

SANTUARIO|SANCTUARY

Teresa Veramendi

Norma Elia Cantú Award in Creative Writing

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Names have been changed to keep interviewees anonymous. Some characters are combinations of material from multiple interviews. Characters are listed in order of appearance.

SISTER PAZ – Nun and Mexican immigrant, serving undocumented population in Southern Texas

ALEJANDRA – thirteen-year-old Guatemalan girl, immigrant to U.S.

AHUEHUETE – 900-year-old indigenous Montezuma Cypress near border outside Mission, Texas

ROSA – El Salvadorian woman in her sixties, on Board of Directors of Chicago non-profit serving immigrants and refugees

CASSANDRA – interviewer, First generation Mexican/Cuban/Chilean/Basque, U.S. citizen

BUTTERFLY – migrant monarch butterfly

DAVÍD CRUZ – Veteran working for Border Patrol in San Diego, Mexican immigrant to U.S.

CLARA – Retired former Border Patrol & ICE Communications Officer, Cuban immigrant to U.S.

ALICIA – First generation Mexican woman, volunteer at Proyecto Desarrollo Humano in Texas

ELENA – Director of National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas

JUANA – Widow of Border Patrol Officer in San Diego, California, immigrant to U.S.

BETH – Resigned ICE Officer

MARK – Representative of the Unified Deported Veterans living in his birthplace, Tijuana, Mexico after being deported

ANA MARÍA – pregnant mother of a six-year-old, El Salvadoran immigrant in McAllen, Texas

DANIEL – immigration attorney in Miami, Florida, immigrant to U.S.

SUSIE – woman in her early thirties, Mexican-born, DACA recipient, member of Otros Dreams en Acción in Mexico City

MIGUEL – teenage guide in Santuario Sierra Chincua in Michoacán, Mexico

LORENZO – thirty-one-year-old Guatemalan father, immigrant to U.S., in McAllen, Texas

HIJO – LORENZO's thirteen-year-old son, in Mission, Texas

PATRICIA – Mexican mother of four, in Santuario El Rosario, Michoacán, Mexico

CARLOS – Mexican immigrant in his thirties, in Colorado

VERONICA – Mother, married to Mexican immigrant, in San Diego, California

SENATOR – White, middle-aged, Democrat in the U.S. Senate

BORDER PATROL OFFICER/POLICÍA FEDERAL DE MÉXICO

NIÑO

ABUELA

IMMIGRANT

HUSBAND

Scene 1 – Ahuehuate's Song

An older nun, SISTER PAZ, lights a candle on a shrine upstage, and kneels to pray.

Spotlight on twelve-year-old ALEJANDRA in an orange detention

uniform, laying in fetal position centerstage, facing away from the audience.

ALEJANDRA has a mylar blanket over her. Long silence. Trumpet plays a

slow melody as a single BUTTERFLY floats by the edge of the circle of light.

Lights down.

Transition. Lights up on a large, 900-year-old Montezuma cypress, *AHUEHUETE*, just past the US border fence in Texas. BUTTERFLY lands on *AHUEHUETE*'s roots.

AHUEHUETE

(chanting slow and deep)

Te siento, mi joven...

Yo siento todo... Siento el río meciendo mi crisálida...

Siento mi fuente fuertemente... Siento mi fuente viajando y dejándome...

Siento mi supervivencia... Siento la gente...

(chanting faster)

Corren, corren, se esconden.

Corren, corren, se esconden.

Corren, corren, se esconden.

Comen, besan, y gritan.

Maten, mueren, y gritan.

Corren, corren, se esconden.

Mienten, lloran, destruyen.

Cortan, sacan, y juegan.

Corren, corren, se esconden.

¡Pesadilla! Los cazan.

¡Pesadilla! Los cazan.

¡Pesadilla! Los cazan.

BUTTERFLY flies away.

AHUEHUETE

(more slowly)

El agua da luz, y la quita.

Yo suspiro, suspiro.

Me quedo, me quedo y me quedo...

Lights down.

ROSA enters wearing a headlamp. She struggles to swim across the Rio Grande; the river pulls her down.

ROSA

El río me estaba llevando; me estaban llevando y salieron detrás de mí...

