

Enrique's Journey Study Guide

Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario

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Plot Summary

Enrique's Journey is a tale of risk, courage, love and danger. Enrique's mother, Lourdes, leaves him and his sister, Belky, behind in Honduras in order to go to the United States. Lourdes leaves her children because she needs to make money to feed them and allow them to finish school.

Over the next several years, Enrique bounces from relative to relative. He begins sniffing glue and finds a girlfriend, Maria Isabel, who eventually gives birth to a daughter, Jasmin. All the while, Enrique dreams of following his mother to the United States. He loves her and misses her and he feels abandoned. Finally, at 17 years old, Enrique leaves Honduras to travel across Mexico on top of trains. Aside from the risks of jumping onto and off of moving trains, Enrique comes up against gangsters, bandits and corrupt law enforcement officials. Along the way, gang members beat him and he goes through periods of not being able to find enough food. He's deported several times across the Mexican border, but every time, he tries again.

Finally, Enrique makes it to Nuevo Laredo, which sits on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. He can see Texas across the river -- as well as American immigration agents who will send him right back to Mexico if they catch him crossing illegally into the United States.

Enrique lives in Nuevo Laredo for weeks and works washing cars to earn enough money to contact his family in Honduras. He's lost his mother's phone number and has no way to find her without it. When he finally reaches his mother, she arranges to pay a smuggler to get Enrique to Orlando, Florida, where her boyfriend picks him up and drives him back to his and Lourdes' home in North Carolina.

During her years in the United States, Lourdes has given birth to a third child with a man who has since disappeared. She's moved from Los Angeles to North Carolina and she lives with her boyfriend, daughter Diana and six others in a trailer. Enrique and his mother are happy to see each other, but in time their relationship deteriorates. He still resents her for leaving and she's angry because she doesn't feel he's paying her enough respect. They fight often and eventually Enrique moves out on his own.

The family eventually moves to Florida. Enrique goes back to North Carolina for a while before moving back to Florida. He pays for a smuggler to bring Maria Isabel to the United States, and a few months later, they bring Jasmin to live with them.

Enrique can't shake his drug and drinking habits, which lead to his arrest and near deportation. His daughter testifies in a trial about a crime she witnessed and receives a U Visa, which allows her and her family to stay legally in the United States.

Author Sonia Nazario chose Enrique as her subject because he represents the typical teen making the trek from Central America to the United States in search of their mothers. Nazario's goal in writing the book was to discourage mothers from leaving their



children and also to discourage children from following their mothers, due to the danger. The book explores the issues behind the mothers' need to leave in the first place and possible solutions. There aren't enough jobs in their home countries that allow them to provide the most basic necessities for their children -- food, clothing, shelter and school. Going to the United States to work and send money back home is the only solution they can think of.

Poverty is the main theme in this book. It is what drives the actions of almost all the players. Mothers, and in some cases fathers, leave their children because they need to find a way to feed them. There is a stark, sharp difference between the haves and have nots in Honduras and very few opportunities for those who have little to improve their financial situations. Women have to choose between staying with men who abuse them or cheat on them and leaving and not being able to care for their children. The situation often requires children to leave school in order to work with their mothers just so they can eat.

So the mothers leave and the children left behind live a slightly better life than their peers. But the children feel abandoned and they resent their mothers. Several times in the book, someone says that there is no replacement for a mother's love. However, the people who say this are people who didn't have to spend a significant or memorable part of their lives without enough food. Some even finished school and started their own businesses thanks to their mothers' money.

Poverty is also a large factor in young men joining gangs and attacking and robbing the migrants trying to get through Mexico. Local officials resort to the same behavior in order to give their own families a better life. It seems that all negative behavior is a consequence of someone not having enough.

Drugs play a vital role in Enrique's life from early on. The glue sniffing is his way of coping and he doesn't have the emotional tools to try anything else. His mother has left him and then his father chooses a woman over his own son. Enrique has a lot of pain and abandonment in his life, so he looks for an escape.

But even once Enrique is with his mother again, when he has a girlfriend and child he loves, he can't stop the drinking and drugs. He still holds onto his hurt and rebellious nature, and by now he has developed a physical addiction. While he languished on the banks of the Rio Grande, the glue sniffing helped him feel less hungry when he couldn't get food. That and alcohol helped him forget how helpless he often felt while trying to raise enough money to reach his mother and hopefully get a smuggler so he could get to the United States. When Enrique felt alone, the drugs were always there for him.

In the book's prologue, author Sonia Nazario compares her family's legal immigration from Argentina to the United States with the illegal immigration of the people who are the book's subject. Her experience was much different from her subjects'. Nazario's family arrived on an airplane and there was no danger in the move. In contrast, Enrique and his family risked their lives to get to the United States and lived in fear of deportation from the time they arrived.



Nazario explores many facets of illegal immigration. There are pros and cons both for the immigrants and the country they've moved to. United States citizens are divided about what they want to see happen with this issue. Some are for full amnesty, seeing the immigrants as an asset to the country. Others believe they are a drain and lawbreakers and are in favor of the immigrants being deported. Even the immigrants themselves can't agree on which is the right answer. At one point, Enrique says if he were a citizen, he wouldn't want illegal immigrants in the country, but then he changes his mind and says they provide a service the country's citizens can't or won't.

There are statistics to support both sides -- from the immigrants being particularly hard workers that are assets to businesses to the cost of educating them or providing them with public assistance because they make so little money. Regardless of whether the immigrants are good or bad for the United States, they continue coming. They need to do so in order to provide for their families back home. Lourdes says she likes the United States and will never return to Honduras. It's cleaner and safer in the United States.



Prologue

Summary

Sonia Nazario's housekeeper in the United States, Carmen, has four children in Guatemala and is telling Nazario about them for the first time. It's been 12 years since Carmen last saw them. Carmen left them because her husband had left her for another woman and Carmen couldn't afford to feed the children on the money she made in Guatemala. The best solution she could think of was to go to the United States to work and send money back to Guatemala to care for her children.

Carmen tells Nazario about how angry and hurt her children are about their mother's absence, but she doesn't want to bring them to Los Angeles, California, where she lives because she doesn't live in a safe neighborhood. She also can't afford to hire a smuggler to get them there. Carmen's own journey north in 1985 included her smuggler robbing and leaving her without food for 3 days. She fears her daughters will become rape victims. Carmen tells Nazario that there are many women like her with children left behind. Carmen doesn't understand how wealthy women in the United States can leave their own children in order to go to work every day.

A year after the conversation, Carmen's son Minor, who was 10 when Carmen left him, hitchhikes through Guatemala and Mexico in order to reach his mother. He thinks his mother left him because she didn't love him. He tells her he would rather have his mother than the clothes and food she provided for him. Minor tell Nozario about his journey and its dangers. Then he tells her that thousands of children make the same journey atop Mexican freight trains, nicknamed El Tren de la Muerte -- The Train of Death.

Nazario wonders how mothers are able to make such a difficult choice -- to leave their children behind in order to give them a better life. She wonders what she would do in their place. She is also fascinated that the children later choose to make such a dangerous journey to get to their mothers. Some are as young as 7, but the average age is 15. Mothers leaving their children is a relatively new phenomenon. Previously, it was the fathers who emigrated to find work and send money home. Single mothers, though, have become more prevalent in Central America and that has made it more and more necessary for them to leave their children in order to provide them with the basic needs -- food, shelter, clothing and education.

Nazario thinks she can help the illegal immigration discussion in the United States by highlighting one such person, humanizing that person. She thinks about riding the trains herself in order to truly understand and convey what the children go through to get to the United States.

Minor has told Nazario about bandits who ride the trains in order to rob and rape migrants, the bandits who prowl the tracks for the same reason, the police who not only



don't stop it but participate and the dangers of falling beneath the trains and losing limbs or life. She is afraid and she knows her husband won't be supportive of the idea. Nazario talks with migrant children in detention centers and area high schools about the route -- where it's most dangerous and least dangerous. She realizes she can't choose a migrant in Central America and follow him all the way to the United States because they will likely end up separated for good. She decides to find a boy who has already made the journey and recreate it alone.

Nazario contacts the president of Mexico and obtains a letter that will help her get out of any trouble she encounters along the way and that allows her to ride on the trains with the conductors' knowledge. She decides she won't get onto or off of any moving trains. She enlists help from Grupo Beta, an armed Mexican migrant rights group, to get through the most dangerous parts of the journey. She has contacts in every region in case she needs assistance.

In May 2000, Nazario goes looking for a boy whose steps she can retrace. The average migrant at the time is a 15-year-old boy. She finds 17-year-old Enrique through a church in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. Though older than average, Nazario chooses him because his experiences are typical. Nazario travels to Nuevo Laredo and shadows Enrique for two weeks. Using the information he provides, Nazario retraces Enrique's steps, beginning in Honduras.

Nazario meets a 15-year-old girl who was raped in a spot where Nazario had been the day before. She goes along on a high-speed chase with Grupo Beta agents trying to rescue a 22-year-old woman bandits have grabbed after robbing a group of migrants and meets a man whom municipal police officers have threatened and robbed.

Analysis

Nazario grew up in Argentina during a time when the government kidnapped and murdered thousands of people for political dissent. She understands the fear and desperation the migrants feel. Her family escaped that situation, immigrating legally to the United States, an entirely different experience from the migrants Nazario is reporting on in this book. Her experiences researching the book teach her that there is a whole other world of immigration that she doesn't understand.

Along the way, Nazario discovers more questions than answers, especially whether any of this migration is worth the price. She says her ultimate conclusion is that she wants her book to discourage mothers from leaving their children behind and also discourage children from following the mothers who do.

In the United States, there is great demand for cheap, immigrant labor while there is also significant hostility toward the illegal immigrants who provide that labor, usually at the expense of their own family unity. The book helps put a new face on that debate. What is the answer? What can anyone do to fix this broken system? The conclusion is that unless something happens to improve lives at the source, the wave of migrants will



continue pouring across Mexico and into the United States and many more people will lose important relationships and some even their lives. Desperation drives the migration. Poverty is strong motivation.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think the mothers are right to leave their children? Why or why not? How would you feel if your mother left you in order to send you money for food and clothing?

Discussion Question 2

What are some things the United States or the mothers' home countries could do to improve their citizens' lives so the mothers don't have to leave in order to provide for their children?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways do you think Sonia Nozario's experiences will differ from Enrique's?

Vocabulary

ventured, timbre, quell, coaxing, brutal, smuggler, immigrant, incomprehensible, envied, relegating, generation, poverty, disintegration, hostile, paralleled, insatiable, smattering, migrating, corrosive, dehumanized, demonized, perspective, illuminate, vivid, nuanced, bandits, route, detention, machete, mutilated, churning, genocidal, mundane, vaguely, colleague, hindered, haunts, crucial, corroborate, notoriously, vicious, tranquil, isolated, excruciatingly, iota, persecution, emigrated, threadbare, malnourished, stamina, awed, invaluable, quest, consequences, optimists, gratitude, sacrificed



Chapter 1

Summary

The story begins with Lourdes, 24, leaving Honduras without her children -- 5-year-old son Enrique and 7-year-old Belky. Enrique doesn't understand why his mother is leaving. He clings to her leg and she can't bring herself to tell him goodbye.

Lourdes has tried making a living in Honduras doing laundry and selling gum, crackers and cigarettes on the street. It isn't enough money to feed her children, much less allow them to continue their education, which requires uniforms, supplies and tuition. Lourdes knows she cannot find a well-paying job in Honduras, so she has decided to illegally emigrate to the United States where she can make enough money to send back to her children in Honduras, along with clothes and toys. Emigrating will allow Lourdes to pay for her children's schooling and offer them a better future. Lourdes has only ever seen the United States on television screens in wealthy Hondurans' homes.

