

**Rain, Dirt, and Sky**  
**By Laura Manna**

I feel blessed that I am able to recall many events in my life when I was 4 years old as if they were long distant, vivid dreams. My parents saw the opportunity to achieve the American Dream by giving me and my sister a better future when they were offered employment in a small farm town called Aguila, working in the fields where housing was provided. Some of my best memories are from my early childhood. I remember when we lived in Mexico, left on a long drive into the United States, and arrived at our new house in a small farming town in Arizona.

Before we moved to the United States, we lived in a small coral-colored duplex with brown trim in Mexico in the busy city of Mexicali, Baja California. The houses and stores were made of brick, and even without close observation, you could see cosmetic cracks along the sides of the some of the buildings because of the frequency of earthquakes in the area. The earthquakes never scared me because I never noticed them. I was lucky enough to live where the roads were paved, and we had a rectangular concrete patch in front of the house, the size of a large rug, that was covered in dirt. Every time my mother would sweep it clean, it was like having a new surface to play on. When our grandparents would watch us, my grandfather would let my sister and me go to the store on the corner and buy baby food (Banana flavor was our favorite snack.), and on a rainy day we would play outside and collect the metallic smelling rain in the baby food jars to “save it” from being absorbed into the ground.

One day, we packed only our clothing and bedding and said goodbye to our home, our neighbors, and our relatives. My parents were nervous and excited about this new journey we were about to embark on, and their enthusiasm rubbed off on me and my older sister who was 6 at the time. We traveled to the United States. We drove past the cities, then far beyond into a desert where the sun was bright, and the wind had shaped the sand dunes to look like the surface of a freshly opened tub of butter. After driving past the sand dunes, we continued down a long and lonely stretch of road for what seemed like days to me (even though it was only minutes) because I kept taking naps in the blankets my mom had laid out in the back of our brown van.

At that time, the dusty Highway 60 was bustling with traffic, and seeing semi-trucks was all too common. There were no windows in the back, and I would remove my seat belt, stand next to my parents, and observe the trucks and moving landscapes out of the van's large front window. I remember there was a section of road where there were many hills and dips in the road. It was like driving on a small roller coaster. At first, it was fun, but every time we went down another hill, I could feel the gravitational force weighing down my stomach and causing some uneasiness. When I grew tired of staring out the window, I would go back to sleep.

Eventually, we drove past different types of desert scenery with occasional mountains that were close or so distant that you would begin to wonder how far from civilization you were. When the mountains began to get closer, there was a unique mountain that was shaped like an eagle's head, and the space under its head formed a small eye in the mountain. That mountain, called Eagle Eye Peak, was part of the Harquahala mountain range. This range, along with the Harcuvar Mountains, formed a valley that was surrounded by creosote bushes and farming land, and in it was nestled the small town of Aguila.

We drove off the highway onto a dirt path lined with tall eucalyptus trees that took us to a community comprised of white cabin housing for the farm workers where my parents had just received employment. These homes were completely surrounded by fields. The landscape was beautiful to me. The earth of the farm fields was a rich brown with vibrant green lines composed of crops that seemed to touch the horizon, and on the horizon lay the dark blue mountains that contrasted against the light blue sky during daylight.

I fell in love with the place, and it felt like home because the smell of dirt reminded me of my mom's sweeping of the concrete ground outside our old home. I was happy to be at our new home which was bigger than the duplex we had lived in. At nighttime, I was amazed by the vastness of space and how the stars were so bright in the dark. It was majestic. When I missed my grandparents, the smell of the rain would remind me of them. To this day, the smell of dirt reminds me of my old home in Mexico, the rain reminds me of my grandparents, and long trips remind me of the first time I ever saw the vastness of the desert night sky. Even though moving from Mexico to the United States was a big change for us, my memories are the comfort that allows me to carry home wherever I go.