



EL NORTE

I was born in Cuicatlán just after midnight in the Year of the Dark Lord Xolotl.
During my long lifetime I first belonged to my family; then I belonged to my husband.
I gave birth to thousands of sons and daughters.
Most of them lived lives of poverty and suffering and too many died young.
They died of diseases brought by the *Gachupines*.
They died in childbirth and in civil war.

In time, some sought a better life in *El Norte* and many made the dangerous trip.
Some found happiness and a better life there, others did not.
In *El Norte* too many of my sons came to believe the lie that machismo can be found by doing violence on their brothers. Only some learned that the sign of a true man is one who takes care of the children he creates and finds respect in honest work.

In *El Norte* too many of my daughters were confined to an existence dictated by their husbands.
They were denied education and self-respect.
Those who tried to escape could only find brutalizing work in factories.
Others numbed their spirit and sold themselves on the streets to feed their children.

A thousand years have passed.
And just before midnight on December 31, 1999 I died in *El Norte*.
I felt the soothing hand of *La Muerte* close my eyes for the last time.
And as my soul passed into the next world, I could only despair.
God forgive me! How can a mother teach her children to hope but not to dream?