Lourdes leaves Belky with Lourdes' mother and sisters, and Enrique goes to live with his father, Luis, and paternal grandmother, Maria, 6 miles away. Lourdes leaves with a smuggler and crosses Mexico on buses. She imagines being back with her children, then enters the United States through a sewage tunnel in Tijuana. The smuggler is supposed to take Lourdes to Miami, Florida, but instead he abandons her at a Los Angeles, California, bus station. After 3 days, a hungry Lourdes walks from the bus station to a factory where she works two hours packing tomatoes and makes \$14. Lourdes' brother's friend in Los Angeles helps her procure a fake Social Security card and find a job as a nanny to a 3-year-old girl. She quits after 7 months because caring for the child makes her miss her own children too much.

Lourdes sends gifts and money to her children and Enrique's grandmother assures him that his mother will be home soon. When he is 7, his father brings a woman home who doesn't like Enrique. After spilling hot chocolate on Enrique, Luis throws the woman out, but they get back together and Luis leaves Enrique alone with his grandmother. Luis blames Lourdes for his estrangement from his son because she left.

Belky, living with her Aunt Rosa Amalia, cries herself to sleep over missing her mother, but scolds herself for being ungrateful for the things Lourdes sends and the money for Belky to attend school. Rosa Amalia worries.

Lourdes sends enough money for Enrique to eat, but it doesn't cover school expenses and he must work to help his grandmother. He sells tamales and fruit juice. When he's 10, he begins selling spices in the market, where he first sees people sniffing glue to get high. Sometimes Lourdes doesn't call Enrique for an entire year. She says it's too expensive and she'd rather send the money to her children. She's also ashamed of her impoverished life in the United States.



Lourdes has a boyfriend, Santos. She hopes living with him will help her save more money and be able to send more expensive things back to Honduras. She also wants to either bring her children to the United States or return to Honduras and build a house and grocery store. Santos drinks a lot. Lourdes become pregnant and has a difficult delivery. Santos never shows up at the hospital for the two days she and the baby, Diana, are there. He returns to their apartment on the third day.

Santos loses his job. Lourdes loses hers, but finds another. Santos punches Lourdes in a drunken, jealous rage. Santos takes their saved money -- thousands of dollars -- and goes back to Honduras when Diana is 1. He promises to make a life for them there, but instead spends all the money on alcohol and a young girl, then disappears. Lourdes can't afford her apartment or car payments anymore and moves into a converted carport for \$300 a month. Lourdes begins working at a bar where she must entice men to buy drinks and talk to her. She changes jobs again, working in a gas station and cleaning oil refinery offices and houses, barely having time to sleep in between. Some of the people she works for treat her well while others go out of their way to humiliate her.

Lourdes gives money to gang members near her home to avoid trouble, worrying what would happen to her children if she died. Belky is angry about Diana. Lourdes' family and Enrique beg her to come back to Honduras, but she refuses because she needs to send money she makes in the United States. She hires people, at a cost of thousands of dollars, to help her become a citizen, but they all defraud her and take her money without doing anything for her. She promises Enrique that she will return for Christmas, but doesn't. She promises every year, but never makes it back. She is afraid to return without United States citizenship because she doesn't know if she will be able to get back. She considers hiring a smuggler to bring the children to her, but is afraid the smuggler will harm or abandon them. Lourdes hears many stories of such instances. Santos returns when Diana is 4, but Immigration and Naturalization Services catches and deports him. He tried again to reach the United States, but disappears again -- this time for good. Lourdes assumes he died in Mexico. She isn't willing to risk their lives. She also doesn't want to expose them to the gangs, drugs and crime in Los Angeles.

Enrique asks his grandmother how Lourdes reached the United States and Maria says, "Maybe she went on the trains."

Eventually, Enrique has to work in order to help support his grandmother. He begins getting into trouble, and she can't handle him anymore. Lourdes arranges for Enrique to live with her eldest brother, Marco Antonio Zablah, and his family. Marco is good to Enrique. He lives in a middle class home and makes decent money. He even buys Enrique his own television. But one day when Marco is out working his job as a money changer, bandits hijack him and kill him. Marco's girlfriend kicks Enrique out of the house. He goes to live with his maternal grandmother.

There he meets Maria Isabel, who lives across the street with her Aunt Gloria. They begin dating and fall in love, but Enrique cannot stop thinking about traveling to the United States to find his mother. He also has become addicted to sniffing glue and



smoking marijuana. He becomes deeply indebted to his marijuana dealer and can't pay. The dealer threatens to kill Belky. He steals from his aunt to pay the debt.

Enrique finally decides to leave. When he tells his father, Luis gives Enrique enough money to buy a soda and wishes him luck. His grandmother begs him not to go, but she gives him a little money, anyway. He says goodbye to the rest of his family and heads out to go to the United States.

Analysis

Lourdes faces a cruel dilemma: does she stay with her children and watch them suffer and possibly starve, or does she leave them in order to provide a better life? There is no easy answer and neither will result in a happy ending. So Lourdes shows her love for her children by leaving them, something they are both too young to understand. All Belky and Enrique know is that their mother abandoned them to others' care and they interpret this as Lourdes not loving them enough, if at all.

The question raised is whether material things, even food and education, are enough to replace a mother's love. Is it easier to watch your children go hungry or to feed them but not be able to see them for years, possibly never again. Lourdes knows she could die trying to cross into the United States or that the government might deport her if she does manage to cross the border. Her decision to risk everything comes down to wanting more for her children than she had, a universal sentiment parents from all classes, races, religions and nationalities share.

This decision is Lourdes' sacrifice, yet Belky and especially Enrique don't recognize their mother's pain. All they know is that they miss her. Her promises to return home, while well-intentioned, add to her children's resentment. Because she never follows through on the promises, her children see them as lies. Diana's birth compounds the pain. To Belky and Enrique, Lourdes has begun a new life without them and replaced them with a new child. Yet still they don't give up on Lourdes.

It's Enrique's grandmother who first plants the seed in his mind to ride the dangerous trains north to find his mother. Maria is supposed to protect him. Instead she practically pushes him into danger's path and sets him on his course. She seems to recognize her blunder immediately, telling Enrique that it's a dangerous journey and he shouldn't consider it, but his desire to be with his mother is too strong. Nazario describes him as sensitive, open only when his mother is near. He's forced to come out of his shell far sooner than he otherwise would have, something that makes him both brave and reckless.

Discussion Question 1

If Lourdes had chosen to stay in Honduras, how do you think Enrique and Belky would have felt, knowing that other mothers went north in order to provide better lives? Do you think Lourdes faced her children's contempt no matter what she did? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

What kind of relationship do you think Belky and Diana would have if Belky had been able to emigrate to the United States to be with her mother and sister?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think happened to Santos?

Vocabulary

resolve, bleak, spectacular, navigate, tainted, deliverance, quest, bewildered, hallucinates, incomprehensible, adolescent, commiserates, console, jostling, contempt, delirious, facade, humiliation, exacerbates, unwittingly, skeptical, labyrinth, literate, deported



Chapter 2

Summary

Fast-forward a few years and find Enrique bleeding, beaten, in Oaxaca, Mexico. Sirenio Gomez Fuentes, a field hand, finds Enrique wearing only underpants, limping and swerving as he walks. Enrique asks Fuentes for a pair of pants, which Fuentes gives him before telling Enrique to seek out the Las Anonas mayor, Carlos Carrasco.

The mayor takes Enrique to his home, where the mayor and his mother treat Enrique's wounds the best they can. Enrique's teeth are broken. People come to see him, ask if he's going to be OK. Enrique tells them he is seeking his mother and people give him money. Carrasco knows Enrique will die if they can't find someone to drive him to get medical care. Carrasco convinces Adan Diaz Ruiz, mayor of San Pedro Tapanatepec, to drive Enrique. Ruiz thinks it's cheaper and easier to get Enrique to a doctor than to deal with another dead body -- there have been 8 migrant bodies in the town in 18 months. On the way, a police officer approaches the truck and Enrique recognizes him as a man who had robbed Enrique the day before. It is a common practice, the officers using what they extort from migrants to pay for vehicles and large houses. It was not the first time police officers had robbed Enrique on his way through Mexico.

This is Enrique's 7th attempt to reach the United States and Lourdes. He began first with a friend, but subsequent attempts he made alone. Each time, Mexican officials sent him back over the border to Guatamala. His 6th attempt ended at the United States-Mexico border before Mexican officials caught him and sent him back. Along the way, he slept in sewer culverts, on top of mausoleums and on the ground. He went long periods of time without food or even water, resorting to drinking stagnant, algae-covered, yellow water and water out of a cow's trough.

He spends time in Tecun Uman, Guatamala, on the border -- one of the most dangerous places on the route. It's the easiest place to cross and draws Los Angeles-based gangs who traffic humans, arms and drugs.

On this most recent attempt, 6 men attack Enrique on top of a train car where he's fallen asleep. They steal everything except his underpants, tossing a piece of paper containing Lourdes' phone number away. They beat Enrique. He escapes, running from train car to train car before jumping off amid gunfire. He sleeps for several hours before stumbling upon Fuentes. He thinks about his mother, his family and Maria Isabel, the girlfriend he's left behind in Honduras -- who might be pregnant. Maria Isabel doesn't believe Enrique actually left until Maria, his grandmother, says so. Maria Isabel makes plans to cross to the United States behind Enrique. She thinks traveling together will help keep them safe.

Dr. Guillermo Toledo Montes patches Enrique up and gives him medicine. The doctor, who has seen many severely injured and dead migrants, tells Enrique not to go on, to



go back to Honduras. The doctor has treated patients whom gang members or bandits threw off trains, people who no longer had limbs because the train ran them over. Some gangsters and bandits attack migrants with machetes.

The local police allow Enrique to sleep on their command post floor and the next morning, Enrique heads back toward the trains. People seeing his injuries hand him money along the way. A driver who turns out to be an off-duty immigration officer picks Enrique up and puts him on a bus for deportation. Some of the other passengers, beaten, have decided to return home. Others, including Enrique, plan to try again.

Analysis

Enrique's desire to see his mother again drives him on his journey north. He refuses to give up, even after 6 deportations back to Guatemala and so much time spent fearing for his life. He's been robbed, beaten, nearly killed, yet he goes on. This is the pull his mother has over him, though she'd rather he didn't risk his life to be with her.

The migrants riding trains through Mexico are mostly children and teenagers. They are poor, alone and vulnerable. They are easy prey for those who choose to take advantage of them. The migrants cannot go to authorities for fear of either a second round of victimization or deportation. Those who try to take on the gangs and bandits often end up severely injured or dead. It is a reign of terror through Mexico and the government allows it to go on unabated. Enrique had a girl he loved in Honduras, a girl who might be pregnant with his child, yet he still chose to leave to find his mother. There was nothing strong enough in Honduras to keep him behind.

That so many children choose this harrowing journey shows that perhaps the better choice would be for the mothers to stay with their children and try to make the best of life in their home countries. There is cruelty and danger along the way. But there is also kindness and hope. Many people in Oaxaca help Enrique. His travels through Mexico reveal the best and worst of the human spirit.

Discussion Question 1

What drives the migrants to risk their limbs and lives to reach the United States?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think mothers would tell their children if they knew the children were going to attempt to travel to the United States to be with them?



Discussion Question 3

If you were Enrique, based on how various people treated you on your travels, what would you ultimately conclude about human beings in general?

Vocabulary

hamlet, apprehension, thatched, hobbles, encounters, stout, futile, balks, mutilated, recoils, extorted, denounced, callow, perilous, pilgrimage, mausoleum, stagnant, parched, lifeblood, destitute, ford, platoon, lurching, pummel, buffer, void, traverses, concussion, lesions, mutilated, chronicles, wielding



Chapter 3

Summary

Enrique wades across the Rio Suchiate, a river along the Guatemala-Mexico border that leads into Chiapas, Mexico. Chiapas is a dangerous area, full of gangs, bandits and crooked police officers. He must catch his first train there. It is his eighth attempt to reach the United States.

Enrique heads to the cemetery, one of the places he can sleep that is a somewhat safe distance from the police department, but also close enough to hear trains come into town. He sleeps next to a member of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, Big Daddy, whom he's befriended who can help keep him safe from other gangsters. Big Daddy is 15 years old.

