



Off the Grid

by Paul García

Home

Summer-Fall 2013

Spring-Summer 2013

Winter-Spring 2013

Fall-Winter 2012-2013

Summer-Fall 2012

Spring-Summer 2012

Winter-Spring 2012

Autumn/Winter 2011-12

Summer 2011

Winter/Spring 2011

Autumn/Winter 2011

Summer 2010

Spring 2010

Winter 2010

Autumn 2009

Summer 2009

Spring 2009

Autumn 2008

Summer 2008

Spring/Summer 2008

Winter/Spring 2008

Editor's Note

Guidelines

Contact

I came to the United States with my brothers Ramón and Filadelfo when I was fourteen. My name's Alejandro, but everyone calls me Ali. Our village in Guatemala is two hours from Tuxtla by car. People are poor there in a way that's hard to understand here, where everything is big—the cars, the meals, the houses, even the people! I left school in third grade to work our field of beans, tomato, corn, squash, chilies... In my prayers, I didn't pester God too much for favors, just asked Him to take care of my parents. Sometimes people go without a doctor and die for no reason other than poverty. I thought of our mother and father when Ramón said, "Listen, Ali Baba, Filadelfo and I are going north, to work. Do you want to cross the border with us?"

The harvest was in, the sooner we left, the sooner we could help. I said, "Yes."

Filadelfo, always the serious one, said, "It will be dangerous, you know."

I nodded yes. I would have followed my brothers to the ends of the earth—not for being the youngest, but to help protect them. Ramón and Filadelfo are very different. Ramón is a joker; his wisecracks can lighten a tough situation. Filadelfo is hard, physically strong. Because he can fight, his nickname is *El Perro*. He's uncompromising, stubborn; he latches onto something till its end. Filadelfo is smarter, but he's the one I worried would need protection.

The village raised a few *quetzales* for us. Padre Eusebio heard our confessions and gave his blessing. We got a ride to the Mexican border. The guards there are notorious for their cruelty. I've heard that they take your money, beat you up, and send you back across. It's even said that they have murdered people. So, I was scared. Thank God, they were busy with a livestock truck and let us pass without inspection. Our bus trip across Mexico, south to north, from San Cristóbal to Nogales took twenty-six hours. There, we rented a tiny room. Nogales was a big city to *campesinos* like us. The very next day, I got lost. A group of eight people from Honduras and El Salvador said they had a way to get across the border. They were two families, with mothers and kids, even. I went with them to see where the crossing was, figuring I could return to find my brothers and tell them. At dusk, we crossed the river and walked, walked, walked. That night, it rained, but heavy! The water rose to my knees, hips, chest. All night! How dark it was! And the water rising. There were two little girls in the group about three years old. We took turns carrying them, to keep them from being carried away by the water. I found a post to stand on. The water was to my chest that night. No sleep all that night. In the morning, some of the people were gone. The little girls, too. It was cold, but in daylight at least I could see. It was desert. I did not know people drown in the desert. I slept, woke up alone then walked for two days. When the American border guards found me, I was afraid. They had big guns. They asked in Spanish where I was from.

"Nogales."

The one who looked Mexican, said, "You don't sound Mexican." I said nothing. He had a lot of muscles. I didn't want to get beat up. They put a plastic cord on my wrists, and took me to a jail. They gave me food from McDonald's, then asked me more questions and had me sign papers saying who-knows-what. The next day, they drove a busload of us *indocumentados* to the border in Nogales. You know, they didn't treat us so badly.

Paul García's fiction has appeared in *The North American Review* and *SNReview*, among other publications. He earns his living as a translator and lives on the Maine coast.

Copyright 2014, © Paul García. This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.
