

*Desde el valle de Nuevo Casas Grandes:
Historias de Guadalupe Madrid Burgos y dos vidas en Hermosillo, Sonora*

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Para mi nana, y las fronteras que cruzo por mi.

Principios

Lupita Madrid Burgos was born into a family composed of her parents, Jose and Delfina, and siblings Thelma, Maria, and Gilberto.

Thelma was sent to live with her grandmother in Nacori Chico when she was three years old; her grandmother insisted she needed someone in the house as her other two daughters traveled back and forth to the United States – and Thelma fit the bill. My nana was still under a year old, and her grandmother couldn't take care of a child that young. The older siblings were already settled into school and sending one of them to live with their nana required a complete disruption in their lives. It was like this that Thelma was destined to grow up apart from her maternal grandmother.

Thelma was only supposed to go with her grandmother for a month. That month became two, then three, and eventually became fifteen years away from home. Back then, Nacori Chico was an eight-day journey by horse. My great-grandmother asked her husband to bring Thelma back each time he undertook the trip on business matters, but weather, robbers, and gangs of men prevented him from bringing his daughter home. Time went on, and my nana and her remaining family moved a pueblo over, then another, moving further from Thelma. By the time they were settled in Hermosillo, they had to take a plane to see her in Nacori Chico. My great-grandmother carried the weight of her lost years with Thelma all her life. When her Alzheimer's reached its worst, she would often cry out for a blonde girl she claimed to see her in her room. My nana realized that she was calling out for my Tia Thelma months after my great-grandmother passed, only after stumbling upon pictures of Thelma in youth that matched the description of the blonde girl.

Bacanora al mar

My nana speaks softly of my tata, sighing and recounting he bold and raucous life he lived. She speaks of his mother, Doña Lupe, who sold bacanora to support her children. How she would string my tata along to ranchos that were hours away so that he could help carry gallons of that illegal mezcal back to their home. How my bisabuela and tata would cross rivers as the sun rose, avoiding the police who watched for the smuggling. The waters would rise to their waist as they rose atop borrowed horses, threatening to reach their necks and carry away their hauls.

Doña Lupe would go on to marry one of these policemen some years later, spurring jealousy and an immediate impulse to leave home in my tata. My grandma claims he got onto the first bus out of town, not realizing the route would take him past Hermosillo and into Guaymas, where he loaded himself onto the first boat that would employ a boy of fourteen. He sailed up and down Mexico's coast, loading and unloading, reaching El Salvador, Haiti, and the expanse of the Caribbean. In his ten years at sea he learned to cook, slowly peeling potatoes, before being pushed to be a mechanic and monitor the ship he sailed on. He swept women off their feet at each port he landed on, breaking hearts and fathering his first child at seventeen. My nana often worries that he has more children out in the world, wondering if they've ever tried to seek him out, only to find out of his passing.

Entre los amores y las responsabilidades

My nana never intended to marry. She wanted to be a nurse, enrolling to work at el *Seguro Social* for experience once it became clear that formal college wouldn't be an option for her. Here she'd receive training, learn hands-on, and rise through the ranks for herself and the parents she was now supporting in Hermosillo. She rebelled against the suitors that came to ask for her, the good men her mother would bring home to meet her. A husband would force her to stay at home, raise kids, and stifle any hopes she had of working in medicine.

My nana never did marry, but she ended up caring for my tata for almost two decades. She would walk past his auto shop on her way to get on the bus, each catching the other's eyes. My nana describes him as a *machista, corajudo, and bien enamorado*. Their lives swirled together, my nana willing to ignore his wife and his existing family, until she couldn't anymore. By then my mother had been born, and my nana's parents were pressing her to either marry my tata or find a man willing to wed a woman who'd had already had a child. My nana wanted a daughter, but never intended to stay with my tata, or any other man for that matter. She was happy living with her parents, still studying to be a nurse, and basking in the earned and toughened independence of single motherhood.

