

Third Place

Essay Contest Winner, Ages 14-18

Maribel Corona, 16

Florida City, FL

From our hands to your table

It's Tuesday, 10:30 p.m. I'm exhausted. However, I refuse to allow drowsiness to take control over me, at least not until my mother gets home from work. It's mid-April, at this time of the year, demand for plants increases dramatically, forcing nursery workers to work later hours and arrive earlier to work than the norm. Its 10:53p.m. and my eyes widen as I hear the humming noise from my mom's car engine, pulling up in our drive way. I open the door and greet her. She's worn out, drenched in her own sweat, and I can tell she'd been on her knees most of the day, the brown muddy color on her pants speak for themselves. Looking at her come home cover in mud and see the pain on her face makes me teary because she deserves a better life. We only spoke for five minutes that day; at least I know she got home safe.

It all began with a dream. A dream my father had since he was a teenager in Mexico. It was April 1996, my parents decided to risk it all and migrate illegally into the United States. They took a gamble and swam across the "Rio Grande" not knowing how to swim well but they had to give it a try. By the grace of God my parents made it safely into Texas. Others have not been as luck as they were. Many have lost their live crossing the "Rio Grande". A week later, they were in Orangeville, South Carolina picking an assorted of fruits and vegetables. They picked strawberries, watermelons, corn, green peppers, green beans, and tomatoes. Once the crop season began to die off, my parents packed the few used clothing they owned and decided to migrant to Homestead, Florida. They were able to rent a one bedroom house in Redland Labor Camp, a housing community for migrant/labor workers. It was tough for them to say the least, for the first six months. They only ate canned foods that wouldn't spoil because they didn't own a refrigerator because they didn't have enough money to buy one. The house did not come with air conditioner; they had to sleep with the windows open to make the house a little bit cooler. But that wouldn't help much; the temperatures would reach up to 90° degrees. The heat in the house was so unbearable that we ran the risk of someone coming into the house with our window open for ventilation. It is unimaginable to say the least but, I lived there the first nine years of my life.

Thankfully, my parents don't have to migrate in search of agriculture work because the plant nurseries are not seasonal in Florida, for the most part, is constant. When the crop dies off, my parents relocate to another field that is thriving from its harvest. However, my parents do still have to work under excruciating high temperatures, heavy rain, and the exposure to all kinds of life threatening pesticides. Working under these conditions I can see that they are beginning to affect my parent's physical appearance and health. I constantly rub aloe body lotion to cure my dad's skin that is throbbing and peeling from a bad sun burn. My mother suffers from a bladder and sleeping disorder, massive headaches on a daily basis due to the extreme heat exposure. Overtime, she has developed itchy sun spots on her face and arms that are a result from too much sun exposure. My parents also have spinal, eye and ear issues. These are the reasons why my parents don't allow my sisters and I to work in the fields anymore. They don't want to see us suffering the way they are.

The typical work day begins at 5:00 a.m. every morning. Everyone is out of the house by 6:30 a.m. My mom drops me off at my bus stop and my sister's at school. While my dad car pools with five other people. My mom's job begins at 8:00 a.m. She only gets two breaks per day, the first at 10:30 am and the last one at 2:30pm, which last only 30 minutes. Since she's been working in the fields for so long she has accustomed her bladder to hold her urine until her break time. The supervisors don't allow people going to the bathrooms any other time because they feel it slows down the production line. This rule also discourages workers to drink less water in order not to have to need to use the bathroom, which increases the chance of someone having a heat stroke. But no one complains, because everyone needs their jobs.

My motivation to do well in school is my parents. No matter how tired I may be, or how hard my school work is, I cannot begin to compare it to my parents work. The dedication and sacrifices my parents have done and still do for me will never be forgotten. It's heart breaking for me to see my parents come home in pain and exhausted from work. My goal in life is to free my parents from this type of hard life. Don't get me wrong, working in the fields is an honest day of work, but there's no room for advancement. It's a dead end routine. However, I want to be the reason why my parent's daily struggles come to an end. I plan to be the first in my family to graduate from high school and attend college to further my education. I am working hard to get accepted into the University of Central Florida. Frankly, I'm still undecided on my major. Nevertheless, I do know that I want to dedicate my life in assisting others whether it's education, medicine, or physical assistance. Through volunteering, I've learned that I absolutely enjoy helping others. Unfortunately, due to my parent's financial and social circumstances, my sister's and I don't vacation like other families. That is why when an opportunity comes along my way and it has to do with travel or to learn, I take it. I want to expand my horizons because I know there is more out there than just Homestead, Florida.

I am willing to make a lot of sacrifices in order to reach my goal in life. My parent's hope for a better future is what keeps me motivated and striving to be the very best and I have no intentions in disappointing them.