

# Umbelina Y Salvador

## The Untold Stories of Mexican Immigrants

Dazalyn Anexi



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For my beloved Grandparents, Uncle, and Mom that without you,  
this wouldn't be possible. This is for you.

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## FOREWORD

By Luis Alberto Urrea

Growing up in Tijuana, Mexico, I certainly felt connected to the Sanchez family. Their connection to their homeland is something that can be seen throughout Mexico and kept near and dear to their hearts. Although my experiences weren't the same as the family, I do understand and feel for their struggles. Coming to the United States is not an easy task and takes an immense amount of bravery.

While I was reading, all of their stories reminded me of home. The food mentioned, the smells, and the sounds connect our culture together as well as connect families and create memories. These stories not only express the journey and experiences this family embarks on but also reflect on the millions of others who leave their homeland behind in the hope of a better future for the people who make it across and those who don't like the Yuma 14.

Through immense research and storytelling, Dazalyn has put together the feelings and multifaced experiences of countless Mexican immigrants. Capturing the immigrant experience in a way that shows that people take their sounds, flavors, traditions, and Mexican pride wherever they go allows the reader to become even more connected and amplifies the voices of those who go unheard.

This book provides hope for those who are first-generation and aspire to follow their dreams. Not only are they reminded of their own heritage, but they are constantly reminded of the sacrifices and difficulties their family had to undergo to be where they are now. It allows readers to believe in not only themselves but their families and the generations to come. Understanding that shared experiences and stories like this one allow us to unite and stand with each other with the constant reminder that our family's aspirations and dreams are not so different from ours.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I would also like to thank my partner and long-life best friend Jay, who motivated me to take on my life dream and stood by me in the good and bad days.

## Love At First Sight

Umbelina “Umbe” Rogel Juarez was a beautiful young woman born in the town of Almoloya, Guerrero, in 1944. She loved to dance, adored spending time with family, and loved getting dressed up. In May of 1957, Umbe and her sister-in-law Teresa were found at the bus stop on the side of *Carretera Federal 51*, shifting their weight from side to side, feeling the cotton dresses rubbing along their legs and leaning forward with their eyes squinted, wondering if *La Flecha* was close. They were headed to the next major town over, Arcelia, Guerrero, where the Mercado is located. During this time, the bus, or *La Flecha* as it was known to the locals, would pick them up. They had been patiently waiting with others from the town since 6:30 am, as the first bus of the day didn’t come until 7:00 am. Upon the bus’s arrival, she and her sister-in-law boarded, and that’s when she first laid eyes on him.

Salvador “Chava” Sanchez Villalobos, born in the village of Sabino Alto, Guerrero, in 1943, is a hardworking young man, always helping and wanting the best for his family. He and his mother, Jovita Villalobos, like everyone else in the surrounding towns and villages, were waiting for the bus to start their day at the Mercado. Lifting one foot in front of another and grasping onto the aluminum rails,

they boarded and walked down the middle of *La Flecha* to take a seat. They were in for a long journey since the bus ride to Arcelia was two hours long. Nodding his head back and forward until they came to a sudden halt. *La Flecha* had just stopped at the town of Almoloya. As he was observing the people entering, there she was. Instantly, he sat up, straightened his grey button-up shirt, brushed off his beige trousers, and fixed his styled hair. *La mujer mas hermosa que he visto en mi vida*, Salvador thought to himself.

For the next two hours, not once did they exchange actual words, not even their names, but they kept glancing at each other. *En nuestras miradas nos dijimos miles de palabras*. When they finally arrived at the *Mercado* in Arcelia, they looked at each other one last time, and they each went on with their day. Throughout the rest of the day, all they could think about was one another.

