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For What it's Worth



*"Good morning National City! More tragedies of war continue to flood our news station. God bless our soldiers out there! Let's take this moment to honor our fallen heroes. Here is the morning death count."* The television in my mother's living room blared name after name, all soldiers who had died in Vietnam between since the last reading,

yesterday morning. My chest crunched and eyes felt heavy. This was pointless and barbaric. They took the poor citizens of the U.S. and sent them off to fight an unwilling enemy. "How is Hector? Did they say his name? Mamá! Did you hear?" *It's happening again. One of my brothers is going to kill or die and there is nothing I can do about it.* Rene sat still in a chair. I could almost see the the horrible memories replaying on his irises. His inner self forever destined to pick up lifeless limbs and torsos, not sure if it is tears on his face or the blood of war's victims. *Look how they have made my brother suffer.* I remember an impulsive desire to destroy the television, but I put on my Joan Baez 45 instead. We could not afford to replace anything.

My father worked hard for that television set. I felt warm thinking of him. His dark skin and teardrop nose, both features I inherited, though I did have my mother's short stature and curly hair. My father was a good man. He was a proud Mexicano. Honest and noble, he gave his children the strength and respect that they needed to succeed. The proud Mexicano spirit was something I often could not find within myself. For what it's worth, it made me proud to

support my brothers and sisters who never lost it. Roger with his protests and involvement in activist organizations, Carlos going to school and getting his law degree, (later becoming one of the first Latino Superior Court Judges in San Diego, even later joined by his hermanito Roy), beautiful Edith always taking in fellow immigrants and helping them the way our father helped us, young Yolanda on her own path toward success and many, many more. This was my moment to show the world what I, Blanca Aida Amaya-Cazares Lopez, was made of.

“Celia! I can’t do this anymore! How are we supposed to let them draft Allen?! He is only a boy! It’s not like any of us want this war! Carlos and Rene are both scarred from Korea, Roger, Roy, and Louie have only just returned from battle, and Hector is still in Vietnam! It isn’t fair that they take our littlest hermano too!” I felt the long held rage start to release, like a dam of oppression and silence was broken down and my spirit was speaking my untainted truth.

Celia, my older sister, was worried too, I could tell by the amount of energy it took her to regain her usual composure. “I know mi hermana, but there is nothing we can do. The draft is the law.”

“But why can’t we try?! We were not raised to sit idly by as our loved ones were forced into danger. We have the blood to make change!” My sister and I argued and argued, but inside we shared the same fear, doubt, and especially anger about our situation. Years of responsibility as the eldest daughters had left Celia and I much less vocal than the others.

Celia was skeptical but let herself go with her instinct. “I guess you are right. But what could we do anyway?”

“Let’s write a letter to the president.”

“The president!? Aida! What U.S. president would care about a letter from two poor Mexicanas?”

“That’s just the thing Celia. We are not just two *poor Mexicanas*, we are two *Americanas rich* with the life we were given and the many family members we were blessed with, we have to do everything we can to hold onto that.”

She rummaged through the desk until she pulled out a fresh white piece of our mother’s stationary. A small grin spread across her face as she handed me a pen. “Let’s write it Yaqui.”

“Certainly.”

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Soon later, we received a response. The president had written us back and agreed that our little brother should be kept safe from Vietnam. Allen was stationed at the American military base in Panama and Hector came back from war in one piece. Celia was right, we really were blessed with the family we were given. Two parents, eleven siblings, and now, 400+ children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. The proud Cazares spirit is one that will truly never stop growing.