, which was funny. When we started to walk, we all had a gallon of water in one hand, and some in two. I was only able to carry one, he was my best friend. I had the spirit of a lion at the beginning, but hours after the lion had gone away. I was tired, but we couldn't stop. During the day, the sun was deadly walking under it. It was like walking under a flame who was following you everywhere you went.

During nighttime, we had to keep on walking, with the coldest temperature I've ever felt. I was freezing. During nighttime, we also had to run from bush to bush, tree to tree, hiding from what the coyote called, "La mosca" a helicopter that patrolled the border. And one night I saw it, and looked straight up at it, before the people pulled me into the bush. We had to keep walking, day and night, never stopping. I remember that my shoe had a hole, where the sand would get in, and the pain in my legs killed me, but I had to keep walking and ignore it. I also remember a night that I was too tired, and without seeing, I bumped into a cactus, because nights were as dark as the ink in your pen. The pain was so extreme that I ended up crying, taking the spike in my right arm while walking, and never telling anyone. But I kept on walking, because pain wasn't worthy of my attention.

After this we walked for two more days, before we made it to U.S. land. There was a van waiting for us, and it took us to this small house, somewhere in the south. We stayed there for a day or two, as the coyotes made phone calls to our family member. I remember this woman whose husband never answered the phone. She cried, and the Coyotes didn't know what to do with her. After that, everyone left the house in a van that took us to our destinations. The woman stayed. I never knew what happened to her. Inside the van, I looked out the window, seeing lights, buildings, a new world. Something amazing, new sky, new people, new air.

The van was taking me to Jamaica, Queens where my mother was staying in my uncle's house. When I got there, my uncle came out to pick me, and I went upstairs inside his apartment. Inside is where I saw her, she ran up to me and hugged me! I stayed still. I guess I was shocked. I just saw a woman hugging me. I couldn't remember! I couldn't recognize her -- her memory had been beaten out of me little by little by my aunt and grandmother. But then I remembered. It all came back: her face, her eyes, her hair, her love. Before me was my mother! That's when I broke into tears, tears that became my struggles escaping my body. I hugged her tightly, saying, "Madre ya vine, madre te encuentre, madre aqui estoy!" All the struggles, the pain, the hits, the bruises, the humiliations, were worth it. I had found once

again my shield, my mother.

And all becomes clear. Wish I could make you see this brightness. Don't worry, all is well. All is so perfectly, damnably well. I understand now, that boundaries between noise and sound are conventions. All boundaries are conventions, waiting to be transcended. One may transcend any convention, if only one can first conceive of doing so. Moments like this, I can feel your heart beating as clearly as I feel my own, and I know that separation is an illusion. My life extends far beyond the limitations of me.

-- David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

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