People have been murdered and raped in the cemetery. They are on top of a mausoleum when Big Daddy wakes Enrique to warn him of a police raid. Police have caught and deported Enrique from the cemetery before. An officer finds them and take them to jail to await deportation. Enrique hears a rumor that a train is due in a few hours. Enrique waits until the police are distracted and, using a bicycle, he scales the jail wall and flees. He runs alongside a departing freight train and finally pulls himself aboard. A boy a few cars back holds onto the ladder, but can't pull himself up. The train is pulling him under, but other migrants manage to reach the boy and pull him to safety atop the train. He meets an 11-year-old boy also traveling to find his mother in the United States.

Enrique considers hiding inside a boxcar, but he has heard horror stories of people being locked inside and dying from the heat. He decides to ride on top of a hopper car where he is high enough to see anyone approaching. He fears the car tipping over, which happens regularly. Enrique has previously been on a train that derailed. Migrants at the front of the train warn others of a branch so they know to duck down.

Enrique must remain wary. Besides the physical dangers, there are often police raids on trains. Every time the train slows, he must watch for this. The migrants climb down ladders each time the train slows, ready to run. They climb back up as it picks up pace.

The train comes upon La Arrocera, a notorious checkpoint where police round up many migrants. Police usually catch about half of the train riders. Migrants spot 20 agents and warn the others, who jump from the train and flee. The agents spot Enrique, who has remained atop the train hoping they won't see him. He hopes they won't come up after him since there is no ladder leading to the top of his car, but one begins climbing. Enrique runs across the train top, descends a ladder and flees into the bushes. He hears gunshots behind him. Now he must worry about *madrinas*, civilians who assist the police. They carry machetes, beat migrants and steal from them. There are also many bandits in the area who will beat and murder migrants. Guillermina Galvez Lopez lives



near the tracks and tells Nazario of migrants who hurt themselves running into an electrified fence or who have shown up at her house missing limbs and even heads -- other migrants carry them to her. Enrique made it through La Arrocera previously by sticking close to a band of gangsters, but he is alone this time.

Enrique runs on, passing an abandoned house where bandits and gangsters often rape women. Some of the female migrants where signs claiming to have AIDS to deter rapists while others disguise themselves as boys.

Enrique makes it around La Arrocera. He's thirsty, but know he's unlikely to find assistance in Chiapas, where residents are fed up with migrants. Some are afraid of them. Enrique meets another migrant who has managed to get around La Arrocera and volunteers to approach a house to ask for water on behalf of both of them. The woman in a nearby house gives him food and water, then Enrique reboards the moving train.

Maria Isabel confesses to her Aunt Gloria that she plans to go after Enrique. Maria Isabel's cousin Karla Yamileth Chavez alerts Maria Isabel's mother, Eva, who berates her daughter. Maria Isabel decides not to go, but she is now more afraid for Enrique than she was before.

On top of the train, Enrique must deal with 105-degree heat beating down on metal cars and the possibility of gangsters bent on harming migrants. Befriending gang member El Brujo has kept Enrique safe on previous trips. He has made sure on subsequent trips to stick by friendly gang members, but on a previous trip when gang members wants to throw a member of a rival gang off of the train, Enrique refused to participate, which cost him the gang's protection. Enrique is afraid to sleep while he is in gang territory.

The train crosses into San Ramon, where police are especially brutal and steal from migrants. They have caught Enrique here before.

Many migrants never leave Chiapas. Trains claim their limbs and lives. Olga Sanchez Martinez treats them at The Shelter of Jesus the Good Shepherd. She does her best to heal their minds as well as their bodies, assuring those who have lost limbs that they can still lead full lives.

Finally, Enrique is in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. Two other migrants ask Enrique to go into town and buy them food that they will share with him as payment. Enrique does his best to stay clean and blend in so police don't recognize him as a migrant. He has learned Mexican phrases that differ from those Hondurans use. He stops to get his hair cut in the local style.

In Ixtepec, Enrique catches a glimpse of his face for the first time since the attack. He sees scars, bruises and that one eye still droops.



Analysis

Enrique is on his 8th attempt to reach the United States. He's been beaten, robbed and lost friends along the way. The journey is brutal, but he keeps on. He has learned a lot along the way and he is using those lessons to make it past some of the most difficult obstacles along the way. But he isn't the only one who has learned from experience. Many of the people who live near the train tracks are afraid to help migrants because they or someone they know has received brutal treatment for offering assistance. Other migrants' bad behavior makes life more difficult for migrants who only want to pass through and have no bad intentions.

There is a lot of talk in both Mexico and the United States about illegal immigration. Some have compassion for the immigrants while others scorn them. Some blame them for many crimes while others believe they only want to work. What Nazario uncovers by retracing Enrique's steps is that both are correct and the issues exist wherever migrants are. In the same vein, there are people who scorn and even harm migrants, while others are like Martinez, who offers only empathy and help where needed.

Enrique's determination and strength embody a spirit that most countries would welcome, especially in their workforces. One must wonder, though, if he and those like him are courageous and strong or stupid. He's taking unnecessary risks and leaving those who love him in distress. He may have left a pregnant girlfriend behind and a child who might have to grow up without a father. He has resented his own mother for years and he is risking his life to find her again without a thought about his own potential child. In many ways, once again there is no good choice. It is poverty that drives these circumstances and forces people's hands.

Enrique's injuries, which he will bear the marks of for the rest of his life, drive him forward as much as anything else. He's stubborn as well as determined. He has reached a point where he will get where he's going or die trying.

Discussion Question 1

Enrique has ridden on a train before that derailed, yet his desire to find his mother overcomes his fear. What do you think about his decision to continue riding trains despite the danger? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

Using their rear view mirrors, train conductors can often see the brutality gang members inflict upon migrants riding on top of the cars. What do you think the conductors think? What could they do to help the migrants? How do you think seeing these things affects them?



Discussion Question 3

If a migrant in need knocked on your door, how would you respond?

Vocabulary

depot, dilapidated, mausoleum, titter, peril, comrades, excrement, sacrifice, futile, emerge, nauseating, uninhabited, creosote, summons, frantic, cunning, arrayed, overwhelming, suspicious, jockeyed, compressor, callous, churning, exceptionally, scapular, inadvertently, pressurized, choreographed, lurches, reinforcements, extraordinary, impunity, collaborate, mysteriously, testifying, vendor, prey, tentacles, notorious, hemorrhaging, murky, ambushed, loamy, rendezvous, bequeaths, confides, berates, emphasized, searing, enviously, adobe, ruthlessly, brutality, legendary, territory, convenient, retaliate, crevice, oppressive, recede, cauterized, tourniquets, sutured, seethe, plagued, recuperate, mangled, prostheses, mutilated, ragtag, rickety, feasible, ration, orthopedic, artificial, recuperate, scrounged, wallow, coaxes, disciples, travails, castrate, denigration, anthropologist



Chapter 4

Summary

In Veracruz, Enrique finds the residents helpful and friendly, going as far as warning migrants of police waiting ahead. The people credit the indigenous cultures as well as saying it's "a good way to protest Mexico's policies against illegal immigration." They recognize the hypocrisy of expecting the United States to accept Mexican immigrants while refusing to allow Central American migrants even to just pass through Mexico.

Residents hearing the train run from their houses along the tracks and throw food, water and other necessities to the migrants riding on the train tops. They throw coffee and Coca-Cola to help the migrants stay awake and avoid falling off the trains. When the migrants first see the people, they don't know what they have and are afraid that the bundles are full of rocks and the residents are going to throw the rocks at the migrants. Enrique receives a bag of rolls from a woman and child. The people, who are poor, are proud of their generosity. Seventy-year-old Soledad Vasquez flings bags of food that her 100-year-old mother prepares. Many of the residents' children and neighbors have gone to the United States themselves, searching for better opportunities than they can find at home. The local bishop, Hipolito Reyes Larios encourages the generosity, equating the migrants to Christ.

Local priests give migrants safe haven from police inside the churches. The migrants can sleep there and find food. Some find refuge in citizens' homes, even though police can charge the residents with immigrant smuggling for allowing it. The locals even go out of their way to save migrants from police who are harassing them. Church members have organized protests against police deporting migrants. Forty churches in the diocese donate money and organize to help the migrants. One priest donated all the money he had saved for his own retirement. The police arrest some residents and extort money from them in exchange for their freedom.

When drunken officers shoot and beat a pregnant teenage migrant, residents organize and force the police to stop. The next day, 500 residents march on Nogales city hall and demand the release of any migrants the police are holding inside.

Enrique decides to ration his rolls, aware that they may be the only food he has for a while. The train approaches Cordoba, where migrant crackdowns become more vigorous due to more valuable cargo and it becomes costlier to stop the trains if a migrant falls off and sustains an injury or dies.

Enrique jumps from the train as it slows on its way into the station. A block from the station, two police officers approach Enrique. They threaten to shoot him if he runs and take him to a railroad shed where they are already holding about 20 other migrants. The officers take everything the migrants have as a bribe and let them go. He sleeps on a flatbed truck, then catches a train in the morning. Now the train takes him through



mountains. There are fewer migrants aboard and the tracks are smoother. Trains derail less often in northern Mexico.

A man in Orizaba, after inquiring about Enrique's scars, gives Enrique 15 pesos for food. He begs two sweaters and finds a discarded blanket in a train car, which he will need soon as the temperatures begin dropping through the mountains. He shares his food with other riders and is thankful for the camaraderie among riders. He shares his blanket with two other riders in order to also share body heat. They ride through tunnels, which cause the train's exhaust to pack closely to the train top and migrants breathe it. Many riders have only T-shirts against the cold. They jog alongside the train when it slows in order to keep warm. They build fires at night.

Enrique arrives in Mexico City. Residents in Mexico City are neither friendly nor helpful to migrants. They say they are afraid, as migrants have victimized some residents near the tracks. Enrique finds one woman willing to help. She gives him food and lemonade. He hides in a culvert to avoid police. He chooses his next train, which goes to the Texas border and travels mostly at night. Because trains from Mexico City are faster, fewer migrants ride on top of them. Enrique and two friends find a boxcar and Enrique braces the door open with a rock.

There are high-voltage live wires above the train that often electrocute migrants. Enrique carefully avoids the wires as he climbs atop a car to retrieve a blanket he's spotted. They're sound asleep when the train stops and police officers discover them. The officers take the migrants to their jefe, who pats them down for drugs, gives them food, water and toothpaste and allows them to reboard the train. The jefe even warns them to get off the train before the San Luis Potosi station to avoid security officers.

Enrique and his friends get off the train and take a taxi north where Enrique finds food for the three of them to share. He finds a job with a brick maker who also offers Enrique a place to sleep and food. He also gives Enrique shoes and clothing and pays him a fare wage. The brick maker advises Enrique to ride in a Volkswagon van through a nearby checkpoint and then take a bus to Matehuela, then try to get a ride in a truck to Nuevo Laredo on the Rio Grande. A man in Matehuela gives Enrique a place to sleep and he finds a truck driver willing to take him north. The truck driver buys Enrique food and drops him off near the Nuevo Laredo airport. He takes a bus the rest of the way.

A man Enrique knows from the train takes him to an encampment on the Rio Grande. He can see the United States.

Analysis

Enrique's experiences in Veracruz and farther north are far different from what he experienced in southern Mexico. The people are friendlier and more helpful, which aids his journey. He probably wouldn't have made it to the border without their generosity and caring.



The people in Veracruz live in extreme poverty, yet they are more willing to give than people who are more affluent and would hurt less by giving. The people in Veracruz have strong religious convictions and their church leaders foster this spirit in the community. It is because they can easily put themselves in the migrants' shoes that they want to help them. There also seems to be less crime in this area. The migrants aren't in constant fear of gangster and bandits through Veracruz. The residents' refusal to stand by while even the police victimize the migrants seems to have deterred criminals from doing so, as well.

