

Author Spotlight: Hello! My name is Sally Doran and I am the author of ***Crossing the Southern Border: Was it Worth the Risk?*** I live and work in Central New York. This is my first novel and it is a fiction book based on a true story. Many Americans, especially young adults, do not understand the plight of the migrant, the undocumented, the illegal. For many, relating to people from other countries is difficult and they are still referred to as illegal “aliens.” After reading ***Crossing the Southern Border: Was it Worth the Risk***, readers will experience many of the struggles some migrants face and gain an appreciation for the reasons why they risked coming to the US. They will have a better understanding of the hardships and cultural roadblocks migrants confront once they do cross the border. More importantly, becoming familiar with the story allows readers to express and entertain their own thoughts about how they feel, and can ultimately decide for themselves what they believe.

What’s it about? The premise of this book is based on my research and retelling the story of one of my own migrant students. The idea arose slowly from my discovery of the facts surrounding this shy student I was assigned to support in the classroom—who she really was, and when she let her guard down, all the many secrets she had kept deep inside about *how* she came to be in that school. If you were to ask most people today, they probably think they know at least why and where migrants cross the border into the US. They may have an idea—and I thought I did too. But even as a veteran teacher and a US citizen, I never stopped to consider the *whole* picture. What exactly might an undocumented journey entail? Who would ever agree to do this? How do they cross, exactly? What might be the life-changing consequences after?

What is the structure? This is a twenty-two-chapter suspenseful, heart-wrenching, and inspirational tale of a teen migrant girl’s scary journey from Guatemala to New York. Yes, parts of it will tug at your heart if it doesn’t make you cry! The story opens with her teacher describing how they met, but then slowly we learn fascinating details of her upbringing—why and how she came to leave her country. From her vantage point, she retraces the unimaginable struggles, intriguing coyote secrets and cultural nuances that probably would not occur to most, as well as the opportunities she and her sister navigated to reach their destination and fulfill a perceived dream. Of course, the real names and details have been changed to protect identities. The last few chapters summarize her achievements and accomplishments, as well as explain where she and several other characters of the novel are today. The novel ends with an opportunity to debate ten themes and a multitude of (unanswered) questions that arise from her journey, giving readers or book club members a chance to think about and express how they feel about the events she experienced. Here are just a few: *Was it worth the risk? Did her mother really love her if she let her go? Do you always have to remember your past culture, past life- who says? Is it ever acceptable to bend a rule? What is patriotism? If you make it through (survive), are you successful? Are you free then?*

What makes me unique as an author is that I have lived in the USA, Spain and Puerto Rico, traveled to many countries, have several teaching licenses: English, English as a

Second Language, Spanish, Spanish for the Elementary level, and have over 38 years in the field. I am bilingual (Spanish and English), and my entire career has been filled with culture and diversity. Even with my background, I learned a wealth of information about immigrants writing this story. I've been a member of the Hay House Publishers Writing Community for several years, and received an award in their writing competition.

I was inspired to write this book after years of teaching students whose first language is other than English. One day after working with a particular group of migrant students, it occurred to me to *really* think about what those students might have to go through to get to where they are. I knew in my own experience growing up, I was able to choose where I traveled to and where I was to live. But up until then, I never really gave it deep thought about the students who had no choice—*What had they been experiencing before they came? How did they get to be here? Why exactly did they come?* I realized that I didn't have any real answers to those questions. I also realized that migrants of all backgrounds and reasons, whether it's poverty, economic inequality, domestic abuse, bullying, racism, or anything in between, fear of the unknown and being known as 'a foreigner' or 'the undocumented' are still very real issues for many. I felt a desire to investigate more of their background histories—beyond the classroom where I met them. I consulted various students, asked about vexed details along their journeys, carried out my own research, consulted a lawyer, and thus began my writing journey.

My hope is that when other people—young or old—read this novel, they will be informed and enlightened at what some human beings, especially younger ones, go through to survive. Good or bad, right or wrong, we all make decisions and hope for the best. I hope this story will inspire all those who read it to rise above and use their voices and their knowledge when they need to, to create better situations for all...especially our future leaders of tomorrow...the ones we are educating today.

The NYS Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages **NYS TESOL** and the NYS Association of bilingual Education **NYSABE** can support teachers and multilingual learners with engaging (bilingual) relevant narratives like this in their classrooms, which communicate and honor diverse perspectives—perhaps broadening mainstream American culture. Not only can they help educators facilitate cultural competency in an educational setting, foster compassion, and invigorate teaching with timely debates on critical topics, they can also ensure that ESL/bilingual students know they have support networks to learn and grow their understanding as they express their thoughts. To facilitate a clear alignment to the collective message that aligns with NYS resources and goals, NYS TESOL and NYSABE know demanding conversations about the future of immigration in this country are critical to the functioning of our communities.