

"The Raid"

By Lupe Casares-Navarro

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Operation Wetback was a poorly planned government program initiated by President Eisenhower in 1954-55, driven by the belief that Mexicans were taking jobs from "true Americans." However, this notion quickly proved false as local white ranchers faced labor shortages, realizing that no one could match Mexican laborers' strength and work ethic.*

It was a day I shall remember for the rest of my life. I woke up with a mission: to convince my mother to allow me to go to the little Tendajo neighborhood store. My savings were more than thirty-five cents, all hidden in a sock, and I planned to bring back a Coca-Cola, three large cookies, gum, and a lollipop for my little sister.

Mother outright said no: "You're too little; you will get lost."

"Mother, I am almost six years old," I snapped.

I knew the way; I had memorized signs and was sure I could return safely. It was a weekday; my father had left earlier, when it was still dark out, early enough to climb a truck filled with other workers for the cabbage fields.

My family lived in a barrio in Harlingen, Texas, in South Texas, in small shacks with walls so thin that we could hear our neighbors' conversations. Our small one-room was at most fifteen broad and twenty long. We had a makeshift kitchen with a kerosene stove next to an altar where La Virgen de Guadalupe and a calendar with the picture of Jesu' Cristo looked over us.

I sat at the table, still trying to convince Mother to let me walk to the store when suddenly, we heard a scream from our neighbor.

«La Migra, Doña Tere,» she cried out. «La Miga, Doña Tere,» she kept screaming.

Well aware of what was happening, the ongoing immigration raids had come to us now; Mother quickly covered my little sister, who was ill with measles. Otherwise, she seemed calm compared to me. I had heard many horror stories from people who had been arrested and deported: The harsh treatment, the anguish, and humiliation of being hauled in boats and trucks like cattle into Mexico. Children were thirsty and hungry,

The U.S. Border Patrol packed Mexican immigrants into trucks when transporting them to the border for deportation during Operation Wetback. —Wikipedia



Lupe's querida Madre.

and some became ill along the way.

I hid behind Mother just in time to see a tall white immigration man scurry into our room. Like a giant, he stood with hands on his hips, facing us; noticeably, a big gun hung from the side of his hip. In tears

from anguish, I held on to my mother's dress.

The policeman then spoke in broken Spanish.

«Tus Papeles»—where are your documents?»

I looked towards my mother, who very calmly placed my little sister in a safe corner of the bed. She then walked over to the altar, pulled a small plastic bag from under the statue of La Virgen, opened it, cautiously led out a formal letter, and handed it to the officer.

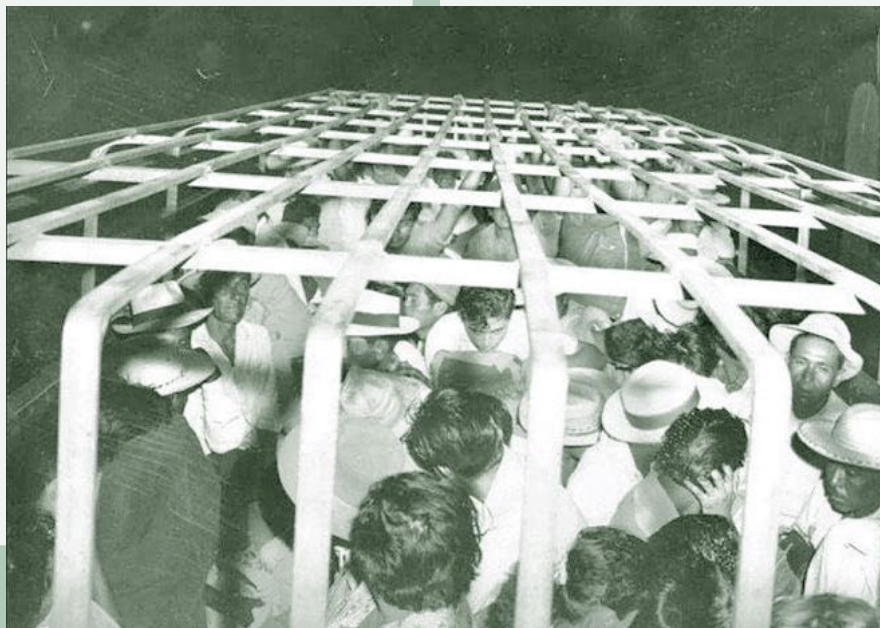
My mother and father had saved every cent to hire a lawyer for mother's petition to become a legal resident. The lawyer had issued a letter as a safety guard in case immigration agents would interrogate Mother.

