



NATALIA TREVIÑO

AND CROWN OUR GOOD

I grew up in San Antonio, Texas with a mother who spoke Spanish to me and Sesame Street, which spoke Bert and Ernie to me. My first words, my dad says, were in English, in the snow-covered state of Minnesota, but with two parents from Mexico, and my mother being a stay-at-home mom who only knew Spanish, it is very likely that my first words were a blend of Spanish and English.

I was born in Mexico City. My parents were from Monterrey, Mexico. We came to live permanently in the U.S. when I had just turned four years old. The flight from Monterrey to San Antonio is one of my earliest childhood memories.

While we waited in the airport for the plane, I sang what must have been a favorite song, the ABC's in English. I think we must have been waiting a long time in line, because my parents tell me I was singing it over and over, dancing around the merciful people waiting with us. I probably felt that the people in the airport enjoyed my song. I probably sensed approving eyes on me, and laughter. More than likely, they were humoring me and my poor parents who were tolerating their child, proud of her voice, unafraid to sing this extraordinary song.

Once on the plane, a lady set a tray with dreadful looking food in front of me, but at the corner of the tray sparkled a piece of candy in its gold wrapper. I knew I was not allowed to eat candy. I had to earn it. I wanted it, and so I decided to eat all the food first. This was going to be a big task because I didn't like food, especially strange food. It was a big decision I remember vividly. I knew this plane trip made it a special day, like a birthday and that my mom would probably give in. Somehow, during the meal, in the excitement of the descent, my plate disappeared and so did the candy. I had sacrificed and received nothing, and I knew it would be ages before another piece of candy came my way. I remember getting off of the plane, without my candy, feeling angry and cheated.

Many immigrant children arrive to the United States feeling this way, but for much better reasons than a lost chance at a sweet.

One friend of mine, Jen, who came from Korea when she was nine, tried to get her four brothers and sisters to run away to the mountains when their parents came for them from America. Her parents had saved enough money, moved to America, created a life here, saved more money, and went home for their children. Jen had a hiding place in the mountains all figured out. Her siblings said no. She wept. How could they leave their playground? Or their grandmother, all they ever knew?

Another friend of mine, Sonya, came from Poland when she was fourteen. Her father left Poland when she was twelve during its Solidarity movement when their home city, occupied by Russia at the time, had become intolerable. Lines of people in front of stores where there were rumors that bread or shoes or eggs had arrived, when all that was available was a shelf of vinegar. He traveled as part of his job, so on what seemed like one of his normal business trips, he left Poland and did not return. He never said a word to his daughters about what he was about to do that would change their lives forever. Her mother also said nothing to them. They did not know when they would see him again, and they did not know why he left. He would carve out a new life for them in another country. Sonya did not see her father again for two years. After starting a life in Austria and then settling in America, it was time for them to be together as a family again. Finally, Sonya, her sister and mother went to the American Embassy and were each tested to see if they were "fit" to come to America.

Sonya makes quotation marks with her fingers when she says the word "fit." The embassy gave them a test because they wanted able-bodied immigrant workers, people who could contribute. The lady who worked at the embassy was abrupt, cold, and bent on making Sonya feel inadequate, but Sonya passed the test. Her mother passed too. Her sister did not. Sonya says her sister was actually deemed "unfit" to come. Her fingers punctuate the word, and her face folds in pain as she remembers this. Her sister, slightly mentally disabled, and desperately excited to come to America, would not be able to join them.

This brought an unimaginable horror to Sonya's family. Would they leave her sister behind? Would they send Sonya on her own and split the

family? Would they ever be a whole family again?

In the darkness before dawn, after months of begging for a second chance at the test, Sonya, her mother, and sister left their home and belongings and took a taxi to the embassy on the chance that her sister might be accepted the second time. Having given up their publicly owned house to a neighbor on the chance they would be leaving, they did not know if they would return to nothing. Her sister somehow passed the test, and their journey across the ocean began.

The intimidating lady at the embassy who didn't want to let her family in, who would be willing to cut her family in half was Sonya's introduction to America.

The conversation about immigration is about all of us. Whether we are Asian, European, Latin American, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, or indigenous to our respective land, most of us come from a legacy of attachment, detachment, migration and settlement. What I keep hearing in the conversation is that immigrants, both legal and illegal, are punished for coming. Both Jen and Sonya, and so many others I have talked to begin to tear up when we talk about it.

Maybe the issue is that government agencies do not accurately represent what life will be like for the immigrant family. Once they arrive, life is very confusing. Images of American freedom seem attractive. The U.S. government proclaims, "Welcome." But the neighbor down the street might proclaim, "There goes the neighborhood." Immigrants hear: *We are welcome. We are not welcome. We are desirable. We are not desirable. We are cheap labor. We are cheap? We are in the greatest nation in the world. It asks for the meek! But do not ask for help. Do not take our social services. Do take this job. We need fresh vegetables. Do not take that job. Or that job. Take care of our children. Stay away from our children. Stay on your side of town. Why do you not learn English and blend in? Why do you not go back to your own country? What do you do for this country?*

What is so confusing about this conversation on immigration, especially for Mexicans, is that we who immigrate legally are often treated like we immigrated illegally. We are all lumped together, and it does not feel good. We never broke a law.

But in a way we should be lumped together. We emigrated from the