Enrique's Journey is a lesson in extremes of human nature, bot good and bad. This chapter illustrates that while people can be incredibly cruel, they are also capable of great acts of kindness and love. Migrants set out for the United States full of hope. It would be easy for them to lose faith on the way. It is, perhaps, the people of Veracruz who help them continue on, despite the dangers and hardships still ahead.

This chapter is also a lesson in friendship, as Enrique bands together with other migrants. They share their money and their food and protect each other as they travel along the railway. Enrique has realized he cannot survive alone in the world. He needs others, something he seemed to forget while still living in Honduras.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the people in Veracruz are so eager to help migrants when people elsewhere in Mexico treat them so poorly?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the jefe lets the boys go?

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Enrique feels seeing the United States from across the river? He's been this far before and sent back across the southern Mexico border. Do you think he is concerned that will happen again? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

summit, generosity, indigenous, gratitude, impetus, archdiocese, refugee, catechisms, commotion, gaunt, parasites, mobilize, anxiously, haste, hobbling, sacraments, sacristy, sanctuary, proposition, delinquents, informal, adorned, gunnysacks, oblige, hoard, humanitarian, apprehended, ultimately, indignant, trudged, crevice, cavernous, putrid, relishes, camaraderie, verdant, designate, elude, noxious, cultivated, metropolis, semaphores, hospitality, rampant, hostile, demeanor, culvert, bustles, combustible,



scarcity, vandalism, desolate, astonished, exploit, stoked, hawk, convoy, oblivious, relentlessly



Chapter 5

Summary

Enrique is camped along the Rio Grande in Mexico. He's been trying to reach the United States for two months. He wades into the water, Rio Bravo on the Nuevo Laredo side, and a United States border agent warns him back to Mexico.

Enrique lost his mother's phone number when the bandits attacked him on the train. He knows the last time they spoke she was in North Carolina, but not exactly where or if she's still there. Many of the children who make it to the border have lost their mothers' phone numbers and often end up dead. Enrique remembers the phone number for a tire store in Honduras where he worked. He can call there and ask the owner to reach out to Enrique's aunt and grandmother in order to get his mother's phone number, but he needs to buy 100 pesos' worth of phone cards to make that happen and he has no money.

Enrique shares a mattress at the camp with three others. They hang their clothes on wire springs torn from another mattress and set upright. Enrique bathes and sometimes drinks from the river, which carries sewage from the city. He decides to wash cars to earn the money he needs for the phone cards. He sits near a taco stand at night and offers to wash cars for the stand's customers. There are several other migrants doing the same. One night, he is there until 4 a.m. and has made 30 pesos, which equals \$3. Another night, he makes 20 pesos, 60 on another. Some nights after closing, the taco stand workers give Enrique food. His only other source of food is two local churches, St. Joseph's Parish and the Parish of the Holy Child, which give meal cards to migrants. Each migrant receives two cards worth a total of 15 meals.

Leti Limon, who cleans houses for \$20 each in Laredo, Texas, manages the migrants' daily meals, handing out and punching the cards. Some of the migrants haven't eaten in days. Enrique meets another migrant from Honduras there, Ermis Galeano. Ermis is also the victim of a bandit attack atop the trains. He's on his third attempt to reach his mother. Enrique also meets Mery Gabriela Posas Izaguirre, and Gabi, also from Honduras. Gabi was angry to learn her mother's job in the United States was caring for another family's children after leaving her own. Gabi was traveling with her aunt and a smuggler, who robbed and left them in Tapachula, just over the southern Mexican border. Gabi and her aunt tagged along with smugglers who constantly asked Gabi for sex in exchange for their help, which she refused. They hitchhiked the rest of the way.

Kelvin Maradiaga also lost his mother's phone number, but when he called home to get it he found that the only phone in his Honduran town no longer worked. He has to return the Honduras for the phone number and make the trip again.

Enrique relies on El Tirindaro in order to stay at the camp. The man has not asked Enrique for the usual fee -- heroin or beer. El Tirindaro is a coyote (smuggler) who



crosses migrants into the United States on inner tubes for \$1,200 each, which he splits with his partners who move the migrants on the United States side. He knows Enrique is a potential client. He associates with Los Osos, a local mob. There are several permanent camp residents, including migrants who have tried and failed to cross into the United States. Staying at the camp keeps Enrique safe from Los Osos and local police, whom El Tirindaro bribes, though the police still rob camp residents sometimes. Camp residents look after Enrique.

Enrique's meal cards run out and he now needs to use some of his car washing money to buy food. He begins living on crackers and soda and some days he doesn't eat at all. Some people share food with him and he learns to fish.

El Tirindaro paddles Enrique on inner tubes to get him used to it so Enrique will be less afraid when it's time to cross. Enrique cannot swim.

Enrique talks to other migrants about his experiences and listens to them talk about theirs. He steps in to help a fellow migrant whom members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang are harassing and now the gang wants to teach Enrique a lesson. Police arrest Enrique twice for loitering, but he sweeps and mops the jail to earn his release. One night, knowing El Tirindaro won't be at the camp because it's raining, Enrique is too frightened to go there, so he sleeps in an abandoned house,

On Mother's Day, Enrique buys his first 50-peso phone card and gives it to a friend of El Tirindaro for safekeeping until he can afford the second. He fears if he has it and the police catch him, they will steal it.

At St. Joseph's Parish, Enrique meets mothers who have left their children behind, just as his did. The mothers try to comfort each other in their grief. Some of them express regret over leaving, but say they cannot turn back after coming so far. Separations, no matter the intentions last between 6 and 8 years.

Lourdes is thinking about Enrique on that Mother's Day. She has learned of his leaving Honduras, but she doesn't know where he went and hopes he's OK. She fears for his life. One of her roommates' relative arrives and tells Lourdes about his smuggler, who loaded 150 migrants into the tank of a gasoline truck. Several of them died.

In order to deal with his hunger, Enrique again begins sniffing glue.

On the night Enrique makes 60 pesos washing cars, he buys a 30-peso phone card, thinking his second call home to get his mother's number will be shorter than the first. He uses the other 30 for food. After, he smokes marijuana, drinks alcohol and has El Tirindaro tattoo "EnriqueLourdes" across his chest. The next day, he is so hungry that he sells his first phone card for less than its value in order to buy food. He decides to try to earn another 20 pesos to call home and ask his aunt and uncle to call back so he won't need a second card. But someone steals Enrique's bucket, which he needs to wash cars, as well as sit on to chop food and wash his feet. A friend tries to cheer Enrique and he suggests the two of them go into the city and beg. The friend fakes an



injured leg, but they leave early, afraid of getting caught. They've earned only enough to buy crackers. Another friend loans Enrique a bucket so he can wash cars again.

Enrique's friends talk him out of crossing the river on his own because it's too dangerous. He cannot cross on a train because there are too many checkpoints and inspections on both sides of the border. He risks getting lost in the Texas desert if he tries walking across it alone. It's also a trip that would take at least a week in 100-plus degree temperatures. Some ranchers shoot migrants who cross their lands or ask for water.

One rancher, Jake Smith, says some of the migrants bring drugs and rob the ranchers. He says even the ones who don't leave gates open and cattle get out. Border patrol agents instruct people to leave food and water outside to avoid having their homes broken into.

Agents Charles Grout and Manuel Saucedo track migrants by footprints. Their drive is as much about doing their jobs as saving lives. They often find immigrants severely injured from snake bites, dehydration or other causes. Deported migrants often end up back at St. Joseph's Parish and Enrique talks to them about their experiences. They travel at night when snakes and scorpions are out looking for food. Enrique decides to ask his mother to hire a smuggler when he talks to her. He decides El Tirindaro is a smuggler he can trust and who will get him where he needs to go without getting caught or hurt.

Finally, Enrique earns enough money to buy another phone card. The priest at St. Joseph's Parish allows migrants to make and receive calls at the church. Father Leonardo Lopez Guajardo -- Padre Leo -- has a soft spot in his heart for migrants and does all he can to help them.

Enrique calls home and two hours later, his aunt and uncle call him back with his mother's phone number. He goes to a pay phone to call his mother because he doesn't want anyone to see him cry. He's calling collect and he fears she might refuse the call, that she'll be angry with him for leaving school and making the dangerous journey to find her.

Lourdes accepts the charges. She tells Enrique she was worried, then agrees to send money for El Tirindaro and his partners to get Enrique to her in North Carolina. After the call, Lourdes cries.

Analysis

Nuevo Laredo is a full of contradictions. Some residents fear and hate the migrants, while others show them compassion. The camp where Enrique stays is dangerous -- gangs and bandits are likely to strike, but he also meets El Tirindaro, who is generous and helpful, despite his own issues. Enrique's stay in the town allows him to commiserate with others in his position and learn that his experience and feelings are not unique. He also learns how lucky he is to have come so far relatively unscathed.



The city highlights the problems both the mothers and their children face, as mothers newly leaving their children share space with children seeking mothers who left years ago.

Besides the migrants, Enrique once again encounters great kindness from the faithful. The meals the church provides, through its selfless priest and parishioners, can mean the difference between life and death for Enrique and the other migrants.

Discussion Question 1

After the poverty in Honduras and the hardships on his trip through Mexico, culminating in living on a riverbank, how do you think life will differ for Enrique when he reaches his mother? What do you think will be his impression of the United States?

Discussion Question 2

What is your opinion about the border patrol agents?

Discussion Question 3

All of the migrants are in similar situations, yet they often steal from each other -- like when someone takes Enrique's bucket and shoe. Why do you think they do this rather than helping each other? What motivates those who do cooperate to do so?

Vocabulary

stymied, ransom, proclaim, haven, superstition, jostle, envisioning, hallucinates, perpetual, undercut, leniency, festooned, berth, atrocities, unwary, loitering, refectory, traumatic, asphyxiation, murky, mottled, methodically, despair, treacherous, delirious, intrusions, apprehended, arsenal, thermal, quarry, gargantuan, impunity, astonishingly, ordination, disheveled, exasperated, copious, interpretation, dignity, onslaught, circumvents, confiscates, contraband, advocate, delinquents, tithes, decrepit, loiter, foreboding



Chapter 6

Summary

Enrique is crossing to the United States. El Tirindaro is going to push him and two other migrants -- Mexicans -- on an inner tube across the Rio Grande from Nuevo Laredo into Texas where they will meet up with El Tirindaro's partners. The partners have an SUV in which they will transport the migrants. Enrique never learned to swim, so the crossing is particularly scary for him. Many migrants have drowned crossing the river.

As the migrants wait on an island halfway across, a border patrol vehicle passes on the Texas side, but doesn't see them. When it's clear, El Tirindaro takes them the rest of the way across. If caught, Enrique faces deportation back to Honduras or time in jail awaiting deportation. Many migrant minors end up there. Some attempt suicide because the conditions are so bad.

Once on the American side -- Laredo, Texas -- the migrants wait for an hour and a half in a freezing creek into which a sewage treatment plant dumps refuse. El Tirindaro has food and soda for the migrants, but Enrique is too nervous to eat or drink. They run to where El Tirindaro's partners wait. Inside the SUV, Enrique sleeps. The driver drinks beer as they go.

El Tirindaro wakes Enrique. They have to get out of the SUV before it passes through a border patrol checkpoint, then meet it up the road. Once back in the vehicle, Enrique sleeps again. El Tirindaro goes back to Mexico. His partners take Enrique to a safe house and give him clothes that will help him fit in.

In North Carolina, Lourdes waits. She feels safe and happy there and Diana is doing well. She misses Enrique and Belky. One of the smugglers calls her demanding more money to get Enrique to Orlando, Florida, where Lourdes' boyfriend will pick him up. Lourdes insists on speaking to Enrique first to make sure he is with them and well. Once the smugglers receive the full \$1,700, they depart with Enrique for Florida.

