



First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience

Volume 5
Issue 1 *New Vistas*

Article 30

February 2016

A Trip through Space and Time

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Recommended Citation

Gonzalez, Alvaro (2016) "A Trip through Space and Time," *First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/fgv/vol5/iss1/30>

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*O! HOW calm and how beautiful—look at the night!
The planets are wheeling in pathways of light;
And the lover, or poet, with heart, or with eye,
Sends his gaze with a tear, or his soul with a sigh.
—John Brainard*

This story begins before any of the characters in it were born. It all started billions of years ago. Out of nowhere a ball of energy exploded and expanded. It doubled over 90 times in the span of a second. This ball of hot energy would soon expand faster than the speed of light and create the primordial goop that would eventually form our universe, solar system, and planet.

A middle school aged Alvaro is sitting in his fourth period of the day. Science class with Mr. Gussin. Today they were learning about subatomic particles.

Mr. Gussin: There are three main subatomic particles that form our world. These three subatomic particles form the building blocks of life and simple changes in their configuration can alter their properties.

Subatomic particles, he thought to himself as he looked at his hand. Alvaro couldn't see the protons or neutrons when he looked down at his hands. No matter how close he put his hand to his face all he could see was the caked on dirt and the poorly trimmed finger nails. The diagram in his book looked too clean. It depicted a nucleus with electrons whizzing around it.

Mr. Gussin: And if you were to scale an atom up to the size of a popcorn kernel then—Yes, a question?

Alvaro: Is this what these atoms actually look like?

Mr. Gussin: What do you mean?

Alvaro: Like all they all nice and cute like this. Like they are in the textbook.

Mr. Gussin: Not really. Think of the textbook as the artist's depiction.

Alvaro: Then what do they really look like?

Mr. Gussin: No one really knows. I can't really go into depth without derailing the lecture so talk to me after class if you're really curious. Now where was I? Ah yes, if a nucleus were the size of an un-popped kernel and you placed it in the middle of a football stadium then...

Bell Rings

Mr. Gussin: Okay everyone, see you next week.

(Alvaro approaches Mr. Gussin after class)

Alvaro: Hey Mr. Gussin.

Mr. Gussin: Hello Alvaro.

Alvaro: So about my question.

Mr. Gussin: Ah yes. Well the answer may not satisfy you, but I do encourage you to look this kind of stuff up yourself. So no one has actually seen a proton or a neutron before, we've only detected their presence and mass before. We don't have the tools required to observe occurrences on such a small level.

Alvaro: Then how do we know they're there?

Mr. Gussin: We can sense their presence. We can feel how they disrupt a system in place and measure the disruption. Another much simpler answer is that the universe wouldn't exist without them.

The conversation ended here, but the idea stuck with Alvaro forever. Now when he looked down at his hands he could begin to imagine the subatomic structures that constructed it and trusted that they were there if only out of faith.

This lesson should not go understated. We begin with this story for a reason. As Alvaro has haphazardly stumbled throughout his life he's had very little, but he has had faith. Faith in what he feels and what keeps his life together.

Now let's move on to a different time and a different place.

It's the year 2015. Much has changed and much remained the same. The scene begins with Alvaro and his father seated at the dining room table. Alvaro and his father had a good relationship. Alvaro's grandfather spent most of his time in the United States as Alvaro's father grew up. The distance between the two men ended up being more than physical as their relationship deteriorated. Alvaro's father and grandfather never had a good relationship, but Alvaro's father wanted this to change with his son. He made sure they went out to the park together, spoke with each other in confidence, and respected each other. Alvaro always knew that his father was one of his best friends and he was grateful for that.

Father: Feliz cumpleaños mijo!

Alvaro: Thanks dad! Good morning!

Father: How'd you sleep?

Alvaro: Not bad. I have a kink in my neck, but nothing too major. Should be gone by the end of the day.

Father: Ah, well that's good to hear. Gotta be well rested for the festivities later.

Alvaro: Yea, they're going to try to get me destroyed out there today. I mean it is my 21st birthday, but still I just wanted to have a chill night tonight.

Father: Just have fun mijo. Not everyone gets to celebrate their birthday party like this.

Alvaro: Yea I know, I'm basically complaining about nothing. What were you doing on your 21st birthday dad?

Father: At around that time I was in Tijuana and we were about to cross the desert into the United States.

*Iban rodeando veredas
como lo habían acordado
era de noche y por eso
la vigilancia burlaron
y por allá en Chula Vista
dos tipos los esperaron.*
—Marco Antonio Solis y Los Bukis

I left so fast. I mean I had to. I was working in the field with my dad when I noticed my uncle, Enrique, walking over in my direction. I'd spoken to him before of my intention to come to the United States and I was hoping to hear good news.

Enrique: Hey, I arranged transport for us to leave in two hours. You need to go pack your bag and be ready so we can start our walk toward the city.

Alvaro: Okay, I need to wait for my dad though. He's working on the other side of the field. I need to let him know I'm leaving.

Enrique: He'll find out. We need to go now.

He packed his bag. It was small so he mainly packed underwear and socks. He went into his drawer and

pulled out his small cash reserves. He folded the cash and placed it under the sole of his shoe. The trip was a couple of days. They would reach Tijuana and wait for their coyote.

