

La Historia de Nuestras Vidas ***(The Story of Our Lives)***

An original, collaborative play about
immigration and the 2008 Postville raid,
as written and performed by Teatro Indocumentado.

Prologue

Juventino - This is a story that is still being told.

Victor - How it ends, we cannot know.

Oscar - It is the story of our hopes and dreams;

Juventino - The story of a long, difficult journey

Aaron - The story of disappointment,

Luis - Imprisonment,

Onofre - Fear and waiting.

All - This is La Historia de Nuestras Vidas.

Onofre - *This is The Story of Our Lives.*

Part 1 - Life in Mexico and Guatemala

When I finally got to my cell, the prison guard gave me a blanket and told me to take the top bunk of one of the beds. There was no mattress on the top bunk – just the metal frame – so I didn't sleep at all that night.

Onofre - In Miami, the latino (?) prisoners got together to share food and clothes. The Colombians and Cubans helped us a lot – many of them had more serious legal problems. They told us that we shouldn't even be there.

Aaron - "You are workers, you don't deserve to be here. Don't worry, God will help you."

Victor - I was there for almost two months. I was happy that I had almost served my time in prison, and that I would soon return to Guatemala to see my wife.

Javier - Fifteen days before I was supposed to leave, they came down from the office and told me that I had to sign a work permit.

Victor - I told them that I could not sign it because I did not know what it was for and my lawyer had told me not to sign anything without consultation.

Javier - But they said I would have to spend even more time in jail if I didn't sign it.

Victor, Javier - I signed it.

Victor - Already a group of prisoners had left for Guatemala. They gave me three shirts and three pairs of pants, and an official told us that we were going to Guatemala. I felt very happy.

Javier - They told me that I would leave that Friday they and arrive in Guatemala on Saturday. On Friday I got up at 5 am, expecting I would finally go home.

Luis - They also told me that I was being deported to Guatemala - not to Mexico. The consulate said that I would go with a group to Guatemala first, and then home to Mexico. But I didn't know how it was going to happen because I didn't have money.

Onofre - But we did not return to Guatemala.

Oscar - Instead we were taken to the immigration center in Virginia (?).

Onofre - Then onto Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Kansas -

All - Again.

Oscar - To Des Moines, Dubuque , and Cedar Rapids -

All - Again.

Luis - But now things seemed to change. They didn't treat us like criminals.

Onofre - We saw lawyers and went to court. They replaced our handcuffs with GPS bracelets.

Victor - They gave us phone cards and told us that we were going to Decorah.

Luis - The supervisors offered us hamburgers and pop from McDonalds. I had never imagined that I would eat another time in McDonald's, or that I would ever be free in Iowa again.

Part 8 - Epilogue

Onofre - But this was no longer the United States I had imagined.

Juventino - Our American Dream had become a nightmare.

Oscar - And the land of freedom had become our prison.

Aaron - We came here so that we could provide for our families and improve their

future.

Javier - But we'll return to them with empty hands.

Victor - We made friends here, but now they are gone, deported.

All - I don't know where.

Luis - And meanwhile, we wait – without knowing for how long.

All - We are still waiting.

Oscar - Unable to make a life here and unable to return home.

All - This is the story of our lives.

Juventino - It is only a summary.

Onofre - *This is the story of our lives -*

All - So far!

Javier - It is the story of Guatemala,

Luis - And Mexico,

All - And *America*

Oscar - It is the story of thousands of immigrants who cross these borders in pursuit of a dream.

Victor - It is a story that is still being told in the fields and factories of the United States.

Juventino - How it will end, we cannot know.

Luis - But we have hope, because you are listening.

Aaron - *Thank you for listening.*

All - Thank you.

Javier - When I was little, I didn't think about work. I played behind my dad in the field.

Onofre, Aaron - When I was little, I dreamt of being a soccer player.

Luis - I dreamt of being a pilot in the air force – but my parents wanted me to do something less dangerous,

Onofre, Aaron, Luis – to work in the fields with my Dad.

Oscar - When I was small (Well, I have always been small.), my parents couldn't afford to continue my education. I went to the countryside to work with my dad, caring for cows...