While she was with Teresa, she thought: *Que sera de el? Cuando la voy a ver de nuevo?* Walking through the *Mercado*, they were immersed in all the colors, smells, and sounds around them. In the stands, they heard people chatting: *Comadres* meeting each other, children crying, and the voices of vendors trying to pursue you to buy their produce *Mira muchacha pasale aqui te lo dejo por buen precio*. Seeing the rich colors of the *Chiles*, *arroz*, *tomate*, y *tortillas* that they would take back home. Taking in the delicious smells of freshly made *Tamales de Elote*, *Chicarron*, and the grounded spices. As Umbe was on one side of the *Mercado*, Chava was on the other with his mother, coincidentally buying the same thing and experiencing the same colors, smells, and sounds. After a long day of shopping, Umbe and Teresa boarded the 12 pm bus. Chava and Jovita --noticing the time--were walking as fast as they could with their *despensa*, trying to reach the bus stop. Just as they did, they saw the bus drive away, leaving them behind. Defeated by the heat and the weight of their purchases, they had no choice but to wait for the 5 pm bus. Not knowing he had just missed Umbe by a minute. As they each rode back home at different times, they found themselves daydreaming about one another, realizing it was love *a la Primera vista*. They were uncertain about whether their paths would cross again and prayed to the universe they would see each other once more. None of them knew, only the universe held that secret.

It was October of 1957, and the biggest and only *baile*, *El Baile de Almoloya*, was being held in four days. It was the talk of all the towns. Walking down the streets, you could hear *Vas a ir al baile?* Every young lady and man could be found washing, drying, and ironing their best outfits for the big night. On the night of the *baile*, after a long day of feeding the cattle, milking the cows, and gathering chicken eggs covered in dirt, Chava took it upon himself to take a shower. Opening the kitchen cabinet and reaching for the biggest pot he could find, he turned the silver knob on the faucet and let the pot fill up, then he put the pot on the stove and let it get warm so he could shower. After his shower he walked to the kitchen and started to cut a lime in half. After applying the lime as his deodorant, he put on his freshly ironed white striped shirt and black trousers, then combed his hair. Chava and his brother Luis, who is three years older than him, walked from their house at the top of the mountain to the *Carretera Federal 51*.

Having walked for two hours and seen others along the way, trying not to sweat, they finally reached the entrance to the town of Almoloya. As they walked from the entrance to the *zocalo* where the *baile* was being held, they heard the laughter of



people from their homes, smelled aromas from the recently enjoyed dinners, and exchanged greetings with people along the way until the delightful notes of music reached their ears. As Luis was enjoying the music, conversing with people, and even sharing a couple of dances, Chava was standing observing other people until there she was. A young girl wearing a periwinkle dress, her beautiful long black hair in a braid, and makeup so subtle no one could tell besides him. He was astonished, couldn't believe his eyes *era possible? Es ella?* He couldn't believe it; it was her, the young girl from the bus. He watched her for a while, watched her laugh light up the town, her skirt flow with her movements, and the love she had for dancing.

Earlier that night, while Chava was getting ready, Umbe, on the other hand, was begging her parents, Columba Juarez and Francisco Rogel, to go to the *baile*.

"Papa, Mama Por favor dejen me ir" said Umbe.

After hours and hours of begging, Francisco finally let her go under some conditions.

"Te dejo ir si va tu hermano Evencio" said Francisco to Umbelina.

Evencio, who was Umbes, older brother, always looked after her when going out. Umbelina was so excited for the *baile* she ironed her periwinkle dress, combed and braided her hair, and then put on some makeup. As Umbe and Evencio were headed out, they told their mother and father they were leaving, but before they could, they made their *bendicion*. After a while of being at the *baile*, *Umbe was looking around*. Maybe she would see some familiar faces.

*Es? Es él?* Their eyes once again locked, and just like before, it felt as if nothing mattered and the whole universe came to a stop. She turned bright red when she realized he was coming towards her and there suddenly they were in front of each other.

"Quieres bailar conmigo" Chava said to her reaching his hand out.

"Sí, me gustaria bailar contigo" she replied as she took his hand.

