

## EVERYONE LIES

*“According to the report, 59 percent of the 29,624 minors detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection between October 2009 and the end of August 2010 were unaccompanied.”*

-Eduardo Santana of FOX NEWS Latino referencing the Appleseed Report published in April 2011.

It was his birthday and though he was fifteen, Joaquin, looked older from years spent fostering his siblings. He crept out of the bed so as to not disturb the children and walked to the room where the old lady made breakfast.

He lingered outside of the room and watched his grandmother fuss. Joaquin held her image until it burned then looked back on his brother and sister and did the same. He held the rosary beads around his neck as if they stored the film he created. The necklace, distinctive to his church *Purissima Conception*, had a bright red string that offset the smooth black beads. He continued into the cook room barefoot across earthen floor to greet his grandmother with a kiss.

The old lady's eyes began to well as she hovered over a pan of beans and a diced potato. She remained focused on the pan as Joaquin went to a cooler in the corner and pulled out a small piece of salted pork and an onion. The old lady noticed and her chapped lips smiled.

“Where did you get the extra?”

“It's from my travel fund. I wanted us to celebrate. Today is special.”

The old lady took the meat and cut it up before she threw it in the pan of beans and potato. Her eyes tried to blink the tears away, to no avail, so she grabbed the onion and began to cut.

“Don't cry today grandma.”

“The onion-” The old lady pointed with the knife.

The young children came out of the bed rubbing their eyes.

“I’m hungry.” The girl said.

Joaquin opened his arms and picked her up to hover over the old lady’s pan. The scent made the girl smile as she nestled her head under her brother’s chin. The old lady meted out the grub on to four plates. Joaquin picked the pork off his plate and placed it on the others against the light protest from his grandmother.

“No, you’ll need energy.”

“Today is my day and I feel strong. There’ll be meat on the other side.”

The old lady controlled her tears for the children and graciously nodded and placed her share on the plates of the little boy and girl. When the family had cleared their plates, Joaquin heard the sound of an idle engine; an uncommon sound in their shanty section of Nogales. It was his moment and he knelt down toward his siblings, “I have to go away to work for a while. I want you to listen to Grandma because I will return, and when I do, I’ll have gifts for you, but you must be good, do you understand?”

The children’s faces lit up at the thought of presents, unaware of exactly what Joaquin meant. Joaquin rose up and gave the old lady one last hug. She cried and kissed the cross that hung at the bottom of Joaquin’s rosary.

“If you get lost, remember your compass.”

Joaquin smiled and clutched the necklace, kissed it, and nodded in agreement. He departed toward the engine and the last sound the family heard was the truck.

Inside, the truck, the driver was quiet. Joaquin tried to make conversation.

“Do you have family on the other side?”

The driver nodded and kept his eyes on the old dirt road.

“My English is decent, no? I’ve learned from the shows I’ve watched at *Purissima Conception*.”

The driver said nothing as he pulled in to a desolate area on the side of the road. When the truck had come to a complete stop he turned to the boy and spoke, “How much money do you have for the other side?”

Joaquin answered reluctantly, “Eight dollars.”

The driver shook his head in disappointment. “You’re in luck, I have a gold coin. It’s worth twenty of your dollars, see, it even says so here. Paradise ain’t cheap, *Chico*.”

Joaquin reluctantly gave the driver his dollars and took the coin, placed it in his shoe, and thanked the driver, “This good act will come back to you.”

The driver offered a toothless smile, went around to the back of the vehicle, and took apart the rear quarter panel of the truck. Joaquin’s heart raced as he looked at the small space he’d have to endure for the next leg of the journey.

“You’re lucky,” The driver said, “You’re small for a boy, I’ve seen others take greater pains to make the journey.”

Joaquin got in to the compartment and the driver closed it back up so that it was no longer noticeable. The truck pulled back on to the road. Joaquin closed his eyes tight, clutched on to his rosary, and opened the memories he burned in his mind from that morning.

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A loud metal-on-metal sound startled Joaquin awake. It was dark but as he opened his eyes, he saw a neon sign in English that read: 24 HOUR DINER. The driver helped him out of the crawl space and then reassembled his rear quarter panel. He explained, "The delay at the crossing was unexpected."

"*Gracias,*" Joaquin said to the driver, as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes, "Bless you!"

The driver sneered and offered, "Beatings help more than blessings, *Chico.*"

Joaquin looked uncertain at the driver, "*Que?*"

The driver jumped back into his truck and turned the engine over. In the gravel parking lot there were tractor trailers lined up in rows. The man pointed to them, "*Chico,* if you run outta money...and remember it's the beatings that make you wise."