Victor - I couldn't attend school – I had to help my father in the fields.

Juventino - When I was a child, my father sold our land so that he could drink.

When he died we had no place to live, and I walked the streets with no shoes.

Onofre, Aaron, Javier - Life is hard in Guatemala

Luis - And in Mexico

Oscar - The crops never earn enough, and everything is expensive.

Victor - We plant with borrowed money, and our debts always grow.

Juventino - Some days there isn't enough to eat.

Oscar, Victor, Juventino - I wanted to make a better life for my family,

Javier, Luis, Onofre, Aaron - So that my brothers and sisters might finish school,

Juventino, Victor, Oscar - So that my children might finish school,

Oscar - I wanted to build a house out of brick.

Juventino - This was more than just a dream;

All - It was a necessity.

Part 2 - The American Dream

Victor - It is more than just a dream. People like us have gone very far away in search of a better life.

Oscar - Those in my neighborhood who came over to the United States were prospering .

Victor - They returned with good clothes, and they bought new cars.

Oscar - They built beautiful houses for their families.

Luis - "Everywhere in America there are women, beer, cars, and money."

Juventino - "An hours pay in the U.S. equals one day's work in Guatemala."

Aaron - " You can buy everything your family wants when you return."

Onofre - "It's easy to cross – I know where you can get forged papers very cheap...."

Oscar - Like my friend said, the papers are really cheap - they only cost 5 months in jail!

Victor - Yes -What about the risk? What if we don't succeed?

Oscar - What if we die in the streets like others who have tried?

Victor - What if we cannot pay back the debts?

Luis, Juventino, Onofre, Aaron - But, you must work!

Javier - Yes, I must work

Luis, Juventin, Onofre, Aaron - Then, you must go!

Javier, Oscar, Victor, - Yes, let's go!

Javier - Let's live -
All - *The American Dream!*
Juventino - Yes, yes... But getting there won't be cheap!
Javier - How will I pay to cross? I have no money.
Onofre - Borrow the money.
Javier - From who?
Luis - Not from me! I don't have any money.
Aaron - Me either.
Juventino, Onofre - Sorry.
Luis, Juventino, Onofre, Aaron - Good Luck!
Victor - One has to borrow the money to get here and go even further into debt.
Oscar - It's hard to leave one's wife and children,
Victor - To long for your family and your traditions.
Oscar, Victor - The journey is difficult and the path is uncertain.
All - Is it worth it?

PART 3 - Immigration

Javier - If I had known how difficult and dangerous the trip would be, I may not have come.
Victor - The trip cost 6,000 dollars, 45,000 quetzales in Guatemala.
Oscar - The trip takes twenty-five to thirty days.
Juventino - Through the mountains,
Onofre - Through the desert,
Aaron - Through forests,
Luis - Through rain,
Victor - Sleeping by day and moving by night,
Oscar - Sometimes by bus, but mostly on foot,
Javier - We walked for days,
Javier, Victor, Oscar - And days,
All - And days!
Onofre - The helicopters were circling above, we had to hide – we couldn't look up or the helicopters would see our eyes.
Javier - The ants were crawling all over me and biting me, but if I moved they would find me.
Oscar - I heard the immigration officer yell,

Onofre: "Stop! We're going to get you!" "We're going to get the dogs to find you!" I dove into the thorny brush and waited until they passed. Only then could I pull the thorns from my skin and clothes.
Onofre - When we reached the meeting point, the guide called for the truck.
When the truck arrived, the twelve of us all crammed in, piled and packed on top of each other.
Juventino - The truck was like an oven, we were drenched with sweat. When the driver told us to get out, three people fainted from the heat. The driver returned fifteen minutes later with water, and we helped the others get back into the truck.

Luis - At the border, we had to climb four, very high fences. One woman climbed the first fence, but she was too scared to jump over. I don't know what happened to her. I cut my hand on the fence, and I looked for help in El Paso. I knocked on the door of someone's house, and I asked if I had arrived in Iowa.

Juventino: Iowa? You're crazy! Iowa is very far from here.

Victor - After we crossed the border, we had to wait in one ranch for two days and another ranch for three days. We waited in an empty room. We couldn't go outside, or we might have been found. We were tired and bored and sad.