As they walked towards the center of the dance floor, they shared a lovely dance to *El Zopilote Mojado* by Mariachi Vargas De Tecalitlán. After their dance, they exchanged names, and she had to go back to her brother since another one of her parents' rules was that she wasn't allowed to dance more than 3 songs the entire night and not consecutively either. So, as she waited and waited until the next song, they just kept looking at one another. As a couple of songs went by, he went up to her again, and finally, he asked,

*"Quieres hacer mi novia".*

Chava and Umbe, now back in their homes, have been dating for a couple of days now, and it was a very lovely couple of days. On the night of the *baile*, they got each other's addresses to send each other letters as Umbe and her family were moving to Acapulco in a week. Acapulco is a lovely place with beautiful beaches, incredible food, and, unlike Almoloya, the sound of many cars passing along the streets. This was

all new territory to Umbe and her family, as they had always lived in Almoloya. That's where her mother and siblings grew up. Her heart ached that she was leaving her home, but she was excited for this new chapter in her life.

Umbe's new house was in Colonia, Santa Cruz. To get there, she had to be let off the bus at the entrance of the Colonia and walk the inclined streets until reaching the house, which was a half-hour walk. Umbe stopped going to school at the age of six. When she and her family got there, they had to find ways to earn income. Columba got a *local* in *el mercado* where they would sell food, each dish being different every day. Umbe and her mother would wake up at 5:30 in the morning every day, get dressed, and pick out the pots and pans they needed for that day. As they walk to the *Mercado* with their utensils, they hear the sounds of metal hitting metal. *Clunk. Clunk. Clunk.* After a long walk, they finally reached the *local*. Entering the *mercado* they were greeted by the people they passed, each at their own *local* selling food.

After they set up their station, Columba sends Umbe with a grocery list while Columba preps the plates for the day. Depending on what day it was and what ingredients were more economical, they would make dishes such as *Carne de Puerco*, *Chicharron en salsa*, *Mole*, and *Huevo en Chile*. When Umbe was done shopping for the ingredients she would then help her mother prepare them. Chopping the *tomate*, *chile serrano* and *jalapeño*, and *cilantro* for the *salsa verde* they would make every day. Her mother would start cooking the other ingredients, and as she started, it seemed like everyone else did as well. It was as if everyone cooking was a precisely synchronized orchestra. The sound of everyone's knives thwacking on wooden cutting boards, the sizzling of the oil's chorus with ingredients cooling, and the echoing of the grinding and blending ingredients in the *molcajete*. Each step is like muscle memory after making these dishes countless times. Once everything was done cooking, they left the burners on low so the food wouldn't go cold. Serving mothers, fathers, children, and workers every day, their day wouldn't end until six in the afternoon. Once done there, they would stay behind and wash the dishes, clean the garbage, and count their day's earnings; after, as they did in the morning, they do in the afternoon. Carry their pots and pans all the way back home now. This time, instead of being clean and full of energy, they would be tired and dirty. Getting home, their time off was spent doing other chores around the house, cleaning and doing laundry. Once it was night, they got ready to go to bed they would shower, get dressed, and get their things ready for the next day.

The cycle would continue every day unless they could afford to take the day off, which was a rare occasion. Occasionally, Umbe would receive what she had been hoping for during her many days of hard work: a letter from her boyfriend, Chava. While opening and reading each letter, they would talk about how much they love each other, how much they miss each other, and how they long the day until they reunite. Reading these letters, it was as if they put a piece of their heart with it. They were filled with a tremendous amount of love the touch of the paper was as close as they could get to each other. This would continue for the next four years, only seeing each other once a year in the same place their relationship started, *El Baile de Almoloya*.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dazalyn Anexi was born and raised in a vibrant Mexican household in Chicago, Illinois. Growing up, she faced the complexities of being a first-generation Mexican American but always in touch with her roots and only speaking Spanish in her home. Anexi is now currently a senior at the University of Illinois at Chicago, studying English in professional writing and publishing as well as pursuing a minor in art. When she's not writing, she is often found around Chicago with her camera, exploring the diverse neighborhoods or spending time with her family in the city.