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## My Mother's Roots are from La Tierra de Huizaches, I Carry her Roots Within Me

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## **My Mother's Roots are from La Tierra de Huizaches, I Carry her Roots Within Me**

By Selina Diaz Sumano

Hi, my name is Selina and I was born in San Rafael, California, but when I was one year old I moved to San Pablo Huixtepec Oaxaca, Mexico because my father did not want us to grow up in the United States. He feared if we grew up here we would never want to visit Mexico.

I could write about everything that happened during those years before I came to live in the United States, but in reality, there is not much to tell. However, my dad came to the United States when I was 5 years old, therefore I was not with him and I did not spend the most important years of my life with him. I remember that on every birthday he would call to congratulate me and always promised me that the following year I could go to the United States to visit him. But it was always an illusion, so I stopped believing that one day it would be fulfilled, until I was 15 years old. When my older brother also came to the United States, his situation was different because he was not born in the United States, so he crossed the border to the United States when he was 18 years old in 2017. 2017 was a very hard year because we were worried about what he was going through, we did not know if he was okay, where he was at, or if he had made it to the United States. It took 2 months to hear from him again when he was reunited with my dad. Once we knew he was okay we could relax.

Two years after my brother left, my dad told me that it was time to come live with him. I felt that it was no longer something I wanted, in fact, I was not even ready to leave my whole life behind and especially to leave my family and friends, but now, it was not an option. From that day something changed within me, I felt that from then on, I would no longer be myself and it was true. I began to think about it so much that sadness began to invade my mind. Most of the time when I spent time with my friends or family, in my mind the only thing that passed by was the fact that I would no longer go to see them for a while or that as time passed they would forget about me. So I didn't enjoy the months completely before I left.

Five months after my 15th birthday, I had the date and absolutely everything ready to go. My travel day would be Monday, July 15, 2019. A week before the farewells began, that was the most difficult of

all because there were tears in all of them that could not easily stop. I specifically remember that everyone told me, “tienes una gran oportunidad, no la dejes ir, estarás mejor ahí.” I believed those words for a moment, but there was something that did not convince me, I always knew something would happen. One night before I left, I remember feeling scared, it was around 10:00 pm, and I had returned from saying goodbye to my grandmother and my little cousins. Obviously, I returned home crying and my mother greeted me at the door to give me a comforting hug. I couldn't stop myself from hugging her and after a few minutes we went to bed to sleep and rest a bit, since the following day I would make the journey to the U.S. Before sleeping, I sat with her on the edge of the bed and we talked, it was time to say goodbye. I can't forget every word she said to me, and it broke my heart as she told me: “No te preocupes por mi hija, yo voy a estar bien, cuando tengas oportunidad de venir a verme está bien, trata de llevarte bien con tu papá y no tener problemas, te quiero mucho y cuídate si?” “Si, voy a regresar a verte, cuídate mucho por favor y si necesitas algo, siempre llámame, yo también te quiero mucho no lo olvides.” le dije con ternura al abrazarla.

I promised to return every year to visit her and one day bring her with me. That was the deal she had agreed with my dad. I was sad about leaving my mother even though I grew up with the stereotypes of the movies, and I thought that people here were lucky to come to a country with a good economy. I spent the best years of my life in “San Pablo Huixtepec” better known as *Tierra de Huizaches* because the *Huizaches* grow everywhere and it is almost impossible to get rid of them. *Huizaches* are a type of tree with thorns and they are native to Oaxaca. People use this tree as firewood and to cook because it grows quickly and everywhere. When you cut this tree you are never able to cut its roots and it will grow again, it is a giving tree. *San Pablo Huixtepec* is a town full of culture and traditions, where people are very united and happy. So I was used to living surrounded by happiness, and although there were almost always bad moments for me, they were easy to overcome when my family and my mother were together. She was always there to support me. I had many friends and I went out with them every day. I learned to be educated, to have respect for the elderly, and I learned to have responsibilities. I believe that everything I am now as a person I owe it to the fact that I grew up in Mexico and, of course, to the examples my mom set for me.

The day finally came, and we got up early to go to the airport. I didn't

know how I felt at that moment, I just wanted to stay and never leave. It was time to board the plane and that was the last time I saw her. I got on the plane with my cousin Omar with a heavy heart. When I finally got to San Francisco, which is where my dad would pick me up, I was a bit confused because I hadn't seen or lived with my dad for 10 years. He was standing there waiting for me with his friend, but I was mad at my dad because he had forced me to come to the United States even though I did not want to. I wanted to stay with my mother, so when Omar and I saw him we just looked at each other and said nothing. I saw he wanted to cry but I just looked at him and I just stayed silent. Omar asked him, "eres mi tio?" and he responded, "yes" and asked us to follow him. We followed him through San Francisco airport to where the car was parked and we began our five-hour journey to Fortuna, California.

When we got to Fortuna, we went to drop up my cousin Omar with his grandparents and then we went to my new home. When I entered, I was greeted by my older brother and he told me: "Que bueno que ya estás aquí, si creciste mucho." I responded, "Pensé que seguía igual... hueles a Estados Unidos," le dije con risa. Then my dad presented me to his new partner Clara and her three children before we said goodbye and went to sleep. When I went to bed I called my mom to let her know that I had a safe trip, but we were both still sad about being separated. The next day I woke up at 8:00am like I was used to, but it seemed that nobody was home because the house was silent and my brother had already left to work. It was a bit weird because when I lived in my pueblo, people were already awake and starting their day by 5:30am. You could hear the birds singing, the roosters, dogs barking, cars selling gas, tortillas, fruits, or others picking up old iron that people had in their houses. It was different here. So I decided to text with my friends and watch a movie to pass the time while I waited for someone to wake up and come to the kitchen. Three hours later my dad came to my room and told me that after breakfast we would be going to the Mall to buy me things that I needed.

