

Deissy Ibarra  
Bakersfield College, Delano Campus

### “The Light at the End of the Tunnel”

When you think back on every opportunity that has been handed to you and what you did with it, are you proud of the outcome? Did you learn a lesson? Every single decision I have made in my short twenty-one years is a consequence of what I believed to be just that: a lesson learned. There have been too many instances in which I regret my choice of action, but in the end it seems like we all end up right where we are supposed to be. My story closely resonates with that of Beatriz Aguilar's road to success: family behind you every step of the way, whether it be good or bad, encouraging you to be a better you. And at times without even knowing it, sending you on a downward spiral of self-doubt. I, like countless young adults in Delano, California, grew up with parents who work in agriculture as laborers. To this day, every morning my parents wake up before the sun is out and head to work. From a very young age I understood that through their actions, my parents were teaching me dedication and perseverance, to remain humble and most importantly to take pride in who I am and where I came from.

Growing up as the older sister to two younger brothers was no picnic. I can hardly remember there being a time where I could just be a kid. There is me being a happy child, with no care in the world, a great student who always did everything to the best of her ability and then some. But when my younger brother Oscar was hit by a car, I can honestly say, my life was changed. It was that day that I, at 6, had to grow up... and fast. Traumatized by the event, to this day I cannot see a kid in the street without freaking out. My little brother had to learn to walk all over again after receiving a skin graft to restore the appearance of his big toe. The same year, my father was diagnosed with a benign stomach ulcer and had to undergo surgery and almost didn't make it. Doctors told him in order to have a complete recovery he had to quit drinking and smoking, but that didn't happen. To this day, my father has kept up with his habits and sees no end in sight. Maybe one day he'll learn.

Not until I was in high school, sadly, did I become proud of who my parents were. My mother, Maria, was born in the United States. She was given the opportunity to study in Los Angeles, but chose to return to Michoacan, Mexico to help her family. At the age of 17, she had begun to learn English and could have gone to college, but her family chose otherwise. David, my father on the other hand, was not so lucky. He too is the first born to his parents, and being the oldest came with responsibilities. For my father, life was all about working on the farm and raising cattle to supplement their growing family. He is illiterate, so he does not know how to read and can barely sign his name. I remember being embarrassed when he would sign us out of after-school programs or weekly checkings of our planners because his handwriting was so ugly. As I got older, I noticed the embarrassment on his face too, and how much he hated the fact that he couldn't do better! From that day on, whenever a note had to be signed or a permission slip needed to be filled out, I asked my father to do it. Looking back on it now, we were helping each other out. He taught me to be patient and non-judgmental, and I taught him to sign his name.

My mother and I have a strange relationship, and that comes with us being so similar. Personality, characteristics and even our voices are somewhat alike. Yet we fight like no other, but at times she is the only person who knows something is wrong by just looking at me; after all she is my mother. Spring of my senior year at Delano High, my mother was involved in a horrible accident in which thirty percent of her body was covered with 2nd and 3rd degree burns. My focus had been on finishing my track season, enjoying my last month in school and having my entire family see me walk across the stage. But that did not happen. Due to her injuries, she was on bed rest for a whole month, unable to walk or even feed herself. Every day for those last two months of high school, during my lunch hour, I would go home and eat with her and help with medications or whatever had to be done around the house. The day of my high school graduation, my mom was not there. Life has a funny way of making bad circumstances help you in understanding what is really important. So when I walk across the stage to receive my Bachelor's and my Master's, she will be the first person I look for. A little bit of that seventeen year old receiving her high school diploma will be there, just as a do-over.

Even the road to college was a rough one, with a bump here and a pothole there. Nevertheless, I was beyond excited to have been accepted to Fresno State as a Biology major. From the age of 13, my mind was set on being an OB/GYN, so the plan was to attain a BA in Biology and then go to medical school and become Dr. Ibarra. Freshman year was a complete waste of time. I was so irresponsible and spent every dollar to my name, forcing my parents to work harder just to give me money. How I blew through over two thousand dollars in one month WHILE receiving financial aid is beyond me. Sophomore year, I was forced to get a job. And then another job. And then go to school part-time. At this point, my parents could not help me anymore and I was on my own. Paying for rent, bills, gas, food; no one ever tells you the truth about how incredibly difficult it is to live on your own. So after three years of suffering, I was forced to move back and basically start over. Living through that experience, I am far more appreciative of everything my parents endured and for the simple fact that they cared. It seemed like they understood the importance of an education, but their actions at times made me think otherwise.

My younger brother, Oscar, is 19 and the father to a beautiful one year old. His entire life he was in remedial or ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. Our parents only speak Spanish, so we learned English at school. My brother never really liked school, so when teachers would just pass him from grade to grade without him knowing anything they thought it was an act. To this day, he is a nineteen year old young man who can only read at MAYBE a fourth grade level. A year ago, he graduated from Delano High School with a high school diploma. Now, he works in the fields just like our parents do. It's a never-ending cycle that needs to be broken. I try to encourage him to take at least one class, but my parents say that where he is in life is good for him. That school isn't for him, and working in the fields will pay his bills. How will he ever reach his full potential with that type of encouragement? In the past three years, my parents have changed their opinions radically, and suggest a higher education is not necessary. I on the other hand, beg to differ.

While watching "Camp to Campus" and even while writing this essay, I find myself very emotional. There is something moving and beautiful about this country and

the opportunities it presents. Both of my parents have worked and will continue to work in the fields until my brother's and I can provide for them. As Beatriz Aguilar has done, I too have set the bar for my younger cousins and siblings. There was no one for me to learn from, everything had to be figured out by first-hand experience. But with a little dedication, a lot of hard work, tears and family support, I continue with my education and will not stop until every single one of my goals is attained.