

2016

Those Hot Summer Days

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Recommended Citation

Amaya, Karla (2016) "Those Hot Summer Days," *CouRaGeouS Cuentos: A Journal of Counternarratives*: Vol. 1, Article 4.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/courageouscuentos/vol1/iss1/4>



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Those Hot Summer Days

Karla Amaya

When I signed up to join the Upward Bound program, a college-prep summer program at Cal State Long Beach, I didn't know that I was also signing-up to clean out the garage before I left. California summers are as hot as fire, and the sun rays were like needles barely breaking the skin. Imagine being in a garage with one window and one door surrounded by mountains of unfolded clothes everywhere. Some piles even reached the roof of the garage. My sister and I did not want to stay in there all day and fold clothes in a hot garage with barely any ventilation, so we decided to climb the 'mountains' and jump off when we reached the tops. Of course we folded some clothes every now and then, so it wouldn't be obvious how slowly we were working.

One day my grandmother walked in on us climbing the piles of clothing, she had angry eyes, and her voice shook like an earthquake when she spoke. She sat down and began to cry endless tears as if her eyes held oceans. My sister and I were confused, yet we also felt sorry for being caught, we felt sorry for making our grandmother cry. My grandmother, seeing our confused faces, began to tell us about her times back in El Salvador. She worked in a factory folding shirts and sewing missing buttons back on. Sometimes there weren't enough sewing machines, so she would have to sew by hand.

As she was telling us her story, I couldn't help but notice her hands: they were bigger than usual due to the surgeries she'd had on them as a result of carpal tunnel syndrome. The surgeries did more harm than good leaving her unable to close her hands more than seventy-five percent and leaving her unable to find work. I thought of my dad, how he works every single day, from six in the morning to whatever time he comes home, which is usually ten at night. How he collects aluminum cans, plastic and cardboard just so we can scrape by through another month of rent and bills.

I thought of myself.

I am ashamed because I couldn't endure a couple days of folding clothes, whereas my parents have endured so much more than this. The guilt in my heart took control of my body; I picked up a shirt from the mountains and began to fold. I had climbed the mountain of understanding.

Reflection

The first day we began to write was the day I began to feel lighter throughout the semester. I felt as if my words were being written for others, for them to learn from my experiences and the things I've endured. Since we had a different prompt each day we met, it was easier to write about more than one subject and really express the thoughts that rose to mind at that moment. I wrote about many things, but there were some subjects I wrote about that I hold dear to my heart, such as my parents, my childhood memories, and about faith.

Even though there were *many* prompts, there is one that I will reflect on titled "Those Hot Summer Days." The prompt was to describe a moment of intense work or labor, and so I did. At first, I was going to just speak about my parents' labor, but later I decided to add how I was told my grandmother's story, which happened to be in the summer, hence the title.

It was a normal day for a soon-to-be ninth grader who had just signed up to be a participant of the Upward Bound program at Cal State Long Beach. Those who participated took summer classes at CSULB that Upward Bound provided. It was also a college-prep program assisting students in applying to colleges (if they were seniors) and aided high-school students with SAT fee waivers and SAT review classes. Those days during my high school career were when I played sports and did well academically; they morphed me into the butterfly I am today, but so did my parents, who got me into the program in the first place. Without them, I definitely wouldn't be the person that I am today.

This led me to choose to write about their labor and share their experiences with the class, the HSU campus, and whoever else is interested in hearing my thoughts and memories.

As I began to write their story and mine, I couldn't help but feel sadness as I remembered that hot summer day. I remember the tears my grandmother cried, they were never ending, a waterfall. I remember her hands, scarred and swollen. I remember how distant her eyes were as she told my sister and I about the hard times she endured back in El Salvador.

I also remembered other times of labor; my older siblings and I went with my parents each day during the summer to deliver phone books to houses in huge areas. We would start at six-thirty in the morning and finish around four in the afternoon. Thank god we helped our parents, because without us, who knows what time they would have come home. Our parents work hard for their children, no matter the task, because of the love they hold for us. They work hard, so that we don't have to, as my beautiful grandmother has always taught me.

Being able to write about your most cherished childhood memories or the things that have caused you to reflect on yourself and change for the better has enabled me to grow as a writer and as a person. If I am able to share this with my campus, then I can share just about anything. Most of the pieces I wrote in class were about my parents and loved ones, so it's time I've opened up to writing about anything. As I continue to write, I realize a mirror will provide you an image of your reflection, you on the surface. But a mirror does not allow you to reflect on the inside, on what allows you to grow—that, you have to find for yourself.