Joaquin smiled at the driver, pulled out his coin and held it up, "Thank you, brother."

The driver rolled off and the gravel beneath his wheels crackled. Joaquin was hungry. He made his way toward the diner with his gold twenty-dollar-coin in hand. The smell of paprika-coated hash browns wafted out of the diner's smokestack and the boy was drawn to the well-lit eatery. He pulled the door open and saw that many of the drivers were of his homeland. They sat at the counter eating food and drinking coffee.

Joaquin took the only seat at the bar that was open next to a bearded obese man who eyed the gaunt boy up and down with a disarming smile. A waitress came over and asked him what he'd like. He extended his coin and spoke, "Ham, eggs, a coffee and change please."

The waitress took the coin up, observed it, and tapped it on the metal counter. "Sugar, this ain't worth an empty can of cola."

Joaquin's confused eyes lowered. He spoke in defeat, "The man said twenty dollars."

“Yeah, well, I hear they lie sometimes, men.”

Joaquin put his hands under his shirt and took the rosary from around his neck, raising it above his head toward the waitress, “Will you take this as my word that I’ll come back with money later?”

Of all the men at the bar only two looked up at the boy’s offering—the plump hairy trucker who wore a ball-cap with a cross and a Mexican man in a straw hat at the end of the bar. The man in the straw hat fixated on the red-stringed-rosary.

The waitress looked sympathetic at the boy as the fat man cut in. He pulled out a fold of twenties, unfurled one and said, “This is a twenty here boy. You got took!”

Joaquin looked at the man puzzled, “Took?”

The waitress looked at the fat man annoyed, “Hoss, you gonna cover thisun’s meal.”

“Ain’t nothing free on this side of the fence,” The patron offered.

Joaquin felt humiliated. “I can work.”

The waitress left to attend to other truckers as the white man looked down into the boy’s eyes. “Boy, you come out to my cab and we’ll see if we can’t find you a few things to do.”

The man in the straw hat watched the trucker at work.

Joaquin, weak and tired, followed the fat man out to his truck. As he came up on the semi, he noticed a giant cross that lit up on the grill when the man clicked a button on his key chain. Under the cross were the lighted words: **JESUS LIVES**. Joaquin felt at ease seeing the familiar sign perched for all to see. He tapped the compass underneath his shirt.

“You’re a good man,” Joaquin spoke, “I’ll work hard for you. What can I do?”

The man opened the door and hollered over the percolating pistons of the diesel engine.  
“Hop up and get in the cab, right back, over yonder.”

Joaquin began to hop up into the cab just as he heard a piercing whistle.

“*Down Chico!*” The man with the straw hat yelled at the young boy.

Joaquin’s heart raced as he whipped his head toward the voice. “*Que?*”

Preacher turned to the older Mexican, “Ain’t no business of yours how the boy earns his dinner.”

The man in the straw hat froze the white man with steely eyes as he withdrew a blade from his back pocket. The white man offered a truce by means of a smile, turned, and helped the boy down from the tractor.

The man in the straw hat walked over to the front grill of Preacher’s tractor, wielded his blade and sheared off the letter “**V**” leaving the remaining letters lit. Joaquin stood off to the side, bewildered as the American trucker began to raise his hands in protest, “Now, look here, I’ll call the goddamn cops fella!”

“The *federales? Si Senor, por favor.*” He tipped his straw hat at the red-faced man and smiled.  
“Who’s the lamb now Padre?”

The trucker spit at the Mexican’s feet. He climbed up into his cab and slammed his door shut. “Was a time when people minded their own-” The fat man grinded his gears, “Fuck it,” and the truck pushed off into the night.

“*Vamos,*” the older Mexican said and turned back toward the diner.

Once inside, Joaquin opened the menu and ordered food: mostly meats. The waitress took the order and disappeared. Joaquin looked up at the Mexican but the man with the straw hat seemed to look past the boy. "Thank you," Joaquin offered.

"That man was going to take your trust," The man in the straw hat said, "I had to lose mine before I understood that in this dark world the blind man is king."

Joaquin's eyes began to water. "I don't understand, they told me that it would be different over here, better?"

"Who're they?"

"Everyone! Everyone said that this was the *promiseland*, the *other side*."

"You can't believe in everyone. Everyone lies."

"Even you?"

"Everyone," the man replied as reached for his wallet, "In time, you'll lie too, one day, because that's what someone wants to hear."

He paused then added, "There's one person that you should never lie to...ever."

The boy's eyes widened, "God?"

The man with the straw hat laid down exact change on the bill and looked the boy in the eye. He handed Joaquin a twenty-dollar bill and then offered a warm smile. "I was going to say yourself, but that works too."