The officer diligently looked over the letter and stared back at Mother with a stern warning: "Next time, you better have your full papers, or I'll send you back to Mexico!"

He glanced once more around our tiny room as if there was space to hide anyone—then briskly walked out. Mother took the baby and finished giving her her medicine; she had been coughing all night. I walked over to Mother; she noticed my wet pants.

"Go change! There are clean clothes in that basket!"

As I returned, I couldn't help admiring my mother for her bravery. Before her, in my eyes, there was only my father who had been my hero. Now, I knew I had much to learn from the woman who naturally kept a low profile.



That evening, Father arrived late from work. It was dark outside. He was muddied and exhausted from a hard day in the fields but was more concerned about us. "What happened? Tell me everything!"

He took off his sombrero and looked at each of us

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OFRIENDAS LITERARIAS

JORGE SANDOVAL, PRESENTE!

Jorge Sandoval, photographer extraordinaire, world traveler, writer, filmmaker, actor and beloved community member joined the spirit world on October 30, 2024 at the tender age of 71. An unassuming man, Jorge lived simply but managed to extract much joy from life and shared his experiences through his beautiful photography that he sold yearly at the Esperanza Peace Market and other venues. He honored his community as an actor playing individuals that exemplified the cultura and gente of San Antonio. He also gifted us with his own creations such as the film *Las Tesoros de San Antonio, A Westside Story* in which he immortalized a group of elder women brought back into the limelight by the Esperanza Center to sing once



Jorge selling photos at Peace Market in front of Esperanza

again as they did in their heyday as young musical stars. Jorge did not let his life of limited means stop him from pursuing his dreams as a world traveler and chose instead to live life to the fullest depending on the universe to guide and provide for him. Thus, he lived to enjoy many adventures abroad and brought home many stories to tell. His love of people and his openness to receiving love in return, was one of his greatest strengths. A graduate of Lanier High, Jorge was proud of his Westside roots and his familia. Now, he is on his ultimate adventure. He will long be remembered. Jorge Sandoval, presente!

The Raid

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intently, his concern palpable. I ran to hug him while Mother placed a steaming plate on the table. Our unity in adversity was a source of strength and comfort.

“Wash your hands and eat before the food gets cold,” she said calmly.

“Were you mistreated?” he asked with concern in his eyes; he seemed emotional. Mother arranged tortillas and a molcajete filled with red Pequin Peppers.

“No, el hombre just wanted to check our papers!” she said, as she brought a batch of recently made flour tortillas. Father looked at me, feeling like he wasn’t getting a full report from my mother, and he held me close.

« Did he scare you, mi’jo (son) ? » Remembering my accident, I looked towards Mother. She, in turn, saved me from embarrassment: «He was fearless and acted responsibly,» she said, quickly changing the conversation.

“Bueno, let’s enjoy a good supper and thank God for a good day.” Our faith in God and each other was a beacon of hope in uncertainty.

I could not help blaming myself for not being more like Mother.

This crucial incident was my first traumatic experience facing adversity; how my parents handled it, and the political and psychological impact on me served as a platform to deal with future problems. The raid brought a new awareness that America, the country we called home, was not entirely ours; we could be questioned and removed at any moment. This stark difference between us and them ignited a sense of vulnerability and resilience, shaping my identity. It fueled my determination to understand belonging, and advocate for my family and community against such challenges. Our family’s resilience in such adversity is a testament to the human spirit’s ability to overcome.

I praise my parents’ thought process for turning what could have been a negative experience into a practical learning lesson. This lesson ultimately developed into a problem-solving methodology, a strategy that became useful in many future encounters.

BIO: Born in the Rio Grande Valley, Lupe began life as a migrant laborer experiencing exploitation and harsh conditions but amidst it all got an education and joined the Chicano movement becoming one of the founders of a Chicano school, Colegio Jacinto Treviño in Mercedes, TX in 1970.