

Iris

*Iris was born on Chiapas, Mexico. She walked for more than ten hours across the border near Nogales, Arizona, after which she was crowded into a pickup truck with seven other passengers. Details of that uncomfortable drive are seared in her memory. "And at that moment I got the courage and I said, 'No, no, no, stop or I will get up and it does not matter if they see us. Stop because the man is suffocating.'" Iris was forty-four years old at the time of this interview.*

ML: And when you all got up, how long did you walk?

I: Ten hours exactly, non-stop.

ML: Ten hours and how far did you get?

I: To Nogales, Arizona, I think it is.

ML: And then, after that?

I: After that, someone picked us up at dawn; we were under a bridge. Somebody came for us at dawn, he got us in a car, and let me tell you how difficult and terrible it was . . . a subhuman situation. But I think we were in heaven if you compare us to others. I have always said, "No, I'm in heaven."

But look, it was a white, double cab truck. I'll never forget: two girls climbed in the back of the truck and they were covered with a sheet and in the middle cabin behind, there was a gentleman, a girl on top of him, me, and another person.

ML: Lying on top of each other?

I: Yes, lying down, well imagine this is the cabin, I think this space is wider. The man was lying on the floor, the girl on top of him, then my friend lying down, then me, and on top of me was another person. No, that is not true, it was the boy, my friend, and me on the top and then bent-over was another person. We were four people in that half-cockpit and then the chauffeur and his assistant joined, and back then we were one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, yes, there were eight of us.

ML: For how long, Iris?

I: About half an hour. I remember that at some point the boy said, "Friend, please, I beg you, I cannot hold up, I'm suffocating." Imagine carrying the weight; my friend was big. I was not so big. I was slim, but anyway, that was uncomfortable and nearby, bent-over, was another person. "Friend, I beg you, stop, I cannot hold up anymore, I'm suffocating." The driver looked, and he

was shouting at us. He insulted us. He said bad words, told us to shut up, that we were not on a tour. They were aggressive.

But as I have told you, I have been a very rebellious woman and this is something that has never left me; I am always standing up for what is right. And at that moment I got the courage and I said, "No, no, no, stop or I will get up and it does not matter if they see us. Stop because the man is suffocating." "No, you bend down," he said, but I told him, "Stop or we all stand up and that will be worse." Then he decided, "Okay, I'll stop and see how you can get more comfortable."

Look, we got out quickly, took in some air, and that poor man got out and started vomiting from the suffocation that he was experiencing. Again we got into the car, but now I was seated in the middle of the driver and his assistant. I fixed my hair and put on some make up. How, you might ask, "How did she put on make up?" or "Where did she get makeup?"

Did you know that I came in pursuit of dreams and I came with a full suitcase and a backpack? And I treated them like treasures. The gentleman who had vomited noticed that I was already very tired from walking and carrying my load so he said, "Hey, can I help you?" "Yes, of course," and later there came a time when we were both so tired that he said to me, "Hey, what are you bringing in here? It weighs so much. Why didn't you leave it?" "No, no, no, I brought something extremely important that I cannot leave behind," I replied. And then the gentleman concluded that it was medicine, right?

"Okay." and here he was helping me and then another one was helping me, but I never let go of the backpack. When we got to Arizona, one of them told me, "Well, I think I deserve to at least know what you are bringing with so much love that you didn't want to get rid of it." And I said, "No, it's something very important." "At least tell me because I helped you so much," he said. "No, because if I tell you, you're going to get angry." He replied, "No, I swear I'm not angry."

And then they all started, "Yes, do tell us. Show us." So I said, "Ok, but you understand, it is part of me." I brought out my creams, my makeup, my perfumes, my brand perfumes and my brand creams, and I kept on looking at them. They said to me, "No, I will hang you. And this is why she wanted us to spend so much hardship in the desert?"

I said to him, "This is my treasure, to me this is very valuable. I'm going to arrive in a country that I do not know, without work, and I don't know when I'm going to buy more cream." Everyone was staring with a blank face, "No, it can not be possible, I wasted all that time!"

"Lady, here they sell this wherever you want," he said, "Yes, you go to any department store, any mall." That man had already become established. "And you will find them, and you can find these easily." "No sir, I did not bring any money with me, and before I can finally find new cream, I will have already wrinkled." The joke is that I'll never let go of my creams.

ML: So you had to sit in the front and to put makeup on.

I: Yes, then the boy told me "Fix your hair." "Yes, take it easy" I took out my case and he said, "You look like you're going to a dance." I got ready and everything, but it was a good thing that they could not see me from my waist down because I was dressed in pants and tennis shoes, right?

And having transformed myself, we had to pass through a stop, but nothing happened; they did not notice anything because I believe that they thought that it was my husband and I in the car. I was wearing sunglasses and everything, because I even brought sunglasses. And I tell you, thank God we had a safe trip. We got to Arizona and everything, but it was something so funny that I had decided to carry all my beauty supplies.

Iris, Interview by Marina López, March 17, 2016