



THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A NEW BEGINNING

A life changing decision

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As I lay on my bed covered in blankets that shield my skin from the cold breath of winter, I rest in complete silence where I then hear the intruder responsible for making my body cover itself in goose bumps. Trying not to make a single sound for fear of waking up the baby that is sound asleep, I manage to get up. As I turn to see a window cracked open I stop momentarily to bend down and plug in a cord that turns on small beaming lights all twisted around a green artificial body. The bright lights seem to give a sort of warmth to the small room filled with diapers and toys on Christmas Eve. When I close the window I take a moment to look outside at the bright city lights that take my breath away even till this day. The tall buildings that stand up high and overlook the rest of the city underneath it takes me back to the first time I looked up at them.

It's hard to believe that it's only been a few months since I joined this new community that is filled with people whose skin tone is much lighter than my own. Four months ago, I was a complete stranger that had just made her way across the border that separated her new home, San Diego, from her old home, Mexico. At the age of 14, I was told on September 14, 1994 to pack a bag with as many essentials needed to survive in a daunting desert but light enough to run in case of an unwanted encounter. I had never been so terrified and excited at the same time. I knew why I had to leave my country. What I was going to do was not uncommon at the time. I knew many people who had chosen the same road I was going to go through. But it was hard to believe I was actually going to leave my family, my culture, and my life, all in Mexico.

There was no way of denying that the economy had taken a turn for the worst. The

year 1994 had started off badly with the attack of the Mayan Indian Rebels and the assassination of political leaders. These were one of the many problems that Mexico was facing that eventually piled up and ended up having a huge impact on the economy towards the end of 1994. Many kids my age were forced to drop out of school in order to help support their families. Most would try to balance their life by going to school in the morning and working in the afternoons or weekends but it wasn't enough. That was why it was decided for me to start a new life in a country that showed actual opportunities that could benefit me.

When I arrived in San Diego I immediately saw why everyone back in Mexico wanted to make their way to the side I was now standing on. The first thing I noticed about San Diego were the huge buildings that made up the city. I had never seen anything like it before. From the town I was from in Nayarit, the tallest building around was the church, only because of its steeple. In San Diego though, there were more buildings than I could count and more faces than I could remember. Not only that, San Diego was right next to a bay. I had never been around such a large body of water before. The only type of sea I knew was the San Pedro River that ran down my town. But, although I was excited about my new home, I soon became lost.

The same day I arrived in San Diego I felt thrilled about my new life but that emotion all flew away in less than an hour. The reason why was because I soon realized that I had no one on this side of the border. And not only that, I didn't know how to get around or how to even communicate with others to ask for directions. I wasn't bilingual which made it a lot harder to try to be a part of this city. Not only that, I wasn't legal which kept me on my toes. I was afraid of being deported on the same day I stepped on American land.

I soon realized that discrimination was all around me. There were banners and campaign ads being televised more than once with a white man at the end of each ad talking straight at the camera with a ruthless face. I didn't have to know English to understand what those campaign ads were about. Just seeing the footage of immigrants crossing the border then followed by the word "NO" translated the meaning of those ads to me. It turned out that there was a proposition trying to be passed that would prohibit illegal aliens from using health care, public education and other social services. The opportunities that drew me into the U.S. were trying to be removed all at once. When I realized what was going on I was shocked because those ads were basically describing me; an immigrant who is classified as an alien based on her origins.

I no longer wanted to be out in the public. I started panicking because I knew I couldn't go back home after having worked so hard to get to where I now was. But I couldn't stop thinking about how I was going to live here. How was I supposed to find a job, get food and be able to support the new life that was growing inside of me? Everything was so complicated but I had to find a way to make things

work because I knew I had no other choice.

As I come back to reality, I can see how my life has completely changed from what it was four months ago. Before, I did not have a job and I was on my own. But now, not only do I have a roof over my head, but I also have a child to support. This new responsibility has surely helped me confront obstacles that I would have never thought possible of overcoming on my own.