

# Winner of the 2015 Living History Essay Contest

## *A Child with No Childhood*

by Esmeralda Aguilar

It was 1982 when Yanet began to notice the struggle her parents were facing. She would see her mom cry every night when her husband would come home drunk and empty-handed. He had wasted the week's money on beer and cigarettes. Yanet saw the pain her mother showed when washing all the pots and pans from their taco stand. The money they earned from selling tacos, burritos, gorditas, and much more was never enough to provide a stable living. Yanet said, "Me dolía mi alma viendo a mi madre sufriendo por darnos de comer." Translating to, "It hurt my heart seeing my mother suffer just to give us something to eat." She could not just go out and enjoy playing with her three other siblings. She didn't care for playing like all the other normal eight year olds in her poor neighborhood. All she wanted was to make her mother happy.

It was then when she decided to step up since her older sister and two younger brothers wouldn't. She stated "Pues ni modo de ver mi familia sufrir mas. Alómenos le podía ayudar con algo en la casa. Mis hermanos no quisieron hacer nada. Entonces, yo tuve que dejar de jugar, dejar de toda diversión, dejar mi niñez y ayudar a mis padres." Translating to, "she felt like she needed to stop playing, stop having fun, leave her childhood behind, and help her parents." Yanet felt like she was doing something to lighten up her parents' load.

Yanet started off small and began washing all the dishes from selling all the food, then progressed quickly to actually cooking and cutting tomatoes, peeling potatoes, and making salsa. She would see all her friends playing and having fun while she was helping her mom sell the food in the market. She didn't feel bad because she saw her mom a bit relieved to have help. But her mom would tell her all the time to go play with her friends and that she didn't have to help. However, Yanet saw the need in the house and felt like she had to help.

During break time from selling the food, instead of resting like her mother, or going out to play with her friends like normal eight-year-olds, she went around the market to see if anyone needed help carrying their bags, or

needed a babysitter. She asked for as much help to better her family's economic issues. She claims, "I even shined rich people's shoes for 5 cents!" Yanet was not ashamed to ask for work like her brothers were. The entire town knew their family was poor and was in need of money. "I knew they gave me small jobs because they felt pity for us but I was willing to work and make a difference in my family." Yanet was told over and over that she should not be working like an adult because she is missing out on her childhood. But how can she go out and play when she knows her parents are loaded with pressures?

Her dad decided to head off to America to see if he can get a job that would pay better so he could provide for the family. Of course, he had no money to file all the required paperwork. So, he arrived to America illegally, but managed to get a small job that paid fairly well. However, Yanet and her family did not know whether he arrived safely or not because there was no possible way of communication. Yanet claims that she had not heard anything from her dad for an entire year! They all felt like their dad had forgotten about them. Fortunately, one of their cousins who had gone with their dad to America came back to Mexico for a family wedding and told Yanet's family that their dad was in jail. He got caught by immigration and was serving his one year and will come back once bail was paid.

This was some of the most devastating news they had ever received. Her entire family worked extra hard to send him money and eventually managed to bail him out and send him more money so he could come back to Mexico. "I didn't even recognize my father very much. He seemed taller, fuller, and more serious." However, she was glad to see her dad for the first time in one long and sad year.

Yanet stated "Every day, instead of playing at recess, I went to help my mom sell burritos to the public". All she focused on was finding a way to help her mom. There even was a time when she knew her mom had to carry a huge container full of food to sell. She lied to her mom saying that her class was cancelled for the day, and she would help her out with carrying that huge container. The story of a nine year old helping her mother carry the burden of life is an incredible story that shows loyalty, love, responsibility, and selflessness.

Yanet's life was filled with sorrow, pain, humiliation by her peers, but most of all it was filled with responsibility, responsibilities that no child should ever have to face. She struggled through life seeing the anguish her parents went through. Stepping up and leaving her playtime to labor is something that all should admire. She never complained to her family and

she said, “Todo era para ver a mis padres contentos”. Translating to, she did everything she did just to see her parents happy.

Now, at age 40, she is happily married, has four wonderful children, attends a loving church, and lives in America legally. All her life she had to work extra hard and set goals in her life to continue on a path her children can follow. Yanet is always explaining to her children that hard work will get you far as long as you have family and love in your heart. She never finished high school, but she encourages her children to appreciate school and persevere to achieve the best in life. Many of her family members are so proud of who she is despite all her hardships in life. She can't recall any childhood memories, and if she has any, they are few.

As she reminisced over her life, she says she would do it all over again if it was necessary. I see this woman and I admire her greatly. She worked since she was eight years old, married at age eighteen, and learned the English language to get her paperwork to live in America. Not many women can stay strong and not give up easily. Her life was not painted pretty, but she made the most of it.

She is a strong woman that is okay with not been given the opportunity to have a normal childhood. I am proud of her and look up to all she has done. But most of all, I am proud to announce to the world that she is my mother! My mother is what I call a true warrior, always fighting the good fight of faith and pressing on. I hope to one day be half the woman she is. There are so many stories to tell, she never enjoyed life as a kid, but has no regrets. I respect her very much and admire my mother, Yanet Aguilar.