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Huetamo, Michoacan

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ERIBERTHA GOMEZ, HUETAMO, MICHOACAN

For several years many immigrants from all over the world come to the United States in search of a better life and opportunities. Many have to leave all of their belongings and family behind in order to arrive to a new country where the culture and language might be completely different. The journey to the United States is not always easy; some have to risk their lives in order to achieve the American dream without even thinking about it twice. Marcelo Gomez, my father, was one of many immigrants who crossed the border between Mexico and the United States. His story of wanting to accomplish a better future not only for him, but his family is what inspired me to choose him for my oral history project. Not only that, but also because I see him as a great role model for me and as someone who I admire and love. He has taught me many lessons that without him, I wouldn't be the person I am now.

My father, Marcelo Gomez, was born in Huetamo, Michoacan in Mexico. He lived in a small pueblo where only a few houses were close by and he was one of the youngest boys in his family. Since they were not really economically fit my father and his brothers and sisters did not have an opportunity to education. Instead, they had to go to work to keep the family well fed and sustained. My father grew up having to see his mother suffer from blindness, which hurt him because his own mother could not recognize him. At the age of 9, his mother passed away right after she gave birth to his younger sister and all 10 children were left alone with their father. As they grew up little by little they all left to the United States until he was the only one left back in Mexico with his father. At the age of 17, he decided to let his father know that it was time for him to cross to "El Norte" too so he could start a better life. He was aware that crossing to the other side, illegally, would be dangerous and that many lost their lives trying to

accomplish this. He decided he would cross through “el cerro,” which was about five hours walking nonstop. Having to cross this cerro is not just physically hard, but mentally too. The scene of dead bodies and skeletons in the hills and rivers is traumatizing. Having to hear people plead for help or stop because they just could not walk anymore breaks his heart, but he also knew he could not stop. At last, he was able to get to the United States safely, where he met up with his brothers in California and his new life was about to start.

Whoever said the United States was perfectly beautiful had perfectly lied. Having to start a life with a different language, culture, and far from those you love was harder than he thought. Fortunately, he found a job pretty quickly and soon was able to live with my mother in their own house, where they started a family. He then heard from my mother’s family in Chicago that the economy was not so bad, and that they should move over there. My dad took my mom and me with him to Chicago and since then his life is settled here. He found a job right away in a plastic company, in which he still works till this day. He started from living with family members, to an apartment, and finally to buying his own house. Getting this far was and still is not easy. The fact that he is undocumented does not allow him to get a better job and he has to work hard every day in order to support us. There is not a day he doesn’t think about the family he left behind, but he doesn’t plan on going back to Mexico if he cannot come back legally. In a way he doesn’t find a point in doing so, since both of his parents have passed away and he says he wants us, his children, to just have a better life than he ever could have. He took the risk of crossing the border to have a family here who could grow up to have opportunities and be successful. Of course, he says in the end it is up to us what we decide to do with our lives, but I

personally try my best because I know it is a privilege to have an education and to live here in the United States.

Being able to interview my father for this oral history project has helped me understand my dad in a better way and open my eyes to see how lucky I am to be living here. I got to know his childhood life in better detail and to even learn more from where I came from. Other than just knowing about him and my culture I gained a sort of perspective on immigrants overall. I realize that coming to the United States is not always something happy and perfect, like what is portrayed in the media, but something real with difficulties, pains, and struggles. People from all over the world decide to come here, not for vacations like some can afford, but rather for a better life and to accomplish the American dream. My father living here undocumented and having to go through a lot has inspired me to become the best I can be and try hard to appreciate him for risking his life to make his families the best. One day I hope I can give back to him by helping him become a citizen and allowing him to go back to his homeland where he grew up. I am grateful for this experience and hope that others get it too, so they can learn the beauty of having a different culture and become open-minded about different people located in the United States.