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## I am from both sides of the Border- Humboldt and Michoacán

Estefani Villalobos Valencia  
*Humboldt State University*

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## **I am from both sides of the Border- Humboldt and Michoacán**

By Estefani Villalobos Valencia

Hello, my name is Estefani Villalobos Valencia. I am from Humboldt County, California. Yes, believe it or not, I was born here and I lived here the first seven years of my life. I went to South Fortuna Elementary until 2nd grade. Later, my parents had the drastic decision to move to Mexico to Aguililla, a town in Michoacán and I lived there for 10 years. I am going to tell you a little about my history in Mexico and even how it has been to live in the United States. The first question people ask me is if it was better to live in the U.S.A. or Mexico? My answer was that "I felt it was the same," although I admit I always wanted to come to the United States to be with my brother because I did not have a good relationship with my mother.

My mother and I did not get along because she would always compare me to my sister. I believe this was a big mistake on her part. My sister lived far away with an aunt in the United States. My father never compared me with my brothers; we are all different, but because of that, I had a grudge against my sister because according to my mother she was the perfect daughter. I remember thinking to myself, "My mom is wrong about me. She doesn't know me. "

When my sister visited us in Mexico from the U.S., I took the time to talk to her about my mom. After talking with my sister, I realized that she was not having a good time living with our aunt in Fortuna. I must admit I admired her and after talking with her, the resentment I had for all those years towards her withered away, because I realized it was not her fault that my mother was at fault for always comparing us. She asked me to forgive our mother and to give her the benefit of the doubt. She said "Do not pay attention to what our mother said." She also told me she admired me for being rebellious and for not giving up.

During this time, I started to feel bad about myself and at that time I blamed my parents for that, it was thanks to them that I felt bad because I felt like I lacked love. To this day I feel bad, everyone says it is "depression." Maybe it is depression, but I don't want to admit it! But I have deviated a bit from the topic.

I really like the town where I lived in Mexico; I met my grandparents and a lot of family. Primary school was a very beautiful time for me in Michoacán. Thanks to that school I met many people includ-

ing my best friend whose name is Yulissa. Also, another person who played a great role in my childhood was Marisol. All three of us were inseparable; the perfect trio. I would say Yulissa was the intelligent one, and Marisol the rude one, and I the kind one and a little rebellious too. When I entered high school, everything changed. Yulissa did not enter the same high school; she had moved to Lazaro Cardenas, and Marisol no longer continued studying. I have to admit the first weeks were different, but I think the same thing happened for all of us.

There in high school I met many new friends, as time went by they also left school, except for Briceida and Rubi. As the school year ended and we graduated from middle school we were all excited for summer. However, that summer was not what I expected I experienced a bit of everything, bad and good things. My mom opened a restaurant and gave me my first job as a waitress. I worked with her all summer. When it was time to return to school, we entered a new stage since we entered high school. I was only able to enter the high school there if I had dual citizenship, otherwise I would not be able to enter the school system. Even though my parents are Mexican and I am Mexican, the school system in Mexico did not see me as a true Mexican. It made me feel angry so they gave me one semester to get my dual citizenship.

The truth is that I was not doing very well in school. I did not put enough effort into it, I was just going to play. At the time I only had passed 3 subjects, so my decision was to leave school plus they wanted to kick me out because I did not have my Mexican citizenship.

My mom was very upset and of course she didn't feel I appreciated the effort she made to get me into that particular high school and I didn't know how to value it. When I left high school, the punishment for me was to put me back to work. After 7 months, my brother Alberto, with whom I currently live with, asked my mother if she thought he could bring me to the United States. He asked excitedly, "Can Estefani come and live with me in the United States, this way she can keep going to school. I am stable now and I can offer her a safe home here in Fortuna, CA. Will you let her come?" My mom thought it was a good idea but my dad did not think it was a good idea, so I talked to my dad. It took a bit more for my dad to agree because, not to brag, but I was always his darling. He said to me sadly, "I will miss you, but it is for your own good to go to the Unit-

ed States so you can study and find work.” It was a bit drastic since they told me I was leaving three days before I came to the United States, and as my friends said goodbye to me, I cried a little since I knew that everything would change for me.

But “it’s for a better future,” everyone told me enthusiastically. I didn’t remember much about Fortuna, the town that I lived in as a young child, just the last house we lived in. The language was not too much of a problem because whenever my cousins came to visit us in Mexico they spoke English to me, so that I would not forget, and I thank them for that.

My arrival in the United States was very normal. I loved the landscape. I have always liked the redwoods and the climate that is in Humboldt. I miss the heat a bit though.

I live with my brother, Alberto and his girlfriend, Ana. The truth is that they treat me very well, they worry about me and when there is time they take me to see places. I also have family here in Humboldt that I saw again after many years of being apart. My favorite part of Fortuna would be the little forest that is in the park. When you get to a certain point you can see almost all of Fortuna in the late afternoon, and it looks super cool.

I’ve been here in Humboldt for 6 months and it has been going very well for me, I hope it will continue to be like this. At East High, my new school, Noemi helps me a lot to catch up with my subjects. There, I also have met Omar and Ashly, my two good friends. I am also in an ELD (English Language Development) class at Fortuna High School. My teacher helps me a lot with the English course. In the ELD course I met Laura, our bilingual instructional assistant who has helped me a lot with English. I also met my new friends, Selina and Omar, who are also in the class. Everyone who goes to this class has treated me very well, they have never made me feel like I do not belong. In the future I want to continue studying to get a good job and to become independent.

I think it was a very good decision to come to the United States because I started to speak more English and I got to see my cousins again. I also get along better with my brother Alberto now that I got to know him more. I hope to soon go back to Mexico to see my parents. And then I will come back to Fortuna because I am from both sides of the borders. Fortuna and Michoacán are my home.