Enrique arrives with Lourdes' boyfriend at 10 a.m. on May 28, 2000. He finds Diana in the kitchen of the trailer in which his mother lives. Diana directs him to his mother, sleeping in a back bedroom. They hug and he kisses her. They're happy to be together. She cooks for him and they talk. He shows Lourdes his tattoo. She isn't happy, but she accepts it.

Back in Honduras, Enrique's maternal grandmother tells Maria Isabel that Enrique is with his mother. Maria Isabel cries because she thinks she will never see him again. Belky is also sad. She wants to be with her mother.

Enrique finds work as a painter, then gets promoted to sander. He helps pay some bills and sends money to Belky and Maria Isabel. He begins going out and drinking with friends. He and Lourdes begin arguing regularly. Enrique is bitter and Lourdes feels he



should be more respectful and appreciate what she's done for him. After an argument, Enrique leaves the house and stays out all night, but they make up the next day.

Maria Isabel tells Enrique over the phone that she is pregnant, and on November 2, 2000, she gives birth to Katerin Jasmin, whom they call Jasmin.

Analysis

The irony of this chapter is that Enrique finds out he has a child on the way at the same time he reaches his own mother. He is starting the cycle over again, leaving a child back in Honduras while he begins a new life in the United States.

Enrique has risked a lot and lost a lot on his way to his mother, but his risk has finally paid off. And besides reconnecting with his mother, he has a new sister with whom to bond -- a real, intact family that even includes a father figure in Lourdes' boyfriend.

Once again, though, people who have more power than others have taken advantage and preyed upon those with less power. The smugglers waited until they had Enrique in their grip before demanding more money to get him to Orlando. Lourdes had no choice other than to pay it.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the smuggler driving the SUV is willing to take on the added risk of being caught drinking and driving?

Discussion Question 2

How would you react to seeing your teenage sister for the first time?

Discussion Question 3

What would you do if you were Belky?

Vocabulary

equipped, torrent, psychedelic, contraband, tributary, effluent, suspicious, futile, romanticized, notions, resentment, console, culminates, amok, prevails, conciliatory,



Chapter 7

Summary

Enrique and Lourdes continue clashing. He tells her money wasn't a substitute for a mother's love. He's angry that she left him with his father while Belky went to Lourdes' family. He's angry that Belky got to finish school and he had to begin working at 10 years old. Lourdes says her sister specifically asked for money towards Belky's schooling while Enrique got more material things. She says Enrique's father and his family are just as guilty, as they had equal responsibility. She tells Enrique he didn't want to study and that's his own fault.

Lourdes' mother couldn't provide for her children and Lourdes had to begin working at a young age. She also didn't finish school, but Lourdes says she respects her mother for all she did.

Enrique begins drinking more and spending too much money. Lourdes tells him not to drink and drive, but he does, anyway. He goes to a regular bar and also a topless bar with friends. He deliberately makes her angry, but she also feels guilty. Lourdes tells Enrique that in the United States, parents can have their children arrested and jailed for disobeying, but he learns she's lying.

Enrique travels to find work, but he always telephones Maria Isabel on Sundays. He promises to return within 2 years. Maria Isabel tells Enrique that his family is critical of the way she cares for Jasmin and during Maria Isabel's pregnancy, one of Enrique's uncles says he doesn't think Jasmin is Enrique's child.

At Christmas, Enrique tells Lourdes that the fake tree she decorated is ugly. He says Christmas in Honduras was better. He goes out drinking on Christmas Eve and doesn't give his mother a gift, though she gives him a shirt. They have a good New Year's Eve together at a party. They share a kiss at midnight and Lourdes is happy.

In Honduras, Enrique's family continues criticizing Maria Isabel, including questioning how she spends the money Enrique sends. They are jealous that he doesn't send more to them. Maria Isabel lives with her Aunt Gloria and her family and feels she should contribute to the household. She also helps support her mother. Lourdes' sister Mirian is particularly harsh. She sends Enrique a letter telling him that Maria Isabel isn't properly caring for Jasmin and Enrique chides Maria Isabel over the phone. He threatens to return and take Jasmin away, which angers Maria Isabel.

Maria Isabel's Aunt Gloria is also angry. She tells Enrique's family to stop. After a particular confrontation, the families -- who live across the street from each other -- stop speaking.



Soon after, Lourdes and Enrique send money for a joint birthday party with Jasmin and one of Mirian's children and they want a video. Gloria convinces Maria Isabel to go for the video. She does, but only stays a short time.

Enrique stops sending money and Maria Isabel finds a job.

In North Carolina, Lourdes' boyfriend smuggles his troubled 14-year-old son to the United States, hoping to straighten him out. The boy continues getting into trouble and drops out of school. Enrique blames the boy's father for leaving him. Enrique drinks with the boy and begins smoking pot. He calls Maria Isabel less often. He begins sniffing paint thinner.

The group moves into an apartment that's bigger than the trailer. Lourdes discovers Enrique's paint thinner habit and yells at him. She says if he continues sniffing the paint thinner, he has to leave. She won't have him around Diana. Enrique runs off, but decides to stop, though he continues drinking. He gets arrested for driving drunk.

Gloria has lost her business and her house is crowded. Maria Isabel decides to move back in with her mother across town. She has a new job at a nearby mall. She begins taking Jasmin to talk to her father on their telephone calls. They talk on a computer screen so they can see each other.

Enrique and his mother continue arguing, but he gets along well with Diana. He decides he's hurting himself more than his mother and decides to change. He wants to be responsible for Jasmin. He wants to save \$50,000 and return to Honduras to build a house and start a business.

Mirian falls on hard times in Honduras and decides to leave her children in order to travel to the United States and work. Mirian's situation helps Belky understand her mother's choice. She comforts Mirian's three children.

Maria Isabel's family's situation is improving, but Enrique is sending money less frequently. He's moved out of his mother's home and his expenses have increased. They speak less often. Maria Isabel doesn't know these things and fears Enrique has another girlfriend. Gloria says Maria Isabel should find someone else while she's still young and attractive. Enrique has become more attached to the United States and wants Maria Isabel to join him, but she doesn't want to leave Jasmin. Every night, Jasmin settles down rubbing her mother's belly, then Maria Isabel rubs Jasmin's back until she falls asleep. Maria Isabel resolves not to leave Jasmin until she's at least 5 years old. Jasmin has begun calling her uncle "papi."

Maria Isabel's friends tell her she should go. Women over 25 or 28 years old cannot find work in Honduras. Companies don't think older women have enough energy. Maria Isabel's sister tried to make it to the United States, but ran out of money. Her attempt was dangerous. She won't answer when asked if she was raped. Maria Isabel has many worries and doesn't want to leave her daughter motherless.



Mirian arrives in North Carolina, but she is determined to go back to Honduras in a few years. She doesn't like it as much as Lourdes and Enrique do. Her youngest daughter calls her "auntie" and says Mirian is not her mother.

Belky falls in love with a man who proposes to her. Lourdes sends them money to build a small house. Lourdes prays for amnesty so she can travel to Honduras and see Belky.

Lourdes spends all her time working or taking care of the men in her household. She says she will never go back to Honduras, which causes a fight with Enrique. Lourdes' boyfriend tries to mitigate their tension. Lourdes begins ignoring Enrique's bad behavior and soon the group moves to Florida to find more work. Enrique tries to convince Mirian to return to Honduras and her children, but she's trying to save money to survive there when she does go back, as she plans. She wants to build a beauty salon.

Enrique goes back to North Carolina. He continues trying to convince Maria Isabel to join him. He's afraid she'll find someone new if they're apart much longer. Then he begins trying to build a better relationship with his mother. He tells Maria Isabel he will build a new life without her if she doesn't come to the United States. She still doesn't want to leave Jasmin. Finally, she agrees to think about it. She finally decides it is the best decision for Jasmin. She and Enrique together can make more money and return together to their daughter sooner. Enrique decides to move back to Florida.

Maria Isabel decides to leave Jasmin with Belky. Enrique's Aunt Rosa Amalia and Jasmin accompany Maria Isabel to the bus station where she is meeting the smuggler Enrique has hired. Maria Isabel leaves without saying goodbye to Jasmin.

Analysis

Enrique is becoming everything he was angry with his mother for. Not only has he left his own child behind, but he isn't supporting her as he should. He's losing Jasmin's love as his self-destructive streak continues.

The pressure on Maria Isabel to leave Jasmin highlights the struggles and choices women in Central America must make every day. Born into poverty, the system makes it nearly impossible for them to climb out. Even with a high school education -- which few achieve -- they cannot find work that pays anywhere near a living wage once they reach a certain age. Maria Isabel and Mirian must face the same problems that drove Lourdes out of Honduras and that make her not want to move back and in the end, they make the same decision Lourdes made -- for the good of their respective children.

Belky, though, has fared well thanks to her mother. Belky's success provides hope that perhaps the mothers' choices have positive consequences, as well, and that maybe the sacrifices can lead to a better future for their descendants. Though not ideal, Lourdes' choices have paid off for her daughter, if not for her son. Since it is usually the mothers who must leave to support their children, Belky's ability to make a living in Honduras bodes well for her future children that they will have both necessities and their mother.



Discussion Question 1

What do you think about Enrique spending so much time and money in bars when he has a child back in Honduras who needs his money? What is Enrique thinking when he does this?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Enrique is OK with both himself and Maria Isabel leaving Jasmin behind, despite his feelings about his own mother doing the same? What do you think this says about Enrique?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Enrique will ever return to Honduras, as he plans? Why or why not? What obstacles -- internal and external -- does he face?

Vocabulary

quell, destitute, nurtures, discipline, harboring, frugal, contradict, insinuated, disheveled, dilemma, bristles, reproach, diligently, vigilantly, livid, seethes, deprived, scrutinized, sully, malign, penchant, despondent, excruciating, shrouded, excessively, ignoramus, affectionate, caresses, wallow, beckoning, plight, raze, ferret, adapted, snubbed, inhibited, rationalizes, frets, inferior, armoire, prompts, ravine, gilded, corrugated, emphasizes, devises, chastity, fixating, chafes, devolves, alleviate, contradicted, mulls, relishes, flubs, amnesty, serene, anxious, embrace, clarity, curtly, cajoles, relents



Chapter 8

Summary

Smugglers take Maria Isabel to the United States on buses and in the back of a truck. She doesn't have to ride the trains. Swimming across the Rio Grande, she loses her backpack with her only photo of Jasmin. Jasmin often asks Belky about her mother and Maria Isabel misses Jasmin. She and Enrique call Jasmin at least once a week, but Jasmin has begun calling Belky's common-law husband papi.

Mirian continues planning to move back to Honduras as soon as she can and Lourdes pines for Belky. In 2006, Belky tells Lourdes she's pregnant. Soon after Belky gives birth to a son, Spanish television personality Don Francisco invites Lourdes and Enrique to appear on his show to talk about their struggles. He also invites Nazario. He surprises Lourdes by flying Belky in to appear on the show. On the show, Enrique and Lourdes talk about how much their relationship has improved.

The show is the first time Lourdes has been with all three of her children at the same time. Belky talks about how much her mother has done for her, but says a mother's love is irreplaceable. Then she gets on a plane to return to her own son.

Analysis

Of all the people involved in the story behind Enrique's journey to the United States, it seems that Belky is the only one who has learned anything. Enrique and Maria Isabel, despite knowing what Lourdes' absence cause for Enrique's life, leave their own daughter behind. In their case, it isn't necessary for both parents to go, but Enrique wants Maria Isabel by his side, regardless. They plan to bring Jasmin to live with them, but Lourdes had the same hopes for her own children and she never managed to make it happen. Will Enrique and Maria Isabel be able to fulfill their goal? Despite all they've been through, the family seems determined to repeat mistakes their parents made.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Enrique and Lourdes appear on television, despite the risk of exposure as illegal immigrants? What does this accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

What kind of future does Belky face in Honduras?



Discussion Question 3

What issues do Enrique and Lourdes face in rebuilding their relationship? Do you think they will be successful? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

retiring, satisfied, envision, resentful, vacant, frantically



Epilogue

Summary

Six months after Maria Isabel arrives in Florida, she and Enrique bring Jasmin to the United States through a smuggler they trust. She, too, crosses the river on an inner tube, but border patrol agents catch her when she reaches the United States. They release her to her parents and set a court date.