Part 4 - Arriving in Postville

Luis - I finally arrived in Postville, Iowa on –

Aaron - November 2, 2006

Juventino - May 24, 2007

Victor - March 23, 2007

Oscar - December 2, 2007

Onofre - May 29, 2007

Luis - February 8, 2007

Javier - January 29, 2007

Luis - When I arrived, I expected a city much bigger than Postville – I didn't imagine it would be such a small town.

Javier - When I arrived it was late at night.

Oscar, Juventino – I arrived to friends and relatives,

Victor, Javier - To co-workers and countrymen.

Luis - My cousin showed me around town –

Onofre - "Well, Luis - this is the United States!"

Luis - As we continued to walk, I saw a group of men dressed all in black, and I thought there was a funeral.

Onofre - They were the Rabbis who worked at the Kosher meatpacking plant.

Luis - I arrived in Postville and soon began to work there too.

All - We worked.

Victor - There was little time for anything else.

All - We worked hard.

Javier - We were too tired for much else.

Part 5 - Working at Agriprocessors

Javier - Some said that working in the U.S. was easy.

Todos - But not for me!

Luis - At Agriprocessors, we worked long hours -

Victor - Fourteen-hour shifts,

Javier - Or fifteen-hour shifts,
Juventino - Sometimes eighteen-hour shifts!
Onofre - And we weren't always paid fairly for those long hours!
Oscar - We worked fast and with little rest.
Aaron - We worked with sharp knives and dangerous equipment.
Onofre - I was unaccustomed to that kind of work, and it pained me.
Aaron - Many of the other workers couldn't hold-up to the heavy work in our department. And when the Chicano in the yellow hat took over, we had to work faster and faster -
Juventino - (as the chicano) "And faster!"
Aaron - He pressured us and treated us badly.
Juventino - (as the chicano) "If you can't do the work -there's the door! Eleven people could do the work of the 64 in here!"
Aaron - He fired many of the workers, and denied us our breaks.
Oscar - In Department 14, we could only rest when the conveyor would suddenly stop. But then the boss in the orange hat would arrive angry and shouting:
Victor - "What's up!? What's going on!?"
Oscar - All while the Rabbi stood watching and not working.
Luis - When I started working in Department 6, I didn't know any of the others. Like now, I was the only Mexican in a group of Guatemalans. In time, I became friends with the other workers.
Javier - I worked in Department 6 with Luis, packaging fake ham and sausage in boxes. The work was boring, we didn't do much.
Luis - Our boss in the green hat was good, better than some of the others.
Javier - He was also Guatemalan.
Luis - It was better than the job I had before in Postville, working in construction. The boss didn't give us a lunch break, and we had to eat our lunches before work in the morning.
Onofre - At Agri-processors we had half an hour to eat.
Oscar - But we had to change out of our bloody uniforms, goggles, and masks
Onofre - And then wait in line for the microwaves,
Oscar, Onofre - Which were always full!
Onofre - By then it was almost time to change back into our uniforms and re-start the line.
Victor - Cutting and deveining,
Juventino - Clearing and fixing,
Onofre - Quartering and cleaning,
Todos - Day after day.
Aaron - That is how our time passed, until the day they came for us.
Juventino - The day our dreams ended
All - The 12th of May
Luis - The day of the raid.

Part 6 - The Day of the Raid

Aaron - I had heard rumors around the plant that Immigration was coming.

Luis, Aaron, Oscar - I didn't believe it .

Luis - Every year there were rumors that Immigration was coming, but they never arrived.

Oscar - Two days before that, on Saturday, my brother-in-law had warned me:

Onofre - (as the brother-in-law) "Be careful, Oscar! La Migra is coming tomorrow!"

Oscar - But that Sunday passed and nothing happened.

All - I didn't believe it.

Javier - On Monday morning, I entered the Agriprocessors plant at fifteen minutes before 10. At first, nothing seemed different at the plant. But as I went inside, I saw the helicopters above – I didn't know why they were there.