My nana remembers the panicked call from one of my tata's sons at 2am. My tata had been driving back from a friend's rancho when he'd crashed head-on with another car. The couple in the other car died on impact, but my tata flew through the windshield, landing some twenty feet from the site. He was rushed to a hospital by a friend driving behind him. Doctors struggled to get all of the glass out of his head to be able to sew the wound shut. My nana says that years later he would wash his hair and cut his hand on the miniscule fragments that stuck. My tata's wife refused to see him after the crash, his drunken behavior and affairs finally pushing her to a

tipping point. Instead, my nana unwillingly took him in, much to the delight of her parents who saw this as an opportunity for their youngest daughter to acquire a husband. My nana saw him through his initial recovery, terrified by his threats of taking my mother away if she chose to leave him. The few months of recovery turned into years, my aunt and uncles arriving in between my tata building a home for my nana and him displaying increasingly angry behavior. My nana always thought that it had been the crash that caused that anger, his stubbornness, and short temper. When some sixteen years later he started complaining of pounding headaches it was my nana that forced him into a doctor's office, and my nana who had to deal with a partner newly diagnosed with a large brain tumor.

Her training as a nurse saw my tata through a failed operation to remove the tumor, and the orders he be placed on bed rest to ease his final days. My tata passed a year after the initial diagnosis, his strong frame reduced to bones as the tumor destroyed him. My nana was forty, a widow, responsible for four children between the ages of seven and seventeen, and now caring for her ailing father.

48, Interior

My grandma breaks into laughter each time I ask her how she got through the years after the death of my tata. The years are a blur for her, in between jobs and trips to buy cars and merchandise from the United States she managed to raise four kids, care for her aging mother, and get her children through private schooling.

She would often rise at 3am, drive herself to the Pepsi factory on the outskirts of the city, and cook breakfast for all the men who worked there. She would often rush back home to drop off the children at their respective schools, their morning process sped along by my mother and great-grandmother. The rest of the day would consist of errands, cleaning, and cooking enough to feed the household. Thursday nights she would embark on trips up to Nogales, Arizona, driving through the eerie quiet of the Sonoran Desert to be able to buy clothing and cheap goods from *el otro lado*. In turn, she would spend her weekend mornings selling the week's haul at the *tianguis*. When gangs and cartels ran Hermosillo the *tianguis* was almost enough to support the family. The men who ran the cartels would sweep through the stands, buying expensive American goods for their family with their tainted money. The influx of cash, coupled with the salary from the Pepsi factory meant that my grandmother earned enough to support the family, and even afford Catholic schooling for my mother and aunt.

When money was scant my nana would turn to selling cars, once more traversing the Sonoran Desert to reach Arizona. She would drive cars back to Hermosillo, catering to the wealthy and new money appetite for American goods. My mother eventually entered college, and graduated, providing another steady income for the house. My aunt and uncles would follow soon, six proud and strong-headed individuals living under the same roof. My nana likes to say I came into a

household that needed the joy of a baby, and for six years I bounced around as the seventh member of our small house.

48 Interior, Calle Rafaela Morero de Romero.

Los hermanos Madrid Burgos

The weight of the stolen years is present during dinner. You can hear it in the rapid-fire conversations Lupe and Thelma exchange; each trying to cram in as many words about their families before the meal is over. There is beauty in this too. Their matching laughs and the rhythm of their sentences give them away as sisters before their appearance does. Thelma's famed blonde curls have fallen away and greyed with time, Lupe's complexion is now dotted with sun spots as the years spent in the sun catch up with her.

My grandmother and her sisters communicate through gifts. Lupe swirls in with bags of *machaca*, dried *jamaica* flowers to steep in tea, packets of *coyotas*. A tub of *frijoles recién cocidos*, *chile para los chilaquiles*, newspaper clippings about *los Burgos*, old pictures turned sepia with time, dulled with fingertips, daintily creased and dated in delicate handwriting.

Familia, Mazatlán, 1984.

Thelma bears gifts in bags from box stores. Baby clothes for whoever's expecting a child, movie theater boxes of candy from the checkout aisle, a set of soft pajamas patterned with stars, a graduation check, a faded Star Wars poster. Mason jars of applesauce, glass platters bearing slices of banana bread.

Maria is further away in memory and in distance. She comes carrying packs of slim cigarettes that accompany her morning cup of coffee. The smell, however, evades her. I remember her in her morning dresses and in the laugh that could be heard across the house.

We continue to kill time over desert, laughing as my dad and Tia Thelma's husband split a beer.

No one wants to motion the end of the meal, there are decades of pain that quietly arise with each goodbye. My Tia Thelma quiet brings up the old pictures my nana brought, asking if there are any of all the siblings in their youth. My nana's breath catches, quietly saying that they never

took one in their young age. The first picture they have together is from their own grandmother's passing, long, long after Thelma had moved to Los Angeles.