Jasmin is wary of Enrique at first, but he does his best to win her over. He and Maria Isabel teach Jasmin to hide from authorities for fear of deportation. Lourdes sees Jasmin as a way to get back some of what she lost with her own children.

The apartment complex where they live is dangerous. Gangs prey on the immigrants, knowing they won't go to the police because they are afraid of deportation. They rob the immigrants and one night they kill one of Enrique's friends. Someone breaks into Lourdes' boyfriend's van and steals thousands of dollars of equipment he needs for his business. Enrique witnesses one of the robberies and the gang members continually harass his family to frighten them. They're particularly concerned after appearing on television.

Enrique continues drinking and begin abusing prescription drugs. The drugs and alcohol cause him to not be very nice to his family and he and Maria Isabel argue often. She continuously considers throwing him out of their apartment. He uses Jasmin to plead his case to her mother. Maria Isabel cries a lot. Lourdes tells him he's going to lose Maria Isabel if he doesn't straighten up.

Belky and Lourdes both get married in 2010. Diana drops out of school with half a credit to go and Belky never finishes college. Diana begins working in a store selling telephone plans.

One day Jasmin is visiting Diana at work when a man comes in and robs the store. They are able to give a good description to police, who arrest the man. It turns out he is wanted for other crimes.

The next year, Lourdes tries to convince Maria Isabel to have another baby -- hopefully a boy -- to get Enrique to straighten out. Jasmin also wants a sister. She says no, but mistakenly thinks she can skip birth control pills without worrying about pregnancy. She doesn't refill her prescription on time one month and gets pregnant.

Enrique disappears on Christmas Eve and shows up at 3 a.m. the day after Christmas asking his mother for money. She says no and prays for God to take him away rather than continuing to make her watch him behave badly. Enrique steals his mother's wedding ring to pawn and returns to drinking with his friends where Jacksonville, Florida, police find him at a hotel and arrest him. Because of changes in federal laws, the police lock Enrique up indefinitely to await deportation proceedings. He's in a special



wing of the prison set aside specifically for illegal immigrants. They don't have the same privileges that other prisoners have.

Lourdes calls Nazario asking for help. Nazario and others believe Enrique's notoriety because of the book puts him in danger if he returns to Honduras. It has become increasingly gang-ridden and killing someone like Enrique would be a status symbol. Nazario enlists pro bono help from two Florida attorneys who attempt to get Enrique asylum.

Maria Isabel has her baby, a boy, while Enrique is in jail. Enrique considers agreeing to deportation so he can sneak back into the United States, thinking it a quicker way to get back to his family. The journey, however, is more dangerous now than when Enrique first came through Mexico. Mexico has changed its laws to allow Central Americans to travel through the country, but gang activity has increased. Gangs kidnap migrants and demand ransoms from their families. They kill many of their captives. There would also be more severe consequences if Enrique returns and is again arrested. He decides to stay and wait.

The judge denies Enrique's request because of Enrique's past drug problems and because, he says, Enrique doesn't meet specific asylum requirements. His attorneys appeal and they find a loophole. The United States created the U Visa in 2000, which allows illegal immigrants to remain in the country if they testify regarding crimes they have witnessed. Enrique's attorneys attempt to secure a U Visa based on Enrique witnessing the robbery in his apartment complex, but police didn't list Enrique as a witness so the appeal fails.

However, those eligible for a U Visa who are younger than 21 can secure the visas for their family members, and Jasmin testifies against the man who robbed the telephone store. Her testimony allows the family to stay legally in the United States and secures Enrique's release from jail.

Analysis

Enrique and Maria Isabel take the first step in breaking the cycle of abandonment when they arrange for Jasmin to join them in the United States. Even with this forward step, though, the family is not free of its demons as Enrique continues drinking and abusing drugs. Ironically, it is Jasmin's presence that saves Enrique from deportation and likely death.

Enrique blames most of his problems on Lourdes, but one can trace all of the negative experiences and consequences to the poverty they faced. Others have dealt with that poverty by turning to crime, making Honduras a more dangerous place than it was when the family members left. There is nothing for the family to return to, yet Enrique may not have a choice.

Enrique's plight also draws attention to the complex subject of illegal immigrants living in the United States and their impact on the country, as well as what to do about them. The



U Visa in particular opens a host of questions. It isn't in the country's best interest to have crime witnesses afraid to come forward for fear of deportation and it isn't compassionate to allow them to be victims simply because criminals know they're vulnerable. On the other hand, they are technically criminals themselves.

Discussion Question 1

How do you think you would manage under the stress of constantly fearing deportation if you were in this family's place?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the ethical concerns about Nazario getting involved in Enrique's deportation case?

Discussion Question 3

What is your opinion on the U Visa? What are its pros and cons? Do you support it? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

inseparable, brandishing, pummeled, potentially, doting, recognize, timid, tutelage, appeals, dominate, berate, moderated, inflicted, devises, furiously, recession, carousing, transform, erroneously, persists, satisfaction, naiveté, morph, dissolve, implement, reflective, perimeter, stark, prohibited, petition, monotony, convey, credibility, exception, imminent, disclose, swaths, marvels, extortion, instill, notoriety, inspired, prompted, broadening, advocate, incompetent, trauma, notoriety, asylum, intensify, cartel, ransom, consequences, acknowledges, redemption, inconsistencies, extort, persecuted, perpetrator, invaluable, retaliation, incentive, curtail, incensed, aggravated, proportional, humanitarian, faux, facade, transfixed, cavernous, tenacious, pro bono



Afterward

Summary

The number of illegal immigrants in the United States is increasing, many of them children. Many come from Central America, as Enrique did, to find their mothers. Mexico has become more dangerous. In 2002, El Tirindaro's body turns up in Nuevo Laredo, one of 57 murders that year. He was tortured and shot execution style. The city is in the hands of a drug-trafficking cartel. They even kill police officials and journalists who get in their way.

The 2012 upturn in the United States economy attracted even more immigrants. Though the number of adults is at a 40-year low, the number of children is up. New laws have aimed at making life more difficult for illegal immigrants, the government hoping they will leave on their own.

Immigrants are willing to do difficult jobs for low wages and no benefits. Employers say they often work harder than citizens. Their families suffer from the separation when some members stay behind.

Schools deal with many issues with migrant children reunited with their parents. They harbor resentment, which spills over into their behavior. The mothers demand respect and neither side is willing to budge. Many of the boys join gangs and many of the girls end up pregnant. Few graduate high school.

The loss of population to the countries from which the migrants come makes things more difficult there, as well. On one hand, it keeps already high unemployment from rising and families receiving money from their immigrant relatives pumps cash into the economies. However, the family separations cause unrest in the countries. Gang activity is on the rise.

At first Enrique says he wouldn't want illegal immigration if he were a citizen, but in time he changes his mind. He believes the immigrants help the economy. Many blame United States policies -- propping up corrupt governments -- for the conditions that drive the immigrants to leave their homes.

Though the immigrants do add to the United States economy, they also are the largest draw on public services because of their low incomes. And it costs significantly more to educate their children than to educate children who are citizens. Some employers take advantage of the immigrants, who can't report ill treatment without risking deportation. Companies often hire illegal immigrants over citizens for this reason. Many Latinos who live legally in the United States resent the illegal immigrants coming from the same countries.

Whether these immigrants are a burden or a boon to the country is controversial and even experts can't agree on the answer. Immigration laws are ineffective and



"schizophrenic." The attitude of citizens toward immigrants changes based on the economy's health. The only thing everyone agrees on is that in order to end it, there must be an end to poverty in the nations the migrants come from.

Analysis

Lourdes and Enrique's story is not unique and the controversy surrounding illegal immigration will continue for quite a while. With poverty at the forefront of the issue, the only way to address it is to eliminate the source.

Though Enrique himself came to the United States as an illegal immigrant, he at one point states that he wouldn't want illegal immigrants in the country if he were a citizen, which is a hypocritical statement, but honest. An objective look at what immigrants both bring to the country and take from it could arguably show that they are more a burden than a boon. At the same time, they contribute to the economy in diverse and necessary ways.

Nazario stated that she wrote the book to discourage women from leaving their children and to discourage those children whose mothers do leave from following them. The trip is dangerous and often deadly. Yet thousands continue taking the chance because they believe a better life is at the end.

Discussion Question 1

What are some things the Central American and United States governments can do to convince mothers to remain with their children?

Discussion Question 2

How can the United States best handle the current immigrant population, including the issues with teen pregnancy and gangs?

Discussion Question 3

How do you feel about the companies that choose illegal immigrants as employees over United States citizens? Do you think there should be better control over this? Explain.

Vocabulary

constitute, treacherous, clandestine, apprehended, surged, capacity, influx, prohibit, mandate, de facto, corruption, racism, irreparable, rancor, acute, emphasize, disintegration, exodus, bittersweet, destitute, delinquency, disproportionate, proportion, entitled, citizenship, repressive, regimes, fluent, abroad, comprehensive, customs,



evident, fiscal, hastened, deterioration, mandated, covet, affluence, calculus, compliant, schizophrenic, bolster, imposed, biometric, demographics, alienated, tactical, inevitable, redistribute, exodus



Characters

Enrique

Enrique is the book's main subject. Author Sonia Nazario chose the 17-year-old Honduran as a typical child migrating through Mexico from South America in order to reach the United States and his mother. Enrique's mother, Lourdes, left him when he was 4 and he's wanted to find her ever since. Back in Honduras, he became addicted to drugs, shuffled from relative's home to relative's home and dropped out of school. He planned for years to find his mother. Nazario recreates his harrowing journey from Honduras to North Carolina and finally to Florida.

Nazario describes Enrique as a sensitive child who only speaks to his mother. Shortly after she leaves, his father also leaves him – the second in a long line of abandonment, which shapes the next nearly 20 years of his life. He's angry and hurt all at the same time. He loves and misses his mother, but he resents her. He thinks of his grandmother as his mother because she raises him, but he isn't respectful to her.

Enrique is the classic example of a hurt and confused child. He rebels and self-medicates. He finds solace in a girlfriend, who he doesn't hesitate to abandon when his chance comes. She's pregnant when he leaves and he later encourages her to leave their child behind, despite his own feelings about having been the child in that situation. He redeems himself, though, by bringing his daughter to live with her parents within months of her mother leaving.

Enrique is troubled and he acts out, but ultimately he just wants his mother and a better life for his own family.

Lourdes

Lourdes is Enrique and his sister's, Belky, mother. She also has a daughter named Diana, born in Los Angeles after Lourdes immigrates to the United States. Lourdes left her children in Honduras so she could work in the United States and send money back to them.

Lourdes is guilt-ridden and sad about leaving her children behind, but she also decides that she never wants to return to Honduras, though she may choose to do so after she is finished working and saving money. She's happy in the United States. She likes the culture and the life she's built for herself.

Despite her reluctance to return to Honduras, though, Lourdes still fiercely loves and misses Enrique and Belky. When Enrique calls and asks for money to pay a smuggler to get him from Mexico to North Carolina, Lourdes doesn't hesitate to raise and borrow the money he needs. She'd worried about him from the time she found out he'd left Honduras and is thrilled to hear his voice when he calls. Enrique behaves poorly in the



United States and his anger causes him to disrespect and antagonize his mother, but through it all, she loves him and tries to help him.

Lourdes is a typical immigrant mother who's left her children behind in order to give them a better life. The relationship she has with Enrique after he joins her in the United States represents what many immigrant mothers endure, highlighting the struggles they face – do they leave their children so they can have food and shelter or do they stay and raise them to avoid the anger that's going to come?

Belky

Belky is Enrique's older sister, who also stays behind in Honduras when their mother goes to the United States. She finishes school and stays out of trouble, eventually finding a nice man with whom to settle down. They build a house in Honduras, thanks to her mother sending money for so many years. She misses her mother, but chooses to stay in Honduras where she has a son.

