

A Better Life in Forest Knolls, California by Eric Trinidad Benito

“My parents took me here to this country to have a much better life than Mexico...”

I interviewed my mom, Patricia Benito Vicencio at my house two weeks ago about how she crossed the border from Mexico to California. We sat down together on my bed and it was kind of nice to spend time with her. I learned how my mom came to the United States and how that changed her life. It was a difficult journey for my mom, when she came as a teenager.

“It was a beautiful little town with a lot of cousins, family, and friends. My parents grew up in that town. It was so beautiful.” My mom told me she lived in Guadalajara, in Jalisco. She liked how she could play with her cousins and loved the food, like the tacos asada and watermelon with tajin and chamoy.

“...In Mexico it's very poor and my parents can't afford a lot of money for all the kids...”

Her family didn't have enough money to buy everything, like food, drinks and the costs of the house. My mom had one sister and three brothers. When kids were sick, they couldn't pay for doctors and medicines. She said that in Mexico they had to pay everything when they were sick. My mom told me she wanted a bicycle, but the family could not afford one.

“It was not so hard, a little bit easier, but it was hard too because it was dangerous from the water and more dangerous for me because I couldn't swim, nor could my dad...”

My mom first came to America in 1992. She told me she crossed the border twice, one time on the sea and the second time across the desert. The first time, she was 13 years old and she came with her father. She had to walk in the water for 3 hours. Border Patrol caught the coyote, the man who crossed the border with them. The second time, it was different.

“It was very dangerous... My little brother was one and a half, my second brother two and a half, my third brother was 10, and my sister 6 years old.... We thought we were going to die.”

The second time my mom crossed the border, her mom and brothers came with her. They walked for 12 hours, then they had no water or food left. Mom said that it was very sad and scary. She told me, “We crossed from Tijuana into San Diego and then we went to the motel... The coyote gave us ID so when we went to San Diego, we fly

from there to Oakland. The second one was the hardest. I don't want to remember it because it was very hard."

I asked my mom how she crossed the border. She told me she walked across the desert. Then the coyote told my grandma he didn't want to drive her across because the babies would be crying in the trailer and then he would be in trouble. "We went in a big trailer. There were 100 people there...I remember he put us inside... it was like 50 boxes, so Immigration couldn't see us," Mom said.

Next, my mom and her family were driven to San Fernando by more people who were working for the coyote. "I remember we stayed in the place, the coyote had a house, a big house there, where people could stay, 60 people." They had to wait there until they could pay the coyote. Mom explained, "It was scary because we stayed there for 3 days. My dad didn't have all the money yet." Her dad got the money because he was working with some of his friends. Then the man who worked for the coyote drove them all the way from San Fernando to San Jose.

My family ended up in Forest Knolls because my mom's uncle lived there. My mom had ended school in 6th grade in Mexico, and she didn't want to go to school here. She said, "But my mom said we are from another country so we have to speak differently. I was like, I don't really care. My mom, she says, it's gonna be good for you and maybe in the future good for your kids..." When she started Lagunitas School, it was hard for my mom to learn English. She went to the Secretary every day because she wanted to go home, but the Secretary just looked at her. The teachers had a meeting in Mexico.

I asked my mom if she misses Mexico. This is how she replied: "Yes, sure, I love Mexico. I really miss Mexico: my aunt, my cousins, the place I was born. I miss the house when I was a kid there and I play all the time outside with my cousins." When I asked if she had a better life here than in Mexico, my mom said it was fifty fifty, but she told me this great memory about when she was a kid.

"I remember always, always in Mexico my dream was to have a bicycle. I remember the first time I was here, I signed for Toys and Joys and I got a bicycle and I was so happy."