What becomes of families after their separation? Where does the internalized guilt and sadness go? Thelma was sent off, but Gilberto and Maria both moved away from home willingly – Gilberto to chase opportunity and a woman in San Francisco, Maria married at sixteen and started a household too soon. Now, they see each other at funerals and weddings, each struggling to bear the weight of the past and the strain on their relationships.

Los aretitos de la niña

My nana likes to remind me that every doctor in the delivery room laughed when they saw that I'd been born with a full head of hair. She also likes to remind me that she, along with all my mother's siblings, was outside the delivery room when my mother gave birth because the doctors miscalculated the time the delivery would take. It was my Tia Margarita who found my nana in the cafeteria, yelling that her daughter had just given birth to her first grandchild.

August rains welcome me on the car ride home three days later. My mother and I were discharged with a clean bill of health, and I was adorned with my first pair of earrings, courtesy of the nuns who worked in the hospital's delivery rooms. The pictures from my first day home reveal the fatigue of my mother, but also the wide smiles plastered across everyone's faces. My nana had adorned her room with Winnie the Pooh decals, quilted a comforter, and bought me a crib she afforded on layaway. My great-grandmother had crocheted a baby dress so delicately stitched it looked like spun cotton candy.

Un verde bandera

Delfina Burgos was born at the close of the Mexican Revolution to a family that would fall into destitution after the death of her father. Family memory tells us that a gypsy once came into town and told Delfina that she would wed a handsome *guero* that would ride into town in a horse. My great-grandfather came into town a few months after, firmly atop a steed, blonde hair shining and blue eyes sparkling.

Family memory also tells of his drunkenness, his tendency to be an emborrachado who once sold my great-grandmother's wedding dress so that he could buy one more bottle. The woman that bought the dress dyed it a deep green, the same color as the Mexican flag. Delfina Burgos *lloro lagrimas de sangre al aprender que la cosa mas preciosa en su vida habia sido desacrada en una manera tan horrible.*

A mi Nana Delfina

My great-grandmother sat at the corner of the kitchen table all the years I knew her, a cup of black coffee in a chipped blue pewter mug between her hands. I knew her late in her life, when her hair had become a shocking white, still graced by the pin curls she wore every morning. I remember the scent of her monthly perms, her thick hair adorned with ringlets so tight she would have me stretch them out to form her usual hairstyle. Her white hair gave way to a tanned scalp, a firm mouth with false teeth, and fierce appetite for candy. She had a bag of anise candies tucked into the pockets of each one of her hand-sewn robes. I remember that even in her later years I was impressed by the seeming strength of her forearms, that despite noticeable veins hinted at a lifetime of power. She had the sharpest mind in the house, often helping my aunt figure out calculus problems as she finished her engineering degree. She correctly recalled details of events that had passed years, even decades ago. She often recounted the details of her wedding day, of my grandmother's days training to be a nurse, of my mother's pregnancy.

Tormentas del verano

The summer rains come in silently. A soft wind in the evening transforms itself into violent gusts, threatening the date palms hanging above our heads. The palms sway so violently that bunches of the fruit falling onto the roof, onto cars, in the middle of the street. *La tormenta* comes in through the kitchen window, slamming the glass windows open, drenching our backs and scaring away the dogs.

My grandmother is there when the electricity goes out for the rest of the night. Her voice remains steady, cutting through the dampened air. She speaks of the storms she has braved, of the wooden cabin her family lived in out in Nacorí Chico. How the wind would whistle through the cracks of the wooden planks when the storms descended. How summer always meant rains so powerful that her own grandmother would feel them in Los Angeles. She reminisces about the afternoons she would spend with her siblings in the rain, watching the hills drown and burst with greenery the next morning. She laughs as she remembers the men who would go out into the downpour, cursing the heavens for daring to blow across their country. Men who would cut the storm with kitchen knives, throwing them into the air as they finished taunting the rain. The community would gather when the rain became too much, returning to where the men had taunted the skies and scattering Palm Sunday ashes into the storm with desperate pleas.