Diana

Diana is Lourdes' youngest child, born in the United States and therefore a citizen. She's smart, but drops out of high school a half credit from graduating and works in a telephone store.

Lourdes' Boyfriend

Nazario never names Lourdes' boyfriend who later becomes her husband. He also left a child behind when he migrated to the United States. He serves as a go-between for Lourdes and Enrique, trying to mitigate the troubles they have after their reunion as they struggle to come to terms with anger and resentment.

Maria Isabel

Maria Isabel is Enrique's girlfriend back in Honduras. He leaves her when she's pregnant with their daughter Jasmin. She endures ridicule and criticism from his family, who live across the street from her aunt's house where she and Jasmin live. Maria Isabel is attached to Jasmin and doesn't want to leave her in order to join Enrique in the United States, as he constantly asks her to do. Eventually she goes, but they are able to pay a smuggler six months later to bring Jasmin to them.

El Tirindaro

El Tirindaro is a "coyote" who runs a "camp" of migrants along the Mexican bank of the Rio Grande in Nuevo Laredo. "Coyote" is a slang term for smuggler. El Tirindaro is



addicted to heroin. He allows Enrique to stay free at the camp and even tattoos “EnriqueLourdes” across Enrique’s chest. When Enrique crosses into the United States, El Tirindaro pushes Enrique across the river and delivers him to El Tirindaro’s partners in the United States. Gang members torture and murder El Tirindaro a few years later.

Jasmin

Jasmin is Enrique and Maria Isabel’s daughter. Enrique doesn’t meet her for the first five years of her life and she takes to calling other men “papi.” She later joins her parents in the United States where she witnesses a crime and her testimony against the perpetrator allows her to get U Visas for herself and her parents so they can stay legally in the country.

Mirian

Mirian is Lourdes' sister. She loses her job and cannot take care of her children, so she leaves them with Belky and travels to the United States to work. Her plight helps Belky better understand her own mother's choice to leave.

Mirian is one of the members of Enrique's family who is critical of how Maria Isabel cares for Jasmin. She doesn't want to stay in the United States, as she disapproves of the culture and wants to return to her children.

Luis

Luis is Enrique and Belky’s father. Lourdes leaves Enrique with him and his mother when she leaves for the United States. He abandons Enrique in order to marry his girlfriend.

Marco Antonio Zablah

Marco Antonio Zablah is Enrique’s uncle. Enrique moves in with Marco and his family, who have a successful business and a nice house, including a television and other luxuries. Marco treats Enrique like one of his own children, but bandits murder and rob him one day when he’s out on a job and Enrique has to leave Marco’s home.

Maria Marcos

Maria Marcos is Enrique's paternal grandmother. He lives with her after his father leaves. She cares for him the best she can, but he gets into too much trouble and she has to give him up.



Aunt Rosa Amalia

Aunt Rosa Amalia is Lourdes' sister. Belky lives with her and Enrique's maternal grandmother after Lourdes leaves. Rosa Amalia is one of the people who torments Maria Isabel after Enrique leaves.

Dominga

Lourdes lives with Dominga in Los Angeles. Dominga becomes like a mother to Lourdes. Dominga introduces Lourdes to Gloria Patel.

Gloria Patel

Gloria Patel pretends to be an immigration lawyer and promises Lourdes and Dominga, among other illegal immigrants, that she can get them citizenship in the United States. She charges them all thousands of dollars, then disappears.

Santos

Santos is the man Lourdes first became romantically involved with in the United States and he is Diana's father. He is a heavy drinker and abuses Lourdes. He disappears in Mexico trying to sneak back into the United States after leaving.

Sirenio Gomez Fuentes

Sirenio Gomez Fuentes is the field hand who Enrique encounters after his attack on top of the train. Sirenio helps Enrique get medical attention.

Dr. Guillermo Toledo Montes

Dr. Guillermo Toledo Montes is the doctor who treats Enrique after the attack on top of the train.

El Brujo

El Brujo is a member of the Mara Salvatrucha gang whom Enrique befriends. Enrique's friendship with El Brujo gives him protection as he rides the trains.



Gloria

Gloria is Maria Isabel's aunt. Maria Isabel lives with Gloria in order to ease the burden on her mother, who has too many mouths to feed in her own home. Gloria defends Maria Isabel to Enrique's family.

Olga Sanchez Martinez

Olga Sanchez Martinez is the director of the Shelter of Jesus the Good Shepherd. She takes care of migrants who have lost body parts from falling under the train, but who have survived. She heals both their bodies and minds.

Hipolito Reyes Larios

Hipolito Reyes Larios is the bishop in Veracruz. He organized the local citizens to band together and help migrants traveling through the area.

Father Leonardo Lopez Guajardo

Father Leonardo Lopez Guajardo is a priest in Nuevo Laredo. He works to feed and clothe the migrants camped in the border town. Any money that comes his way, he pours back into the church and helping the migrants.

Sui Chung

Sui Chung is one of the Miami attorneys who represents Enrique in his deportation case.

Michael S. Vastine

Michael S. Vastine is one of the Miami attorneys who represents Enrique in his deportation case.



Symbols and Symbolism

Trains

Enrique's main mode of transportation from Honduras to the United States is trains. He rides mostly on top of them and sometimes is able to get inside a compartment, where it's slightly safer but carries other dangers.

Drugs

Enrique becomes addicted to sniffing glue, drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana and at one point he sniffs paint thinner.

Telephones

When Lourdes leaves her children behind to travel to the United States, their only means of communication is the telephone. This happens again when Enrique and later Maria Isabel travel to the United States and leave their young daughter behind in Honduras.

Houses

Many of individuals in this story dream of making enough money in the United States to return to Honduras and build themselves and their relatives nice, comfortable houses. The houses represent prosperity and security to them. Belky is grateful to Lourdes for allowing her, through Lourdes' sacrifice and hard work, to build a one-bedroom house for herself, her boyfriend/husband and their son.

Churches

Along the way from Honduras to the United States, Enrique encounters danger and a great deal of cruelty. He spends days without any or enough food. His few bouts of solace and comfort occur when he is near churches with congregations and priests who want to help the migrants. The buildings provide food and shelter, but also serve as safe havens from law enforcement and gang members who would harm or deport the migrants.

Food

Food, or rather the scarcity of it, is the main thing that drives migrants north and causes mothers to leave their children



Bucket

When Enrique is in Nuevo Laredo, he must work to earn money for phone cards so he can contact his family in Honduras to get his mother's phone number, which he's lost. He washes cars and directs traffic in order to accomplish this goal. He has a bucket he uses for the job and it is his lifeline while he is in the city. At one point, someone steals the bucket, leaving him hopeless for a time. Fortunately, another migrant has a bucket to loan to Enrique.

Phone Numbers

Migrant children seeking their mothers take along their mothers' phone numbers in order to be able to contact their mothers once the children reach the United States. Without these phone numbers, the children have no way of finding their mothers once they arrive. Most children don't memorize the phone numbers and often lose them along the way through Mexico.

River

The Rio Grande is the last obstacle migrants face on their journeys to the United States. Enrique camps along the river for weeks as he works to earn money to contact his family and mother, then Enrique, who cannot swim, must ride an inner tube across. On one side, he is trapped in poverty without shelter and often without food. The other side, which he can see, is prosperity and safety.

Teeth

When bandits attack Enrique as he rides atop a train, they bash his mouth and he loses some teeth. His mouth continues aching for years after, a reminder of the peril he faced and how lucky he was to make the journey alive and relatively well.



Settings

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Enrique and his family come from Tegucigalpa, Honduras. They live in various parts in and around the city. The city has citizens who are affluent living next to people in extreme poverty, as Enrique's family is. Jobs there are scarce and many of the people live in inadequate housing, most without indoor plumbing.

Los Angeles, California

When Lourdes first arrives in the United States, she lives in Los Angeles. She is supposed to continue from there, but her smuggler leaves her. Lourdes lives in a poor, gang-infested neighborhood in the city and at one point she lives with her daughter, Diana, in a storage locker.

North Carolina

Lourdes moves to North Carolina, which is where she lives when Enrique joins her in the United States. She lives in a trailer with seven other people and she likes it there. It's quiet and safe.

Mexico

Most of Enrique's journey is through Mexico. It's a dangerous country full of bandits, gangs and corrupt officials. In the southern part of Mexico, it's too hot and in the northern part, it's too cold. There are also several areas where the people are helpful to the migrants, many at their local church's behest. Most of the book takes place in Mexico as Enrique travels across the country on the tops of trains.

Florida

Enrique and his family move from North Carolina to Florida. There are more job opportunities in Florida. Enrique lives in a different apartment there, separate from his mother and her boyfriend. In Florida, the family has to be careful that law enforcement officials don't catch them because they fear deportation.



Themes and Motifs

Poverty

Poverty is the main theme in this book. It is what drives the actions of almost all the players. Mothers, and in some cases fathers, leave their children because they need to find a way to feed them. There is a stark, sharp difference between the haves and have nots in Honduras and very few opportunities for those who have little to improve their financial situations. Women have to choose between staying with men who abuse them or cheat on them and leaving and not being able to care for their children. The situation often requires children to leave school in order to work with their mothers just so they can eat.

So the mothers leave and the children left behind live a slightly better life than their peers. But the children feel abandoned and they resent their mothers. Several times in the book, someone says that there is no replacement for a mother's love. However, the people who say this are people who didn't have to spend a significant or memorable part of their lives without enough food. Some even finished school and started their own businesses thanks to their mothers' money.

Poverty is also a large factor in young men joining gangs and attacking and robbing the migrants trying to get through Mexico. Local officials resort to the same behavior in order to give their own families a better life. It seems that all negative behavior is a consequence of someone not having enough.

Parent-Child Relationships

What makes a good parent? What is important and what can a parent neglect in a child's life?

The answers to these questions depend entirely on who one asks. In Enrique's Journey, the parents would answer that food, shelter and schooling are the most important things they can give, even if that means not being in their own children's lives. Their children, on the other hand, merely want their mothers' love. Belky got to have nice birthday parties, Nike sneakers and in the end, she even got her own house because of her mother leaving. But she lived always missing her mother. Mother's Day at school was especially difficult for her, driving home her loss. The loss was more acute for Enrique, who never reaches the point of understanding, even when he leaves his own child behind.

Belky does eventually come to terms with her mother leaving. She understands when she sees her Aunt Mirian agonize over her own decision to leave her children. Belky has watched her aunt struggle to care for her children's basic needs and that finally turns on a light bulb in Belky's mind. She realizes her mother did what she needed to do and Belky feels grateful for the life she has because of it. Enrique never quite understood,



but being with his mother eventually helped mitigate his negative feelings toward Lourdes.

It would be difficult as a mother to feel helpless while one's children starved. The mothers in the book know that their children are too young to understand and that they may lose their children's love forever. But to these women, the risk is worth the reward. They would rather have healthy, living children angry with their mothers than stand by and watch their children suffer physically. The repercussions of the mothers' actions vary, but all of the children have negative feelings.

However, even understanding what they're causing, the mothers still expect their children's respect. They want their children to thank them for what they've done. Immigrating to a foreign country is dangerous for these women and difficult. Making a life in that new land isn't easy for them, but they do it out of love. They want their children to understand.

Drug Addiction

Drugs play a vital role in Enrique's life from early on. The glue sniffing is his way of coping and he doesn't have the emotional tools to try anything else. His mother has left him and then his father chooses a woman over his own son. Enrique has a lot of pain and abandonment in his life, so he looks for an escape.

But even once Enrique is with his mother again, when he has a girlfriend and child he loves, he can't stop the drinking and drugs. He still holds onto his hurt and rebellious nature, and by now he has developed a physical addiction. While he languished on the banks of the Rio Grande, the glue sniffing helped him feel less hungry when he couldn't get food and that and alcohol helped him forget how helpless he often felt while trying to raise enough money to reach his mother and hopefully get a smuggler so he could get to the United States.