(chokes on water)

Me tomaron la mano, porque ¡me estaba ahogando! Yo no podía...
porque el río iba creciendo y no había nadie que te quería cruzar-

ROSA's headlamp goes out.

SCENE 2 – San Diego Sector & Caminen por la Noche

A border patrol officer, DAVÍD CRUZ, walks onto the stage, giving CASSANDRA a tour of the border.

DAVÍD

We are in the San Diego sector. We are going with Border Patrol. There are twenty sectors in the whole United States. The San Diego sector is the second smallest one.

DAVÍD freezes. CASSANDRA turns towards audience, framing herself.

CASSANDRA

(to audience)

My name is Cassandra. I am first generation Cuban, Mexican, Chilean, and Basque. I am four people combined, living in between the worlds, in between the borders of lines of: spirit/earth, Spanish/English, love/fear, collectivism/individualism, rolling my R's/tongue twisters, in between the borders of traditions and change. I dance between the borders and lines of my being. Porque nadie sabe lo que uno pasa cuando se crece entre dos culturas, entre dos tradiciones. ¿A quién escuchar? ¿A quién seguir? Nací bailando en las fronteras, entre las líneas de mi propio ser. Sueño en Ingles, y siento en español. No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá. I am the interviewer, and Agent Cruz is giving me a tour of the border wall.

DAVÍD

We have eight different stations here in San Diego. Six are responsible for patrolling the border, two are crossing stations. The wall goes down for about sixty miles along Mexico.

Whatever you can think of, people have tried. One of the biggest problems we have in this area is tunnels. Here, this is called Otay Mesa which means, mesa is like a table, a plateau, in Spanish. The soil composition in this area is unique. It almost provides the perfect condition for tunneling.

The longest tunnel that we found here was about 900 yards. In yards, it went about seven down. And you can see we have a lot of um, commercial areas on this side. In Mexico, it's the same thing. So they have the soil, that's perfect, they have warehouses where they can easily disguise. So it's hard, it's difficult for us. We do have a tunnel outreach team, I'm part of it.

People come, over the fence, they can run.

So that's the other thing that we have. We have the maritime...

DAVÍD's radio blares: "See you down there, Omaha." DAVÍD exits.

ROSA enters with chairs; CASSANDRA sits with her.

ROSA

Es difícil abrir...

CASSANDRA

(softly)

El trauma.

ROSA sits. Long silence.

CASSANDRA

(to audience)

This is Rosa, from El Salvador. She is on Centro Romero's Board of Directors. Centro Romero is an established community-based organization serving the refugee and immigrant population in Chicago.

ROSA

...y eso que sucedió hace treinta y tantos años. Todavía recuerdo cuando salíamos corriendo en la oscuridad, porque no hay luz, no, right? Venía con una niña de cuatro años que es mi sobrinita, sin comer, entonces todavía me acuerdo que andábamos buscando a ver si podíamos comer maíz. Entonces, no es como se pinta, no es como es lo que la gente dice.

Entonces, no solamente dejaba mis hermanos en El Salvador, que eran menores, porque yo soy la mayor de seis, no solamente el dolor de dejarlos a todos, sino dejar todo lo que era mío, todo lo que yo sentía que es mi casa. ¡Luego cruce el río y casi me ahogo!

ROSA and CASSANDRA laugh together. Lights fade.

ROSA walks slowly in the dark with her headlamp on.

ROSA

Para pasar de un pueblo a otro pueblo en México, tuvimos que salir de medianoche, huyendo, en la oscuridad, la niña y traíamos aquí no más que una mochila, es todo lo que traíamos, una mochila. En la mochila lo único que teníamos era... este... una toalla y cositas, pero nada de valor, nada de valor. Traíamos los pasaportes falsos, porque es la única manera que puedes cruzar.

ROSA turns off headlamp. POLICÍA FEDERAL DE MEXICO shines a light on her face.

ROSA

Nos preguntó quién era la niña, la niña le habíamos dicho que dijera que yo era su mamá porque si no me la podían robar. Venía con el miedo que nos robaran a la niña. Y nosotros sin papeles, y la niña sin papeles sin tener un nombre, nombre salvadoreño, porque venía con pasaporte falso. Si alguien se la roba, en El Salvador no hay manera de que la pudiéramos recuperar porque los papeles que tiene no son de ella ni yo tampoco.

