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## The Border

By Juan Vargas

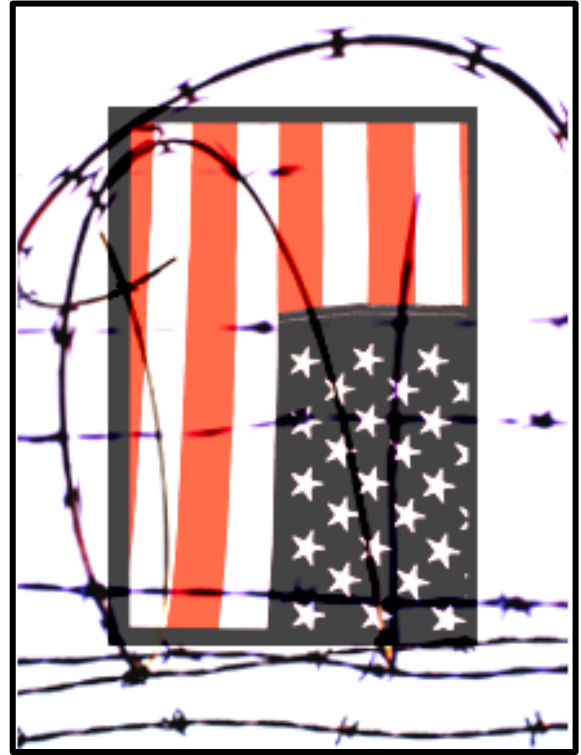
**In 1996 I had just turned 8.** My family and I lived in Michoacán, Mexico where it was very difficult to survive. We lived in a house made out of old cardboard boxes. Some parts of the house were made of bricks. Everyone in the family would work from sunrise to sunset in order to bring home enough money, but it wasn't enough to live a decent life. My parents decided it was time for a change.

On the early morning of January 8, my family traveled from our small town to the city Morelia Michoacán. From there we caught a bus that took us all the way to Tijuana, Mexico. Tijuana was a smelly, dirty city that held my family and I from a better life in this world of injustice. We arrived at my aunt's house, where we rested and prepared our bodies for a long and brutal trip over the border into the United States. My father had saved up enough money to pay a professional coyote to cross my mother and sister without putting them in danger.

The remaining money wasn't enough for my father and me to safely cross the border. We had no other choice but to cross illegally. We would have to walk through the desert, where we would risk capture by the border patrol, or get caught by death itself. The desert was a place where humans could not survive more than two sunny days without the necessary tools. After we received the call that my mother and sister had made it over the border, my dad decided it was time for us to embrace a risky journey to the other side.

At 6:00 my dad woke me. I was a small boy, but I had a big desire to cross the border. My father and I drove to the border fence, where met the rest of the people who were going to make the crossing. The first challenge was a tall dirty fence. I wondered if I was strong enough to overcome the first obstacle. But we dug a hole through the bottom of the fence, and on the other side, we ran like there was no tomorrow. After walking a long distance, the group decided to stop and rest for a few hours until night. The leaders believed that night traveling was better. It would give us an advantage against the border patrol.

Once it grew dark, we restarted the journey to the United States. All I remember was the big bright moon that was our torch of light. We walked for hours through the night but decided to cross



the river during the day because it would have been difficult to cross at night. I was relieved because I was tired of walking through the dark, and even more terrified of seeing a hungry coyote. The idea of being eaten by a wild animal scared me more than the border patrol. When the sun rose, it was time to cross the river. I was afraid that the river was going to take me and I wasn't going to be able to make it. My dad carried me on his back.

On the other side of the river, someone cried: "La migra. La migra." My dad guided us to a safe place near the river. He said it was time to run. We ran as if we had seen Jessica Alba waiting across the finish line with a gallon of water, ready to pour it over our heads. After we saw that no one was near, we stopped to catch our breath. During the break, I realized that this wasn't a joke anymore. The border patrol took their jobs seriously. They caught half of the people who had traveled with us. I wanted to go back to my old life and forget about crossing the border. After our little break, we found others who were able to escape from the border patrol. We learned that we had to cross a little mountain, where we would be safe.

After we reached the last checkpoint, I saw the people waiting for us in the car that would take me closer to my mom and a new life. At the beginning of the trip, twenty desiring men started the race to a new life, but only eight made it, including me. My eyes saw a long black road that had no end and mountains to the side. I was hungry. Everyone could hear each other's stomach growl, so the leader of the group pulled over to a place called IN AND OUT. I was happy to get some food.

We got out of the car, looking like a basketball team that had played a game of rugby. The ordering part was even difficult. The cashier asked what we wanted to eat but we didn't understand what she was saying. A Hispanic worker translated and we were able to eat. I took a bite of burger and I forget what we had gone through. I fell in love with America. With the taste of melted cheese and the grilled onions in my mouth, I said: "Thank you God."

From that moment my life has been an adventure with ups and downs and difficult decisions. I was an 8-year-old boy who had traveled a long way to look and to reach something. I believed that it would help me out. I had to run through a desert because people decided that we needed to have boundaries, and I knew the only person that could decide that was God. Today, I'm angry because political decisions have caused many deaths of innocent people trying to feed their loved ones. But life has taught me a valuable lesson. I will never forget, and I will never give up.

Juan Vargas was born in 1988 in Mexico. He is the oldest out of two siblings. He has lived with both of his parents since birth. He currently attends Santa Monica College, seeking to finish his units and transfer to Cal State Long Beach. He hopes to receive his B.A in Business/ Finance, with a minor in sociology.