

# The Journey

UCR graduate student Cristian Flores ('05 creative writing) is finishing her M.F.A. in creative writing and writing for the performing arts at UCR. She was the recipient of the 2006 Clara Peretzman Scholarship for Immigrant Women, which she received, in part, for writing her biography, which appeared on [claraperetzman.blogspot.com](http://claraperetzman.blogspot.com). Below is a portion of that blog, which has been adapted for this magazine.



It was for the best, they said.

I had to see my parents depart to a distant country. My three siblings and I had to stay behind.

I was 13 when my parents left for “el norte” in search of a chance for a better living. It was a rare sunny late afternoon. Standing out on the sidewalk in front of our home in Mexico City, I could hear the busy traffic rushing by.

Holding my grandmother’s wrinkled, rigid hand, I had to see my mother fade away, blending into the crowd and busy street. My siblings and I stayed behind.

My oldest brother tried to support us by taking on every job opportunity that came along. The four of us worked at home for a cosmetics company, emptying bottles of shampoo and lotion until we felt nauseated from the overpowering vanilla and coconut scents.

Next, we hand painted Santa Claus candles until our fingers were stiff from maneuvering the little figurines and our

backs ached from sitting hunched over the table for 12-hour shifts.

At one point we chose to work for one of our cousins, making Christmas ornaments that they would later sell at the mercado. We worked with Styrofoam, noisy paper and smelly glue. We quit after three months because the boss kept reassuring us that we would get paid soon – next week – but next week never came.

My siblings and I always managed to find a way to survive, thanks to the creative skills inherited from our parents . . . after all we were Mexicanos.

A year after my parents left, they sent for my older sister and me. I woke up to a bright sun after sitting on an airplane for what felt like all night long.

When we arrived in the United States we lived in a small one-bedroom apartment where only two people could stand at once in the kitchen. We had two chairs and a small table, no TV, no radio – only letters from my brothers in Mexico and

old, worn-out Spanish books. My parents worked two jobs, I hardly ever saw them. We spent only a couple of hours together every morning.

A couple months after arriving in the United States, my sister and I started school. We were placed in bilingual classes for nearly two years. We transferred to regular classes because we weren’t learning any English at all since the “bilingual classes” were taught completely in Spanish.

Some months later my parents finally gathered the money to send for my brothers.

Ever since my family and I moved to the U.S., both of my parents spent their time working full time. Today, they teach catechism at our church and spoil the grandchildren. My oldest brother, who married his best friend under the moonlight of a sizzling August night, is the proud father of a 4-year-old perky girl and a 16-month-old baby boy.

I transferred to the University of California, Riverside, in the fall quarter of 2003. It wasn’t until I transferred to UCR and took my first creative writing class that I discovered the beauty of reading and writing. “Highwire Moon” (by UCR creative writing professor Susan Straight) was the first book I read in its entirety. I fell in love with it. It was an easy read considering that I still struggle with my English. I felt so proud of such silly achievement. I received my bachelor’s degree in creative writing in the summer of 2005. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts program at UCR.

These days I’ve juggle my time trying to work on a collection of nonfiction pieces – trying to put together a memoir. I’ve also been writing, revising and polishing poems in the process of becoming a manuscript that will someday transcend frontiers.

Every day when I lie down to sleep I think of the words Momma always taught us when times were rough: “Solamente vivimos lo que tenemos que vivir –canta, baila, y sonreír saboreando la vida,” – “After all I do think it’s true that we only live what we must live, thus sing, dance and smile while savoring life.” ❧