

Margarita

*Margarita from Veracruz, Mexico, recalls a harrowing walk across the desert, during which she was separated from her mother. She was just eleven years old. "They were lost in the middle of the desert and I was left alone with all the men. The guys, the men; I was left alone with all of them and I remember that the guy told me, the guide who helped us cross over, he told me that they were making fun of the fact that my mother and sisters were lost." Margarita was nineteen years old at the time of this interview.*

ML: How did you all cross over?

M: We crossed over through the desert.

ML: Did somebody help you cross over?

M: Yes, somebody helped us to cross over. We were a total of fifteen people. My mother, my sisters, and I were the only women in the group.

ML: How was the trip?

M: We walked for a day and a half and I remember that my mother, my mother's boyfriend Omar, and my two sisters were all lost. They were lost in the middle of the desert and I was left alone with all the men. The guys, the men; I was left alone with all of them and I remember that the guy told me, the guide who helped us cross over, he told me that they were making fun of the fact that my mother and sisters were lost.

ML: Your mother and sisters were lost, you were left alone with those people and they were making fun of you?

M: Not mocking in a bad sense. It was like—

ML: What a scare, Magui.

M: He did not seem like a bad person. He was not a bad person. Shortly after he went to look for them, they laughed again. You could hear my mother shouting "Magui, Magui, Magui," and so then the other one went looking for them. I do not know how to say it, it was not a bad mockery, but it was a mockery. It was not the type of situation in which you mock somebody for being lost. (sobbing)

ML: Do you have any idea of where you arrived, Magui?

M: I remember that we got there at noon of the second day that we were walking. We arrived at what looked like a small Indian city. I think that is how they say it here in the U.S. By that point we had already crossed over and I remember that a man gave us macaroni and cheese for lunch and it was the first time in my life that I had tried that food. After that my mother told us, my sisters and I, that we were going to travel in a car to some lady's house, but they, my mom and all the other people that came with us, were going to stay one more night in the desert and cross the next day. They did not want us to stay in the desert because it was too cold at night. It is very cold at night in the desert.

Later, they took us in a car to some lady's house; she had a daughter and we stayed with her. We did not hear any news of my mom until three days later or something like that. The guide had not wanted to bring us back to our mother because while we were at the lady's house, he told me that when they were going to cross, everybody was robbed. The people that were helping them to cross over robbed them and then they took my mother, Omar and some other people. Some were able to run away and were not caught, but others were caught and they demanded money from them to let them go. It was not Immigration (ICE) who caught them, it was our own people, Hispanics, the people helping us to cross over. They were asking for more money in order to let them go instead of letting them cross over.

Once on this side they were caught. It is complicated to explain. Those who were able to cross over were sort of kidnaped by the people who initially helped them cross over. My mother and others were kidnapped, and asked for a ransom in order to let them go. My mother told me that she confronted her captor and said that she needed to go because she had three daughters that already crossed over, but they refused to let her go until she paid. They charged one thousand dollars for each daughter, and she was able to find the money and pay the guide. Then they gave us back to our mother.

Margarita, Interview by Marina López, June 8, 2012