



I remember my childhood clearly: sitting quietly by a large window overlooking a peaceful lake, flipping through channels on a giant flat-screen TV while waiting for my mom to finish work, eating a snack from a fridge that seemed to hum louder than ours ever did. Everything felt new, clean, and expensive, like the kind of homes seen in movies. But we were only visitors. My mom was there to clean.

She came to the United States from the borders of Oaxaca, Mexico, with hope for a better life. Cleaning houses was not her dream, but it was what she could do to support my sisters and me. Sometimes, when no one else could watch us, we would go with her. Those days stay with me, not just for what I saw, but for what I learned.

One day, I watched her on her knees scrubbing the wooden floors with a rag that had started to turn dark brown, the same color as the bags under her eyes after a long day of work. I found myself in a corner of an ostentatious home that seemed almost surreal as if it had stepped off the pages of a glossy magazine. I asked if I could assist her, and she looked up and said, “Tú sigue con tus estudios. No quiero que termines como yo,” which translates to, “Keep going with your education. I do not want you to end up like me.”

In these affluent households, I often pondered why my circumstances differed from those of my peers. Their refrigerators overflowed with food, and their bedrooms resembled idealized portrayals from television: everything appeared effortlessly accessible. Yet, whenever those feelings of envy emerged, I redirected my focus to my mother, laboring intensely, perspiring, and maintaining her composure despite exhaustion. Her dedication reinforced the necessity for me to contribute as well.

Academic challenges frequently arose; I faced nights where comprehension eluded me, leading to feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Nevertheless, I persevered. I sought additional assistance after classes, studied diligently despite physical discomfort, and cultivated resilience in facing my anxieties. Because if my mom could push through her pain, I could persevere through mine.

From her, I gleaned invaluable lessons far beyond any formal education could impart, lessons in sacrifice, responsibility, and love manifested through consistent action. I aspire to obtain a college degree, establish a sustainable career, and contribute positively to my community, particularly aiding others with stories akin to my own.

The moment I walk across that graduation stage, I know I will be smiling through tears. The first person I will look for is my mom, clapping with pride and looking at me with emotion. At that moment, I will understand that every effort was worthwhile for both of us.