Oscar - Suddenly the assembly line of the machine stopped, - I didn't know why. By the time we saw the immigration agent entering our department, the plant was already surrounded. We tried to find a way to escape. We ran into another room, but there was no exit. There was no place to hide.

Aaron - Our lunch break started at 10am. I went down to the office to change my gloves first, and I saw the men wearing jackets and hats that said "ICE". I didn't know if they were police or immigration agents. I went around to the dining room in order to warn friends who were already at lunch.

Javier - Soon after I entered the plant, officers blocked all of the entrances, so no one could escape. I knew by their uniforms that they were immigration agents.

Juventino - I had just arrived to my department and began putting on my uniform. Right as I finished, someone nearby starting yelling,

Oscar - "La Migra! La Migra!"

Luis - It frightened me when I heard all of the people yelling "La Migra!"

Javier - "La Migra !"

Aaron - "La Migra!"

Oscar - "Hide! Hide!"

Juventino - Everyone was running.

Luis, Juventino - We ran.

Juventino - To the 2nd floor, where I hid with four of my co-workers.

Luis - To the 3rd floor, where I hid between boxes.

Juventino - I waited there for two hours, listening to the police and immigration officers pass by, scared that they would find me.

Luis, Juventino - They found me.

Juventino - The police were everywhere, and the helicopter circled above. There was nowhere left to hide and nothing we could do. They told us no to worry, that nothing was going to happen. They weren't yelling, they were talking.

Onofre - "Don't worry. We're only here to observe - you can return to your jobs."

Luis - "Don't worry - it's only a safety inspection."

Victor - "You'll be able to return to your homes."

Oscar - But nobody returned. Everything was surrounded.

Aaron - I asked my boss, "What's happening?"

Juventino - (as the boss) "I don't know."

Javier - I was trembling with fear.
Oscar - They took us from our rooms, one or two at a time.
Aaron - And led us to a giant stadium, where games are played.
Juventino - They asked a mountain of questions.
Javier - Questions about everything:
Victor - "Where are you from?"
Onofre - "How did you arrive?"
Victor - "Who brought you?"
Onofre - "Who did you get your ID from? "
Victor - "How did you find out that there were jobs at AgriProcessors?"
Onofre - "Do you have a wife?"
Luis - Almost all the officials knew Spanish, they were Latinos.
Aaron - For almost three hours, we sat there,
Oscar - In pain and sadness,
Juventino - Trembling with fear.
Javier - And shivering from the cold -
Aaron - While our questioners sat calmly, drinking hot coffee.
Javier - For the first time that day, we were given something to eat -
Juventino - Potato chips, soda, and water.
Oscar - But I couldn't eat, because I was too nervous.
Aaron - And I couldn't drink, because my hands were bound.
Juventino - We were given a military type cot for the night.
Javier - But I couldn't lay still, shivering under one thin blanket.
Aaron - And I couldn't sleep, because they kept coming in to remove others from the room.
Oscar - So ended that horrible day.
All - The 12th of May.
Juventino - This is only a small summary.

Part 7 - Imprisonment

Victor - After three days and two nights, we received our sentences – they told us that we would have to spend the next five months in prison.
Onofre - The many immigrants were taken in smaller groups to nearby jails – what would only be the first stop in a long series of prisons.
Victor - I was held in Waterloo for three months, and during that time I hardly spoke a word. I don't know what I was thinking – I was filled with sadness. I missed my wife and my family. I didn't have any money. I didn't have anything. They gave me sandwiches for every meal, and there was no heat.
Onofre - It was so cold, and we spent all day long sitting on the bare floor. There, one didn't wait for anything, only food.
Victor - And even then, only sandwiches.
Luis - We were very hungry. The night that we were taken to Mason City, I remember that the officials that had lots of pizzas and pops, and we requested a piece of pizza and they told us no, that they had already distributed our food.
Javier - I was taken to a closed room at the Benton County Jail, where there were