During the ride to Eureka Bayshore Mall, I did not talk with anyone, I only observed the giant redwood trees that were on the side of the road. When we got to the Mall my dad began to talk to me about all the stores that there was and how the stores were different. I say this because there is a big difference between how you buy things in Mexico compared to that of the U.S, the tax is not included in the price because in Mexico, when you buy a product the tax is already

included in the price. We went to TjMaxx to look for something that I liked and this is when I began talking with my dad. “¿Cómo estuvo el viaje?, te dió miedo el avión o era normal?” dijo mi papá. I said, “Me dió un poco de miedo cuando ya estaba arriba, pero en el siguiente vuelo ya me quería regresar,” le respondí.

That’s what I call the *la tercera parte de mi vida*, the third part of my life. It was still summer, and that was a time I had grown to know as family time where we would go to the rivers in my *pueblo*. Where we would pass the time at home or on occasions help my grandmother prepare *tejate* to sell. *El Tejate* is a drink made from corn and cacao, it is a very traditional drink in Oaxaca and is heavily consumed by people in the summer, since it is very refreshing. During this time, I waited to go out to places, to eat together, or for my dad, Clara, and my brother to return from work so that we could sit down and watch television together. The reality is that none of that happened. Every day I stayed at home without going out, without seeing new places or meeting new people. I ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner alone at home a lot of the time. I began to feel like I did not belong here even though I talked with my mom and friends every day, I still felt completely alone in this new place.

Finally, the time came to go back to school and I thought that it would be the perfect time to make new friends and become a part of this new place, but it was harder than I thought because I did not speak English so I could not communicate well with everyone. Fortunately, at school they assigned me Laura who explained everything to me about school and joined me in all my classes to translate. In addition to that, I met more people who also did not speak English and we were in ELD together with our teacher Femenella, where I felt more comfortable because I knew that I was not the only one who did not speak the language. I even made friends with everyone in the class. We would talk about things we missed from our home back in Mexico and how it is that we came to be here. I’d finally found joy in making new friends and didn’t feel too different, since we are from different states of Mexico. Everything seemed to be improving, my grades in the schools were excellent compared to my grades in Mexico. The schools in Mexico are one of the biggest challenges you can face. If you are a person who is a little distracted or worrisome like me, it is difficult because since elementary school the tasks turn out to be in greater quantity. For some it is very difficult to have good grades and carry the same learning capabilities as others. Since changing schools,

the U.S. turns out to be very easy and stressful for students. I thought as time went on everything was going to be normal for me, and even though it had only been 5 months, something happened that I wasn't prepared to experience.

It was a day before my birthday, I was alone in my house and I called my mom like every day, but I noticed something different in the way she talks to me. All the talk was normal until we were almost saying goodbye. "Tal vez el Lunes vaya al hospital, porque me he sentido mal últimamente," me dijo mi mamá un poco triste. "¿Qué pasó? ¿Por qué no me habías dicho nada?" le respondí preocupada. "Es que no hay nadie que pueda llevarme en estos días." "Mañana mismo le hablaré a alguien para que te lleve, sabemos que te tienes que atender rápido antes de que empeore," le respondí casi llorando. "No te preocupes, el Lunes sin falta voy, ya mañana hablamos, por favor no le digas a tu papá ni a tu hermano, hasta que ya esté ahí," me dijo mi mamá con una voz quebrada.

After I hung up the phone, I started crying because I had a very bad feeling, I knew something would happen to her. Since then I began to assimilate it. I called my dad and as soon as he found out he called his nephew from Mexico to take my mom to the hospital that same night. It all happened so fast that night, I didn't talk to her until the other day at 6:00 p.m. She called me from the hospital to wish me a Happy Birthday. The call didn't last more than 2 minutes, so I can't remember much about what we talked about. I knew that the next day she would have surgery and that it was a little risky, so I asked everyone to ask God for her. Thank God she came out of the surgery and left her to rest without visitors for a day. When my dad picked me up at school he told me: "Ya hablé con tu abuela, dice que tu mamá ya salió de la cirugía y se ve bien, nada más tendrá que quedarse reposando más días en el hospital."

That day was a Tuesday, and my dad was planning to have a special dinner to celebrate my birthday, but before we sat down for dinner, my mom called me to tell me that she was fine and that I shouldn't worry and that I should enjoy my birthday dinner. She actually told me more things, but my mind was so dazed that I couldn't pay attention. The last thing I heard was "no se te olvide que te quiero mucho."

As we ate I couldn't stop thinking about what could have happened because I'd been having nightmares that last three days. That night

we went to sleep like any other day. It was 4:30am on December 11 when out of nowhere I woke up and in front of my bed was my dad and my brother. I knew without them telling me anything that my mother had passed away. Both my dad and brother hugged me but I didn't shed any tears. I felt that during the last few days I had already assumed it and that now I could be even stronger. I checked my phone and had too many calls from my grandmother, cousins, and aunt. I took the time to call them to tell them that I was okay. That day I decided to go to school to distract myself. Apparently, I looked normal and no one noticed, just one person. It didn't take many hours for my friends in Mexico to find out and send me messages of comfort and call me. It was that day when I felt my heart completely destroyed. From that day on, I learned to live with that experience, and although it is not easy or something that one day I can forget I will always take as a lesson. I will continue to hope one day to be with her again. Sometimes she visits me in my dreams and I am glad to see her even for a moment. I miss her every day. When I look in the mirror I can see her, I carry her own features and her name is also *Selina*. It is as if she had reincarnated in me.

In memory of the person who gave me life, who raised me as a mother and father, who gave me the best examples and the best experiences in life.