Coyote: We're going to be walking for over 12 hours. I will not wait for anyone. If you get left behind you are on your own. I will tell you all the path we will take in case you get lost. We will end up near a water spigot and a truck. When I arrive there I will wait for 5 minutes as people drink water. Then we will hop in the truck and leave. If you are not there when we leave then I wish you the best in your future travels.

Alvaro looked around the group of people. There were about twenty of them. Men and women from

different places all over Mexico converged to this location to risk it all.

The first hour of their trip was uneventful. They made it into the serranos easily enough. They'd seen other groups walking around as well. Black masses of people moving as one in the darkness, herded by their coyote toward a fate that was unknown to them. The hills ahead of them rolled like dark waves in an expansive ocean until the darkness was cut. The harsh yellow light exposed the rugged surface of the mountain and along with it the people that traversed its dangerous surface. Everyone scattered. Alvaro found himself sprinting in the opposite direction from the green and white trucks. The truck was far off and there were enough people

that he had a chance to hide away. He hid out on a hill nearby. He could see the truck perfectly and duck out from the light if they swept it in his direction. But as he looked toward the truck he noticed that it had cut its engine and was hidden in the brush. Unnoticeable from the ground in the dark the truck hid itself well. Ten minutes of deafening silence passed and a group below began to emerge. The group gathered its bearings and began to walk in the direction of the truck that they could not see. Alvaro tried furiously to scream from his lungs to warn them, but not a peep emerged. When the truck left with those people and their dreams firmly sealed in its doors my father, remnants of his group, and their coyote reconvened from their hiding spots and continued.

Alvaro: (*fidgiting in his seat*) these seats are uncomfortable.

Mom: Callate. Ya mero empieza

Alvaro: (*to himself*) I don't know why they had to have wooden pews for us to sit in. This is a courtroom for Christ's sake. People that come and sit here have to worry about their loved ones being prosecuted and on top of that they have to worry about not getting splinters up their ass.

Mom: Stop moving. You're making me nervous. Just don't think about it.

But Alvaro didn't want to think about it. In fact he was focusing on the pain from the seat.

December 31st 2009. Downtown Los Angeles, a courtroom somewhere atop one of the many skyscrapers. Janette Gonzalez v. U.S. Government.

Janette was on trial and facing deportation. Her family sat in the stands in behind her. She looked back to see an encouraging smile and nod from her father, she

met everyone's eyes except Alvaro's. He was fidgeting in his chair and looking away. They were waiting for the judge. Today was the day. Visa numbers renewed in the new year so a decision had to be made. Either Janette would be allowed to stay in the United States as a legal permanent resident of California or she'd be deported. She remembered what her dad had told her "No te preocupes mija. Regardless of the decision we'll stay together as a family." Together, that's all they wanted to be. Growing up they'd all been taught to value family and each other above all else. Now all they valued was being threatened. Janette had received the deportation notice along with her mother several months prior. Her mother's case was easier to handle because she had filed paperwork with her husband when they arrived to the country. Janette's case dragged on from August, through September, and begrudgingly into the cold month of December. Christmas and Janette's birthday were clouded by the court case. A month that once brought the family immense joy was now an ominous time bomb ticking above their head. They had until the 31st for the case to get resolved and things weren't looking promising. The attorney that defended the U.S. went on leave halfway through the case. This maneuvering pushed them to the last possible court date on New Year's Eve.

Alvaro didn't want to look up, but what he heard next jolted his head straight up.

U.S. Attorney: There seems to be a problem with the case. The case file that was being handled by the last attorney was sent to Kansas City.

Judge: Kansas City? But why?

U.S. Attorney: That's our central archiving headquarters. We usually only send documents there when cases are considered closed. I have no idea why my colleague would send the documents out there...

"This is it" thought Alvaro to himself. With no file the attorney could ask for a recess and push the case back. It would have to be fought on the other side of the border. Everything became silent.

The air
Stood still.
Feeling
Left his body.
A ringing
Filled his ears.
His empty eyes
Flooded with tears.

It appeared that the world had turned its back on them. In this moment of need the cosmic order of the universe made it so everything was lost. They hadn't been let in the ring to fight before they were defeated and it was that bitterness that hurt the most.

Janette's Attorney: Look, we don't have the time to try and get the case back.
U.S. Attorney: I understand that. I've known you for a long time as attorneys outside of this courtroom. I know I can trust you. She has a clean record and has been here for 19 years of her life. I'm not going to object to her receiving her residency.

And that was all it took.

Epilogue

That day has been lost. The second the courtroom door opened everything that had conspired within it escaped into space. Floating in the sky for years these actions went unnoticed and their names went unspoken. As time went on these actions started to bubble and grow, as all things in the cosmos eventually do. More and more things began to attach themselves to these wandering thoughts and the lump of ideas gained mass. Eventually the thought grew and grew until it collapsed in on itself. The process felt like it took a billion years, but really occurred in the blink of an eye. The thought exploded. The ideas that had been festering within it emerged transformed. These new ideas rushed out from this singular point and consumed the space they occupied. Things would be different now. They have become more complex. Ever since then everything in the universe became different. The scars of the explosion that created everything he once knew still existed at the periphery, but the center was different. It glowed an amber red and a soft yellow. At the center of all the mayhem and shining like jewels sat his new ideas. Formed by the pressure and heat of experience. Forged from weak and disconnected elements to strong and complex compounds. He knew what to fight for.