

There's something missing in these pages and I know it's you.
I'm still trying to keep that promise
but you're always there
behind the silence
the tears
faces turning away

You show up in the most unusual places
the tips of my fingers
the palms of my hands
invading my self esteem

by Leonarda Carranza

One thing that we all agree on, is that it was dark when we left El Salvador. Some think it was night, evening, or just before day break. But all those that have a memory of that day in May remember that it was dark.

It was dark...

There were lots of people on the bus and I was puking and puking. The bus was cramped, my legs hurt. I couldn't find a comfortable position. Sitting on my granny's lap, I kept shifting. My stomach hurt. When the vomiting would stop my legs and head would take turns throbbing. I wanted to go home. I was tired of sitting, tired of puking. People kept passing used plastic bags to my mother hoping she could contain the vomit and maybe even its smell.

But it doesn't work that way. Even once the bag has been tossed out the window, the smell keeps creeping back in through the cracks.

My mom was annoyed.

When the vendors walked down the aisles selling pops and food my granny, Nuona, bought me a coke. I liked the bubbles and the way they clung to my throat and made my nose sting. Memo, my little brother, was sitting close by on my mom's lap; he wanted the bubbles to. That's when he started fake puking. He forced the sound, and stuck out his tongue so far that he actually puked. Except there was no used bag ready for his milky vomit and it spread over us. There's nothing worse than milk puke. I felt crowded by the people and the smell of dried puke. My clothes felt sticky.

Before we left I remember my mom dressing me while I was still in bed. I wanted desperately for her to leave me be and let me sleep. I tried fighting her as much as I could, but before I was even fully awake I was dressed and my body was being pulled and

pushed off my bed. She then led me to the bathroom and washed my face. The sharp cold water forced my eyes to open but not for long. She told me to brush my teeth. I could hardly see where I was going. It was dark outside and inside. No lights were on. When I finished pretending to brush, I walked back into my room determined to get back in bed. But she pushed me back into the hallway towards the living room. I remember how she turned towards me, her face serious, and sent me to say "Adios" to my father.

There was something very permanent and sad about using that word. I thought about it then but when I walked into the room and saw my father sitting in the dark, I forgot all about the finality of the "Adios". I was drawn to his face, and the lost look in his eyes. He was smoking, inhaling and exhaling, so calculated, there was a soft rhythm to his action. I liked the way the smoke filled the room, and clouded around his face, his gaze off somewhere far away from here. Far away from me.

It was only until I shuffled my body in front of him that he realized I was there, then he rose from the chair abruptly, cigarette still in hand, and wrapped his arms around me giving me the most unusual hug. It was warm and sad. I wanted to stay there and hold onto him. But just as fast as I had felt his embrace he let go of me and gently pushed my body aside.

It was only then that I realized that we were all out of bed. Eli was there, scratching her head, her eyes still shut and so was Quique and Memo, all waiting in line to say goodbye to our father. Where are we going Papi? But he didn't answer. No one answered.

When we left I was about five, Quique was seven, Eli was eight; and Memo was two-years-old. I don't think we had ever been on a bus before. My granny Nuona she was 57 and my mom, she was only 29.