When the electricity returns in the early morning she is still there, combing my hair to prevent it from sticking to the back of my neck. She makes her rounds across her garden, the sweet smell of *hierbabuena* cutting across the backyard. Her famed lime tree has survived this year's rains, but will fall with the next, doing away with three decades of its cool shade. The house is quiet as we start the day, only the soothing chirp of birds disturbing our morning. I am five years old again. I am sitting at the kitchen table and the only world I know is under this roof, in the light of

these wired windows, in the humid air of last night's rains. I learned love here, in the hugs and hand-squeezes, in the food that always comforted, in the mornings spent working through pan dulce and café con leche.

De rumbo a Kino

There is an understated excitement in the summer trips to Kino. The early mornings filled with yawns, *huevos con chorizo* waiting on the kitchen table, bags filled with food from *el mercado*, fights about who left the towels dirty, arguing about how leaving late means slimmer chances of landing a *palapa* close to the water. The two hours in the car pass quickly, undercut by stops to buy *queso menonita*, chips, and *aguas frescas*. My grandmother urges my uncle to please drive more carefully, to be mindful of the lack of highway lines on the drive there, wondering out loud if the *hamaca* would last another summer on the beach. She reminisces too, talking of the trips her and my *tata* would take out to Mazatlán when my mom and her siblings were young, of my *tata* and his boat, who would come back with enough fish for a month after each expedition. My grandmother was twenty-one the first time she saw the beach, claiming to have then spotted those famous sharks that swim into the Sea of Cortés and get lost as they come in closer, away from the open ocean.

El mar es celoso, she warns all of us. *Embarazadas* shouldn't get too close, lest the waves come and carry the child out her stomach. She watches us splash on the shore, faces sticky and browning under the waves. She calls us back, to the cold drinks in the coolers, to the promise of buying coconuts that get split right in front of you. My family descends when the jellyfish stings my foot

Corazon de melon

My nana calls me her corazón; her heart, and as her first grandchild I can claim the pet name proudly, with a smug look as she dotes on my brother and cousins, knowing I was her world long before they were. For my first six years the world was ours. In between the walks to the corner store, the café con leche, and trips to the panaderia we conquered the city, became one single unit that braved the walk to *catedral* knowing our reward would be the sweet *nieve de garrafon* pushed along the sidewalks.

Le llaman a Lupe desde la calle

My grandmother sits at her kitchen table in the afternoon lull. The smell of roasted spices waft towards the hallway. It is a typical summer day – the heat of the desert the sun smothers everyone in its warm embrace, bringing about a quiet hush. Between the hours of two and four pm all is lazy; the dogs are laid out on the patio and everyone in the house is asleep or wishing to be. Light streams in and hits the burnt orange walls. The entire city is holding its breath in anticipation of the cool evening hours.

My grandmother sighs and stands up to continue sweeping the worn linoleum floors. The dark green floral pattern has long been worn away by three generations of footsteps, each tracing the same path from the side door to the well-loved kitchen table. Someone shouts for a Lupe on the street and my grandmother makes her way to find her caller. The dust of the unpaved driveway sticks to her pants as she unknowingly dirties the floors she is painstakingly cleaning. It is the middle of June and the summer seems endless.

La despedida

My nana waves, weeps in her driveway as she watches my mom and I pack my dad's car *pa' irnos al otro lado*, to go to the United States. The air is sticky, last night's rains haunt the air and promise a scorching afternoon. A few stars cling to the sky as the sun starts rising over us. My dad's truck is packed to the brim and I run inside to say goodbye to my aunt, uncles, grandmother, and my childhood home. I am six years old and every memory I have is here, wedged between these orange walls and the expanse of this beautiful, desert city. My mother tells me I cried inconsolably until we made it to Nogales, calling my grandmother every time we stopped to rest. The crying wears me out around the time we cross into Arizona, and the expanse of the American southwest lulls me to sleep.

Nunca nos alcanzan los días

There is never enough time. There will never be enough days and sunny summer afternoons and raining, thundering nights to give me all the time I want with my nana. The summer is not endless, it is brief, and it is fleeting. I pull out of the driveway, the same red desert dust that welcomed me home sending me off to the airport. The air is hot and sticky, soaking into my skin as I cry all the goodbyes I will never be able to say. My grandmother waves until my *tio's* car turns the corner, the strong metal door closing behind her, protecting her like I will never be able to. Her whispered prayers and goodbyes coat my ears, my heart.