When Enrique felt alone, the drugs were always there for him. It didn't help that so many of the immigrants with whom he spent his time in the United States also had substance abuse problems and encouraged it in each other. These people are living apart from their families and friends, far away from home. They live with the constant fear of arrest and deportation. Many of them survived horrors and difficulties to get to where they are. They need something to help them cope and forget.

The book never addresses whether Enrique continued his addictions after getting out of jail and getting his U Visa. It was his history of drugs that nearly cost him his freedom and ability to stay in the United States.

Illegal Immigration

In the book's prologue, author Sonia Nazario compares her family's legal immigration from Argentina to the United States with the illegal immigration of the people who are



the book's subject. Her experience was much different from her subjects'. Nazario's family arrived on an airplane and there was no danger in the move. In contrast, Enrique and his family risked their lives to get to the United States and lived in fear of deportation from the time they arrived.

Nazario explores many facets of illegal immigration. There are pros and cons both for the immigrants and the country they've moved to. United States citizens are divided about what they want to see happen with this issue. Some are for full amnesty, seeing the immigrants as an asset to the country. Others believe they are a drain and lawbreakers and are in favor of the immigrants being deported. Even the immigrants themselves can't agree on which is the right answer. At one point, Enrique says if he were a citizen, he wouldn't want illegal immigrants in the country, but then he changes his mind and says they provide a service the country's citizens can't or won't.

There are statistics to support both sides, from the immigrants being particularly hard workers that are assets to businesses to the cost of educating them or providing them with public assistance because they make so little money. Regardless of whether the immigrants are good or bad for the United States, they continue coming. They need to do so in order to provide for their families back home. Lourdes says she likes the United States and will never return to Honduras. It's cleaner and safer in the United States.

Nazario presents both sides evenly, leaving the reader to make up his or her mind about what should happen. The issue is too complex for one book to answer all the questions involved.

Religion and Generosity

Much of the book focuses on the dangers migrants face, as well as gang members, bandits and even law enforcement officials who prey on the migrants, sometimes going as far as torturing and killing them over tiny amounts of money. But the other side of that are the people who offer kindness and generosity to the migrants along the way.

They find much of this kindness in churches. Along the train route, several priests have noted the need to help migrants, taking the Catholic Church doctrine of helping others seriously and putting it to the test. Some of their parishioners rebelled against it over the years, but most came around and banded together to fulfill the priests' goals. Migrants find shelter, food, water, medical treatment and even sanctuary from law enforcement inside the church walls.

Besides the churches, there are parts of Mexico where the residents, poor themselves, refuse to allow the passing migrants go hungry or cold. The people run out whenever they hear a train and throw food, water and clothing to the migrants riding on top. They shelter them in their homes, even driving police away to keep the migrants safe from extortion or deportation.

These people, too, cite their religious beliefs as the reason for their actions. They, along with the priests, think of Jesus Christ as the ultimate migrant and they want to honor



Christ with their own actions. They also say they know how they would feel in the migrants' place and can't allow the migrants to go without when the residents are able to help. Though the residents have little themselves, they always find something they can spare.

Whether the Church creates this generous atmosphere or the people already harbor it inside is something the reader must discern for him or herself.



Styles

Point of View

The author tells Enrique's Journey in third person point of view. Mostly this is from Enrique's perspective, but the author also tells the story through other characters sometimes. This style allows the reader to see more of what's happening in the story.

While Enrique is the primary focus, it's also necessary to understand his mother's perspective, his sister's and other friends' and family members'. But because Nazario uses Enrique as an example of the average child migrant, his story is not just about him, but all the other nameless children making the same journey across Mexico and Lourdes is an example of the mothers whom those children are traveling to find. In addition, Nazario faces the task of representing the people who help the migrants along the way.

Nazario, however, goes a step further by personally recreating Enrique's travels. She rode atop the trains and met with the people Enrique encountered along the way. This gave her the unique ability to inject first-hand experience into her retelling. While the book is third person and while she tells others' stories, she also lives them. This gives the storytelling an element of reality, taking the reader as close to the action as possible and gives the story layers it may have lacked had she only retold others' experiences.

Nazario is also an immigrant from a Latin nation, like her subjects. The difference is she came legally in a safe way rather than having to sneak into the United States after a harrowing journey fraught with danger. Her experiences as an immigrant help her empathize with her subjects, though she manages to present multiple sides of the immigration debate and point out the problems that occur in each.

Language and Meaning

Because Enrique's Journey is non-fiction, Nazario could only portray the individuals' experiences through their own first-hand accounts to her. This is limiting because she couldn't just make things up to suit the story. Real people's actions and experiences dictate the way the story progresses. Some of these experiences are unhappy ones. There are real-life villains and heroes involved. Nazario tries to present them all the best she can. As a journalist attempting to portray truth, she must also remain objective in her writing.

Nazario writes the story simply, choosing to not complicate it with confusing, meandering sentences or paragraphs. She tells it chronologically and factually, though at times she uses characters along the way to inject emotion. She does this through descriptions of the intense poverty and hopelessness the migrants leave behind in their home countries, as well as the dangers they face in their trek to the United States. They risk losing limbs and lives to train accidents, they risk bandits and gangs targeting them



and maiming or murdering them. Girls and women risk rape. Some of the men do, as well. Nazario uses the stories of people who have been victims of crimes or accidents, as well as stories from people along the way who helped them, to manipulate the reader's emotions.

Because Nazario's intention with this book was to influence choices that mothers and their children make about immigrating to the United States, she is graphic and specific in her accounts. She uses these details for shock value, to change minds and make readers think hard about the implications not only of the dangers of the journey itself, but also about the circumstances that lead to people choosing to take the risk.

Structure

The author broke the book into 11 parts. There are 8 chapters, a prologue, an epilogue and an afterward.

The forward explains Nazario's inspiration for writing the book, as well as how she found her subject and the criteria she used in selecting him. Each chapter describes a different part of Enrique's journey, from his mother's departure to his life growing up in Honduras, his feelings toward his mother and his final decision and actions to leave Honduras to find her in the United States. It goes on to describe the events of that journey, each leg a new chapter, culminating in his reaching his mother and bringing Maria Isabel and Jasmin to live with him.

The epilogue and afterward, added in later editions, chronicle what happened to Enrique and his family in subsequent years. They also chronicle and explore many of the issues surrounding illegal immigration. The epilogue and afterward demonstrate that Enrique's journey didn't end when he found his mother, and that other immigrants' stories go on long after they reach the United States.



Quotes

She stares awkwardly down at the kitchen counter. Then, quietly, she tells me about four other children I never knew existed.

-- Sonia Nazario (Prologue paragraph 5)

Importance: Nazario's maid, Carmen, is telling her about the children she left behind when she traveled to the United States in order to make enough money to support them. The mothers don't talk much about the children they leave behind -- the pain and shame of it is too much. When Carmen's son travels to the United States, their story inspires Nazario to write Enrique's Journey.

The train crawls out of the Tapachula station. From here on, he thinks, nothing bad can happen.

-- Author (Chapter 1 paragraph 204)

Importance: Enrique is setting out on his quest to join his mother in the United States. What propels him forward is a love for her and a deep desire to be with her again. He's naive about the dangers he's about to face on his way to find her and only has hope as he sets out. Without this naive hope, Enrique and other migrant children probably wouldn't attempt the journey, which ends in many deaths and maiming.

Do you have a pair of pants?

-- Enrique (Chapter 2 paragraph 5)

Importance: Enrique has just stumbled into a small Mexican town after gangsters beat and robbed him on top of a train. They've left him with only underwear and in such terrible shape that without immediate help, he will likely die. He never completely recovers, having constant pain in his mouth from broken teeth. His first thought, however, is to ask for a pair of pants. The migrants making their way across Mexico lack for the most basic necessities -- food, water and clothing. Many set out without anything, but most lose them to those who prey upon the migrants. They lose almost everything they have on their way.

He stumbles, gets up, and keeps running.

-- Author (Chapter 3 paragraph 101)

Importance: Enrique is running from the gang members who beat, robbed and nearly killed him. He's weak, in pain and in a country where he knows no one and most people are hostile toward the migrants traveling through. He's fallen down in his flight, yet he gets right back up and keeps going. His ability and desire to save his own life, to do what he can to get to safety, shows the drive and resilience of the migrants heading to the United States. There is nothing more important to them than reaching their destination and they do what they can to keep anything from stopping them.



If they die, their bodies are lowered, nameless, into common graves.
-- Author (Chapter 3 paragraph 160)

Importance: Many migrants die during their attempts to reach the United States. Some fall at the hands of other people, but most die from injuries sustained falling off of trains -- either while trying to board or while riding. They are unidentifiable. They are human beings whose lives have ended, yet no one knows who they are. Many are trying to reach their mothers, the person who probably loves them more than anyone else does, yet they die anonymously, unknown and unloved. The trip through Mexico is more than treacherous. It can lead to complete erasure of entire lives.

They aren't animals. They are human beings.
-- Church volunteer Gloria Sanchez Romero (Chapter 4 paragraph 79)

Importance: In Veracruz, Mexico, the people go out of their way to help the migrants and even prevent bandits, gangs and corrupt officials from hurting them. They credit religion, the teachings of the Catholic faith, for their actions. This one line sums up the compassion some of the people whom Enrique encounters have for the migrants. The book puts a face on the "other," the "illegal immigrant" that people in both Mexico and the United States discuss and often rail against. Without a face, a person, to keep in mind, it is difficult for many to remember that these are people. That some do helps the migrants survive what is an almost impossible journey.

Spoons of stew touch lips before bottoms hit the seats.
-- Author (Chapter 5 paragraph 35)

Importance: In Nuevo Laredo, St. Joseph's Parish feeds stranded migrants. They have come far and they have suffered much. So much that the acuteness of their hunger shows in the way they approach their scarce meals. They don't even have the luxury of sitting fully at the table before their stomachs demand food.

In his underwear, Enrique stands for the first time on U.S. soil.
-- Author (Chapter 6 paragraph 28)

Importance: When last Enrique stood in just his underwear, he had just escaped imminent death. Now he stands within the United States, on his way to see his mother -- finally. He's survived the most difficult part of the journey. This time, in contrast to the last, he is safe. He is safe for the first time in months.

Your father's family had equal responsibility to provide your needs.
-- Lourdes (Chapter 7 paragraph 13)

Importance: Lourdes is trying to impart to her son that he has misplaced his anger and resentment. Lourdes left because she didn't want to watch her children starve, yet their father did nothing to help. Even after Lourdes was gone, he put in minimal effort and ultimately abandoned his children in favor of a woman. Enrique, though, can't see past



his anger at his mother to understand why she had to leave and that it wasn't entirely her fault.

The love of a mother is something you cannot replace with anything else.
-- Belky (Chapter 8 paragraph 43)

Importance: As she stands with her own mother for the first time in decades, Belky expresses the thought that drives her to return to her own son back in Honduras. Belky has missed her mother terribly, as all children of migrant mothers do, but she has to leave her again. Belky has learned from her own childhood how important it is to be with her own son.

Diana drops out of high school half a credit short of finishing.
-- Author (Epilogue paragraph 51)

Importance: Education in Honduras was at a premium. Many children didn't finish because their parents couldn't afford the expense. They often needed the children to go to work and help support the family. Enrique and Belky's lives would have been far different had school been an option for them even with their mother still living in Honduras. Yet Diana, who has all the advantages her brother and sister missed, throws away her own education with barely any time left to finish. The children seem to be unable to end the cycle that led to their mothers' sacrifices and the pain that followed for everyone.

If your mom leaves you, if she disappears, it marks you in a way for life.
-- Glenda Gallardo, United Nations Development Program economist (Afterward)

Importance: The mothers leave their children to save them, but in the end, the mothers' absences might be the worst thing that could happen. Growing up feeling abandoned, no matter how much the children understand why their mothers left, has a lasting negative effect on the rest of their lives.