POLICÍA FEDERAL DE MEXICO drops papers to the ground, one by one.

ROSA

Por eso muchos cadáveres no se encuentran, o los encuentran y no saben quién es, ¿por qué? Porque traen papeles de otras personas. Ese temor de saber que, en cualquier momento te van a agarrar, en cualquier momento alguien te va a denunciar. Por eso los emigrantes generalmente caminan en la noche, en la noche, no ser visto.

Lights fade.

SCENE 3 – Restricted Flights

CASSANDRA

I went to McAllen, Texas to see the Humanitarian Crisis Center and the
National Butterfly Center.

I went to Michoacán, México to see the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuaries in El
Rosario and Sierra Chincua.

I went to San Diego, California to see the border wall and Friendship Park.

CASSANDRA lights a candle at the shrine.

CASSANDRA

Les pido de los Ancestros—escúchenos.

Queremos abrir un santuario donde podemos cantar las historias. We want
to embrace the wounds so they can be heard. Guide us towards what is real.
Help us understand who we are. Darnos agua cuando sufrimos la sed spiritual.

En nombre del espíritu santo. Amen.

Light shifts. A border dance begins with most of the ensemble crossing the stage back and forth in separate alleys. Their faces and bodies show fear, hope, and every emotion in between. Two people cross the alleys at will and stop the runners' movements: DAVÍD and CASSANDRA. DAVÍD stares them down until he decides to allow them to pass. CASSANDRA holds a recording device, following individuals, facing them, absorbing their presence, stopping them from passing, until she moves on. Eventually BUTTERFLY enters, dancing across the entire space freely. All freeze to watch BUTTERFLY until she exits.

Lights down.

SCENE 4 – The Border is a Game

Lights up. Children play jump rope. When a child trips, they return to the end of the line. When a child wins, they celebrate, cross the stage immediately, run all the way around the stage and return back to the end of the line. Game continues muted as CLARA walks onstage.

CLARA

We've deported people, at like Border Patrol, or ICE deported somebody back to Mexico and they'd be back. A week later to get arrested again. Here. Again. Because they use the border, it's like nothing to them. It's a game, it's a joke. The border is a joke and a game for some of these people, they think it's just their right to cross it any time they feel like it.

SCENE 5 – San Diego Surfing and Gliding

DAVÍD strides on stage, continuing the tour with CASSANDRA.

DAVÍD

We are very close to the ocean, so we have the maritime.

So, people use a type of surfboard.

Since 2010, they started going just to San Diego. The farthest we ever found, was Half Moon Bay, in San Francisco. So, they go up 6,000 miles into the ocean, which is international waters, they went North. (*looks into sky*) Look at that, the gliders? You know one of those gliders? They have them with an engine on it, and they just go up and north.

CASSANDRA

(*laughs*)

People, glide? Into the country?

DAVÍD

They usually make them not for people. What they do they use them for... drugs. Usually marijuana. Because hard drugs, what they do is come in, find a GPS point of place and drop it, and someone comes from the north side to pick it up. Our policy does not let us shoot at anything in the sky, even a drone, we can't shoot.

What we do is watch it. Report it. Life is the main thing to protect before anything else, so obviously, if there's a human being out there we're not gonna shoot at something. The preservation of human life is the most important.

Not material stuff, like drugs.

Usually it's about twenty pounds. And they usually use juveniles. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen-year-old kids. The reason is because, why? Well, it's fast money for them, it's a thrill, and they weigh less. So the less they weigh, the more drugs they can put in the basket. The way they do it is they have this basket and ropes, like six ropes going up. The way they need to release this, it's not like the military how they have a hook and everything releases at the same time. They have to cut it with a knife. And the kids, many times, when we're going in there, they get stressed and they don't cut. Or they're a six-year-old and they cut. They lower it like this...

(gestures of a spill)

And they often die. They go back and the cartels pay them a lot of money, and they put them in a nice car, so the other kids see it. They have a recruiting system. Lately they've slowed down because we've begun detecting it. However, my aunt stays up until twelve at night, and then there's a lot more going on in the sky. The infrared can usually see it, so then we just see it.

(looks up)

DAVÍD exits.