Tres horas para llegar a Hermosillo

Flights to Hermosillo take you over the Sea of Cortez. Salt plains, shallow blue water, and the wide expanses of land in Baja define the short, but often turbulent flight. The woman next to me talks the whole flight, stopping only to get up to use the bathroom. She speaks of the additional hours she has to drive to see her sons, her eyes watering, quietly mentioning the years that have passed since she's last seen him. She smiles as she talks of the years she's lived in Boston with her daughter and grandchildren; how cold the apartment gets during the snow season, the beauty of a city covered in ice, her bundled grandchildren and the neighbor's kids slipping down city sidewalks. She jokingly scolds my extra ear piercings, offering to braid my hair as she sees me struggling to put it up. Our coffees scald our hands, a brief scent of cinnamon wafts between our seats. She grips my arm as we descend, whispered pleadings to saints passing between her lips. My grandmother's prayers are on her tongue, the comfort of a familiar pattern holds me as the aircraft descends. The hot summer air greets us as we walk towards the gate. Her son waves at us both.

La casita que se hico chiquita

My nana's house has shrunk in size in the years I've spent apart from it. The cavernous living room has receded, shying away from its former grandeur to accommodate the modesty of its inhabitants. The kitchen no longer fits the same number of people it used to, the walls close in on the modest table and threaten to advance on the dwellers. The household is a shell of what it was in my early childhood, now only housing my nana and her three dogs. At its peak, seven of us occupied the too small rooms, crowded around the kitchen table where we'd all carved our names, much to the annoyance of my great-grandmother, and passed through at all hours of the night.

Now, the house is frozen in time. The same diplomas and pictures grace the walls, the dated couch has not moved from its place in the living room. My bedroom still contains the faint traces of Winnie the Pooh decals, the oversize portrait of *la virgen*, the same pink curtains with butterflies that my grandma made because I was her *princesa*. My nana has me do the tasks she can't anymore; replacing lightbulbs, bringing down the shower curtains, and bringing her dogs down from the roof are common requests.

Tardes en Catedral

Children run and scrape their knees under the fluorescent lights of *Catedral*. The same vendors have graced its sidewalks all the time I've known it, the same gazebo sits proudly in the center of the square, a quiet giant in the background of every photo. There is the calm chirp of the church pigeons in the background, abandoning their roosters for misplaced food.

The inside of cathedral is a gaudy testament to the Catholic faith. The late afternoon sun is set ablaze through the glass-stained windows, catching the light of the massive amounts of gold plating. A giant Christ is set above the altar, and off to the side is a portrait of *la virgen*, with fresh roses placed at her feet. When I was little, I would sneak out of the pew and wander into the niches, playing on the cold marble floor.

The end of mass meant treats from the vendors, and slow evenings as the sun started setting on the city. It is too easy to get lost here. Not metaphorically, but existentially, the swelter of the summer threatens to consume you, swallow you in its embrace as it breathes humidity into your lungs.

Te encargo las macetas

The patio is a quiet space, reserved from the bustle of the kitchen and the sounds that carry through the hallway. Quiet flowers creep up on the stairs that give way to the roof. The stairs crumble, decades-old cement threatens to give out under the weight of your footsteps. I spent my childhood evenings on these steps, sitting as my uncles smoked or my nana swept the floors, often waiting for my mom to get home from work. Here, we could see the people on the street walk towards the corner store and the pharmacy. The city comes alive at dusk. The sun is much softer now; the brick and cement construction glows, the heat is now more akin to a warm hug than a scorching embrace.



*My nana's first portraits
Late 1950's*



*My tata, mom, and nana (holding my aunt)
Late 1970's*



*My nana in San Francisco
Early 1970's*



*My nana holding my mom at a birthday party
Mid 1970's*



*My nana in San Francisco
Early 1970's*



*My nana in San Francisco
Early 1970's*



*My great-grandmother and I
2005*



*My great-grandmother and I
August 2007*



*My brother, nana, and I
June 2019*



*My nana in San Diego
June 2019*



*My nana and her dog
June 2019*



*My nana, at Jung, my uncle's health store
June 2019*



*Before the summer rains
July 2019*



*Catedral, Hermosillo, Sonora
July 2019*



*My nana's backyard in bloom
July 2019*



*Bahia Kino, Sonora
August 2019*