Javier, Oscar, Aaron - I don't know.
Javier - I asked the immigration official, "What will happen to me?"
Onofre - (as the official) "I don't know."
All - *I don't know.*
Onofre - (as the official) "That will be decided by a judge."
Oscar - We waited this way, in sadness, passing the hours without knowing what might happen to us.
Javier, Oscar, Aaron - We waited.
Juventino - *We waited.*
Aaron - Wondering about the penalties, about what might happen to our families and friends.
Oscar - They finger-printed and photographed each of us.
Juventino, Oscar, Aaron - One by one.
Aaron - The first of many times we performed this ritual.
Juventino - Stamp, press, turn, flash. Stamp, press, turn, flash.
Oscar - They chained our ankles,
Aaron - Our waists,
Juventino - And our hands.
Onofre - Hundreds of Guatemalans and Mexicans were marched single-file through the plant and loaded on many "department of homeland security" buses that were waiting outside.
Luis - Seated on the bus, I thought "So long Postville! So long America!"
Todos - *"Goodbye Postville! Goodbye America!"*
Victor - There ended our days in Postville.
Onofre - There ended our American Dream.
Aaron - *There ended our American Dream.*
Luis - Outside, we could see TV news cameras and people taking photographs, as the caravan of white prison buses left the AgriProcessors plant.
Aaron - For two hours we sat chained on the bus, without knowing our destination.
Oscar - Without knowing our fate.
Juventino - Watching America pass us by through the window.
Javier - Scared.
Aaron - Silent.
Luis - It was the first of many such trips we would take.
Onofre - Crowded together with other immigrants in vans, buses, and airplanes.
Victor - Never certain where they would take us next.
Juventino - We arrived to the fairgrounds in Waterloo.
Luis - They had prepared a place to hold us – *The National Cattle Congress* – a place meant for cows.
Javier - Like the cows we butchered at AgriProcessors.
Oscar - But now we were the ones being processed.
Aaron - *Now we were the ones being "processed."*
Juventino - They made us remove our pants and shirts
Javier - They took all of our clothes, everything we carried.
Juventino - I was shivering from the cold.

no windows and I couldn't see anything outside. One could go crazy without ever seeing the sun. I could only watch the day pass from the time on the TV. A cell-mate made a calendar and put an X on each day, and each day a guard would enter with more prisoners.

Victor - We were always moving from one prison to another, without ever knowing where or for how long.

Javier - To Cedar Rapids for one day.

Juventino - To West Union for a week.

Victor - To Mason City for three weeks.

Juventino - Back to West Union for eleven weeks.

Victor - To Kansas for three days

Javier - And back to Cedar Rapids again – until the flooding began there. When the waters rose and the electricity went out, we were all loaded into the back of a moving truck. – herded together with chains on our feet, like pure animals.

Aaron - Like cows.

Onofre - In Cerro Gordo county jail, no lawyers ever visited me. They forgot about me, and I worried a lot that maybe my problems were worse than I thought. They took me to another cell, where I was with more serious criminals. They wouldn't let me watch the TV, and if I put it on the Spanish channel, they would take the remote control from me. We didn't understand anything.

Victor - And all throughout these weeks, we had little contact with our friends and family outside. They went long periods without any news from us.

Luis - Often, I didn't have money to call them.

Victor - Often, they didn't know where I was being held, only that I was imprisoned somewhere.

Todos - In Kansas again.

Javier - I was in Kansas for three months.

Onofre, Javier - I felt a little more free there.

Javier - We were allowed to get out into the prison yard.

Onofre - There were microwaves and we could buy soup. One is accustomed to eating a lot, but in jail it is very hard. If I ate in front of my friend, he also was hungry, so I had to give him a little bit. and we had to share something with the others. Sometimes six or seven of us shared a little bit of soup, with one spoon, nothing more.

Javier - I was content now that this was how all my time in jail was going to go. But they came and told me that I had to fly somewhere in an airplane.

Javier, Victor - I thought of Guatemala.

Javier - At the airport, 150 of us waited in chains. Everyone thought that we were going to Guatemala

Victor - I was excited, thinking that I would finally return home. But, I asked an official where we were going and he told me:

Oscar - "I don't know, Some other jail."

Victor - I was very sad - It wasn't the news I'd hoped for.

Javier - We arrived in Miami at about 2:00 in the afternoon.

Victor - They interviewed us, asked questions, took blood, and gave us another set of jail uniforms - so many things. We didn't finish until eleven o'clock that night.