SCENE 6 – Listening to Shoes

CASSANDRA in the half-light. She trips over a shoe left near the shrine. She picks it up and looks at it very carefully. She notices all the other shoes. She puts it to her ear. Trumpet song.

SCENE 7 – De Acuerdo con Mi Mamá

ANA MARÍA, with NIÑO, approaches CASSANDRA. ANA MARÍA is six months pregnant and sends her young boy off to play.

CASSANDRA

(to audience)

Last summer, I volunteered at the Humanitarian Relief Center at Sacred Heart Church in McAllen, Texas. As of August 2015, they had assisted over 23,000 individuals. I was introduced to a few immigrants who had just crossed into the U.S. the day before. One was Ana María.

ANA MARÍA sits with CASSANDRA.

ANA MARÍA

Yo vengo de una familia muy pobre en El Salvador... con el fuerza me sacó adelante mi mamá. Y entonces, mi mamá trabajó duro para sacarme adelante a mí y a mis dos hermanos. Cuando ya soy grande, yo comencé a trabajar. Encontré un compañero, luego me separé del papa de mi niño. Y hice yo lo he sacado adelante. Y, bueno, este, yo tengo una tía acá, verdad, en Los Ángeles que... Ella me, en ver mi situación, verdad, como vivía, ella me dijo que me iba a apoyar, para que le diera mejor futuro a mi hijo, y, el que voy a tener, verdad y entonces... Así fue, que yo, decidí de venirme.

CASSANDRA

¿Cuántos años tiene tu hijo?

ANA MARÍA

Cinco años, sí. Cinco años.

CASSANDRA

Y, ¿cuántos meses de embarazo tienes?

ANA MARÍA

Seis, seis. Seis meses tengo, sí. Sí, es muy duro venirse y dejar a la familia a
uno.

(begins crying gently)

CASSANDRA

¿Cómo fue la despedida?

ANA MARÍA

Bueno muy difícil porque es difícil dejar la familia. Verdad... y... sí, pero gracias a dios estamos aquí verdad y... para luchar y, y salir adelante. Si... Mi mamá no quería que me viniera por, como yo vivía con ella y yo era la que le ayudaba a ella.

Sí, ella no quería que me viniera, pero igual, hablé con ella y le dije que no era solo para mí bien ni para el de mis hijos no - pues para el de ella también... Ella, me dijo que ya, sí que ella estaba de acuerdo de que me viniera, porque ella también quiere mucho a mi niño, y solo con él pasaba. Sí.

NIÑO

(running up)

Mamá, mamá, mamá!

ANA MARÍA

Deja, mi amor...

NIÑO

Mamá, mamá, ¿ya vas a cambiar?

ANA MARÍA

Sí, mi amor...

NIÑO runs away.

CASSANDRA

Y ¿cómo fue el viaje?

ANA MARÍA

Bueno difícil porque, en esos viaje uno se, se arriesga la vida de uno verdad, y...

es muy difícil porque uno aguanta hambre, a veces duerme en monte.

Sí, en mi caso, este... yo así de embarazada mientras cargada a mi hijo

de cinco años, fue bien incómodo, sí. Pero gracias a Dios, ¿verdad?

Siempre hay una recompensa cuando uno hace sacrificio así, ¿verdad?

Sí... así es. Así es...

ANA MARÍA turns around wiping away tears, joins NIÑO playing.

Lights fade, as the Lady of Guadalupe shrine begins to glow a bit more strongly.

SCENE 8 – National Butterfly Center in Texas

ELENA enters exhausted, dropping her bags and paperwork next to a chair.

CASSANDRA enters.

CASSANDRA

Elena is the director of the National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas. Their

property is right by the Rio Grande, or Rio Bravo.

NIÑO enters from one side of the stage, BUTTERFLY enters from the other. BUTTERFLY dances as ELENA speaks.

ELENA

Over the last few years, with the crossing of people from Central and South America, and the unaccompanied minors, there have been a few experiences that have stuck with us. One time, uh, just over the canal, a little boy, about five-years-old, came out of the shrubs and the tree and everything, and asked some of the staff for help. They put him in the grounds keeper's building and then his big brother came out and his big brother was like seven and then three other boys came out who were in their teens. And they weren't all brothers, the two boys had been sent off with these bigger boys—presumably to do the, you know, the big train and all the other crossing to get here. We explained to them we had, we have to call La Migra and, um, but come in and let us help you and all this.

