

## Mi Patria

January 13, 2014 My name is Carmen Saldana, I am nineteen years old and come from Chiapas, Mexico. I am headed for America and as a going away present my father gifted me this diary. Before I begin my official entry, I'd like to take a step back and introduce how I got here.

Life in Chiapas is difficult. My family and I are impoverished. I lived in a small house on the northern outskirts of Chiapas with my mother, father, and two younger brothers. My father works in a nearby factory while my mother stays home to take care of me and my brothers. For most of my life I helped my mother at home with basic chores: washing, cooking and cleaning. I hated it. When I turned eighteen I decided I needed to work. My father was growing older and as he was our only source of income, if he were to perish, so would we. I set out on my employment journey by heading into the city, looking for a job. Unfortunately after months of searching I was unable to find a decent job. I became discouraged. It was not until I saw an advertisement for a job in the America that things began to look up. A resort in Arizona was looking for seasonal employees to work as maintenance staff and was offering temporary work visas to those interested. I brought the flyer home, as excited as a kid on Christmas Eve. Immediately my father said no, but after some time, he began to warm up to the idea and eventually allowed me to apply. I worked at a nearby field for the next few months, picking vegetables for atrocious wages. As bad as it was, it was worth it, for I was able to save up enough money to apply for my H-2B temporary work visa. The application process was lengthy. It required submitting personal documents, an interview, a background check, and proof of my family in Chiapas. Spring was quickly approaching and I needed confirmation to begin my travels to the States. I waited and waited and waited, and eventually, on the warmest day of winter, I received my confirmation documents and approval to work temporarily in America. It was the best day of my life.

March 25, 2015 Today is the big day, today I leave my home for America. Unfortunately, because of a lack of travel services in my area, I am forced to ride with a coyote, someone who illegally smuggles people over the border. I plan to separate myself from the caravan prior to crossing the border, because I am able to enter legally.

March 27, 2015 Dirt. When I look up, all I see is dirt. As the truck bumps along I wonder how much longer it will be until we arrive at the checkpoint. I am scared, scared of the future, but more broadly, scared of the unknown.

March 28, 2015 At last we have reached the final checkpoint, this is where I plan to embark on foot. The resort has arranged for my pickup once I am in America.

May 20, 2015 It is amazing here! Everything is so beautiful, the food is good, and the work fun. Some of the Americans on the maintenance staff complain about the work being difficult, which puzzles me. When I hear this, I have to bite my tongue, for I know they have never spent twelve hour workdays, bent over picking vegetables. If American's find this job laborious, work must come easy in the U.S.

July 11, 2015 While I am really enjoying it here, I also miss my family. One of my coworkers helps me wire money to them back home. It is not much but I know it helps. I

am beginning to fall in love with America. The way the sun peeks over the hills in the early morning, the lack of boundaries on what I'm allowed to wear or say, and the way people act towards me, respectful. While some do give me funny, almost demeaning looks, the majority are kind to me. What makes this experience even better is this attractive young man, who heads the lifeguards, that I have spoken with a couple times and hope to see more.

September 1, 2015 Officially the second best day of my life! The head of lifeguards, Joseph, has asked me on a date. America keeps getting better and better, furthermore as a result of understaffing, my H-2B visa has been extended. They asked if I'd like to stay and I obviously said yes.

September 30, 2015 Today I had a horrible encounter. While pushing my cart through the hall, I accidentally bumped a woman carrying coffee, causing her to spill some of it. This infuriated the woman, resulting in her calling me a "stupid immigrant" and said I should "go back to where I belong". I wanted to cry. I miss my family.

December 2, 2016 It has been awhile since I've written in here. My life has been changing drastically, faster than I could ever imagine. Regarding my job, I received a promotion, meaning I am able to send more money home to my family (who are doing well). But most importantly, I am going to become a U.S. citizen. Joseph proposed to me, which means I am able to apply for citizenship. The process is lengthy, but we have already finished most of the paperwork and have begun interviews. Every day I continue to grow and become more accustomed to western culture. America has given me a new life, a better life. One where I do not have to worry about being killed in the streets, or running out of food. As I look around me, I see people from all backgrounds, African, Hispanic, Asian, and through these observations, I've come to realize that America truly is an ethnic melting pot, filled with different perspectives and experiences. America truly is my home.