

Alma

*Borders and social conventions can make love challenging. But Mario persisted, disregarding the efforts of Alma's family to keep the couple apart. He followed her from Mexico to South Carolina to Florida, insisting that they be together. Alma and Mario have been married for more than twenty years: "I remember that I bought a dress at Wal-Mart, a white dress, and then we went to eat tacos to celebrate. I was so nervous that I put sugar in my tacos instead of salt." Alma, from Guerrero, Mexico, was thirty-seven at the time of this interview.*

A: Well, it's a very nice love story. I arrived here around August and we did not lose contact. He continued communicating. He continued to communicate through letters, he called me at my aunt's house, and in December he came here. He moved here to South Carolina. I remember that he was in Texas, and I remember we went to, a friend I met, a cousin, and I, went to pick him up at the airport and bring him home. I remember the funniest thing was that I felt embarrassed talking to my aunt and uncle about him, right? My uncle said, "Well, there's the room for Mario and Alma to stay." There was no communication, he thought that he was coming to stay with me to sleep together, I do not know, and we were just friends (laughs).

ML: Of course.

A: And my uncle said, "There's a room," and he and I did not respond, and my aunt said, "No, no, no, he's not going to stay here." I said "No," and with all this confusion, it was very embarrassing.

Well, they let him have the room for one night, but then he looked elsewhere for a place to sleep and he went to live precisely at Solomon Pineda's camp because the workers could stay there. He went to live there because there wasn't much communication with other Hispanics here, so you didn't know any better.

A: He went to live there, and well, I stayed here, and that's how we started to date. That was December, January and it stayed that way through June.

ML: Was he going to live in Solomon's camp and start working in the fields too?

A: Yes and I worked there too, but my aunt, who had never had daughters, was very worried about him being my boyfriend because, well we bring our cultures, our customs here and she was very concerned I could get pregnant. That was the biggest concern. My aunt's biggest preoccupation and of course, she protected me and she also scolded me; she pulled me by my hair one day to take me inside the house because I was in the front yard talking with him.

I started liking him more particularly because he was very independent. He said to me, "I'm going to teach you to drive," and, "You have to go to English classes," it was, for him, the most important thing for me to do. I did not want to go to English classes, but he said, "You should be

in school." I was sixteen years old then. "You should be in school." "No." I was seventeen in October. "You have to be in school."

And I was like, "What, how, where, here?" I know nothing of the United States, I have no car, that is, nothing, nothing. That peaked my attention because where I come from, there is the macho man and the woman who is there only to get married and raise children, but he did not feel that way. While we were dating he started teaching me how to drive, so, that was a good excuse to go out, right? So that's that, and he took me to the English classes, I remember.

Yes, he took me there; it was only an hour and only once a week, Thursday, I think. It was difficult, I understood nothing other than the word "Yes" and "No"; I did not understand anything, but there he was, my husband, cheering for me.

Then my aunt got a little annoyed because I was walking with him one day, the day she pulled my hair, and she did it because she saw me kissing him. For her, that was a big thing. So, the next day my aunt made the decision that we were going to Florida without telling Mario; we were going to Florida and, "Why?" "Because you have a boyfriend I do not know and you could get pregnant here, so I'm going to leave you with your mom. I don't want you to have a boyfriend." So I am going to Florida without telling him and I never gave him my other address, so we lost communication. I was crying and everything, but I had to go because I was seventeen, a minor.

When I arrived there we did not communicate with each other; there were no cell phones then. Thursday and Friday went on and on, and on Saturday my cousin went to the store—my cousin who lived there with me, two cousins that he knew and my sisters, who he did not know. They went to the gas station and at the gas station they found Mario, my husband, and they said, "What are you doing here? What are you doing here?" Well, he was happy because he knew, seeing them . . . and that's the thing again, I believe in God. And I thought, wow, Florida is so big, how would he know where I was and where that gas station was? Where he had to stop and find me? He was coming from South Carolina and he hadn't even started to look for us, that is, he was just about to start looking for me.

So he came here and when he arrived, in his car, I remember I was in the kitchen and my mom said, "No," my aunt said, "No, no, no". And they began scolding me, saying that I was very young, that I was not old enough to have a boyfriend, and that I needed to help my mother because she still owed money to the coyote and I never help her enough, that is I just helped her a little and I had to finish helping my mom, first.

So I was not allowed to marry or have a boyfriend. He heard this and he asked me to go out for at least fifteen minutes just to talk, that his interest was to say goodbye, because he could not be playing like that; he wanted a good relationship, not a sneaky one, and my mom had already said that she would not let me have a boyfriend.

I asked my mom to let me go out to talk with him. When I got out he said, "Look, I followed you from Texas to South Carolina, and now I'm coming from South Carolina here," he said, "And I'm sorry for putting you in this situation, but you have to come with me because I'm not going to tolerate sneaking around or seeing your parents angry. I already did that with your aunt, so no, I'm a free spirited person and I do not like that." And of course, I'm a person who is very dependent on my family, totally different from him, so I thought, this does not work well, that is, it will not work.

Then when Mario got here he said, "Either you come with me or I go, but it ends here. More than anything, I came to talk to you." Then I said, "Well, I'll marry you," and he responded, "But I do not want to get married, I've never wanted to marry young,"

"No, neither do I," I explained, "but this is what my grandparents have put into my mind, my family: when you leave the house, you have to leave as a married person, white gown and all, if not, you do not leave, Ok? I mean, I cannot leave the house like this, I have to get married in white."

"Yes, but I do not want to get married." "Then no." So he had to give in to get married, and I had to, too. We decided it in fifteen minutes. A marriage decided in fifteen minutes.

He told me, that was a Saturday, he told me that on Sunday he would come back to talk to my mom about what we had decided. I got in to the house and my mom was happy that he already left, and I said, "No Mom, he wants to talk with you tomorrow." When she talked with him, my mom said there was nothing she could do to change it, and the last thing to do was sign. Because I was seventeen, she had to sign.

And yes, we got married. It was Sunday when he spoke to my mom, on Monday we asked for a marriage license, and on Tuesday we got married. I remember that I bought a dress at Wal-Mart, a white dress, and then we went to eat tacos to celebrate. I was so nervous that I put sugar in my tacos instead of salt.

Alma, Interview by Marina López, March 23, 2016