And the little boy, the five-year-old, he was just enthralled with the butterflies, and you know he was, you can't even imagine what they've been through in getting here. But he was like a little boy. I mean he was just asking—

NIÑO

(running and playing with BUTTERFLY)

¿Qué es este lugar? ¡¿Y por qué hay tantas mariposas?! ¡Es el jardín más hermoso que he visto!

ELENA

And you know on those times we all, you know, uh, we maintain a certain composure and we do what has to be done but um... I have two girls and two boys of my own but I cannot... *(choked up)* I can't even imagine...

Female IMMIGRANTS join NIÑO. BUTTERFLY exits.

ELENA

There was, there was another time, where I encountered a group of women on the levee. The women were a variety of ages, and one woman was like the grandma. I mean like you could see her age and everything she'd been through on her face and she was kind of hanging back from the group and as

I stopped, uh, the women were like,

IMMIGRANT

(broken English)

Could we get in your car? Can we put children in your car?

ELENA

(to CASSANDRA)

And I tend to carry water in my car just to give, you know, in case we run into people. I'm like,

(to group)

No, I'm sorry, I can't let you in my car.

(to CASSANDRA)

Because that would be a violation of the law, I could be arrested for planning to transport them or human trafficking, who knows what charges, but...

IMMIGRANT

Where are we? Where do we go? Can you help us?

ELENA

You need to stay here, I've already called for help.

They're gonna come pick you up.

IMMIGRANT

But, what's gonna happen to us?

ELENA

Well, from my understanding, you know they'll—they are gonna put you in the van. They're gonna take you and, you know, ask you, you know, interview you, ask you all these questions. They will keep you all together.

CASSANDRA

(to audience)

Not a guarantee with zero tolerance policies.

ELENA

I was explaining the process as I understand it happens at, uh, at the McAllen station and how they'd be processed and everything and the old woman, uh, through everything just held back. I mean physically and verbally and in everything and, um, her demeanor (*choked up*) her manner (*sniffs*) it was one of such resignation. Like she, she could just die right there right now because she had done her part, she had gotten all of them here and she was, that was all it was for her, was delivering her family safely. (*gasping sob*) Another one of those incidents... I gotta get a tissue. You just pull over in your car and bawl for the rest of the afternoon.

(runs to get tissue)

So those are the kinds of stories that people who don't live here and don't work here and don't deal with it face-to-face and on a daily basis, don't... they... it's easy to demonize people when they're not people to you.

Note

Santuario|Sanctuary was inspired by the summer of 2012, when 60,000 more unaccompanied youth crossed the U.S.-Mexico border than the year before due to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. That same year, the migrating monarch butterfly population was nearly halved from 222,000 to 145,000.

In 2018, Amy Buckler Rusterholz, Victoria Gonzalez, Stephanie San German, and Teresa Veramendi received the Boedecker Foundation Path to Excellence Grant, funding the development and production of an original bilingual, documentary-style theater piece following the parallel and divergent experiences of youth and monarch butterflies on their migrations across the U.S.-Mexico border. The team traveled to research and conduct over thirty-five interviews in Colorado, Illinois, California, Texas, and Mexico.

Santuario|Sanctuary had its world premiere at The Dairy Arts Center in Boulder, Colorado, opening September 6, 2018, with the following cast: Eva Aboytes, Juan-Carlos Espinoza, Dennis Kerr, Carolina Osuna, Ana Karina Ramirez, Adria Maria Streitman, Athena Ray Sweeten, and Fabian Vazquez. It was directed by Amy C. Buckler Rusterholz and Teresa Veramendi, who also designed the set and props. Chaney McCulloch designed the costumes, and Brian Miller the lighting. Sound was designed by J. Michael Martinez and Allison Caw. Animation and videography were designed by Z Bass Speaks. Julia Aerase Morgan was the muralist. The production stage manager was Rosie Glasscock. Many thanks go to a volunteer team of transcribers and translators who made this project possible.

Additional thanks to all who helped develop this play in early workshops, including Leigh Fondakowski, Stephen Earnhart, Dennis Kerr, Kate Moore, Adria Maria Streitman, Judy Veramendi, and Ben Waugh.

