

# A Mexican mother longs to be reunited with her family in America

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Word Count **765**



From her bedroom window in Tijuana, Mexico, Emma Sanchez Paulsen gazes toward the hills of the U.S.-Mexico border. Her husband and three sons live on the other side, in Vista, California. Photo: Don Bartletti/Los Angeles Times/TNS

TIJUANA, Mexico — At bedtime, Emma Sanchez Paulsen's three sons pile onto her bed. She begins to weave a tale.

When they lived in Vista, California, the stories used to be about her childhood in Mexico. She would tell them about running through green pastures or strolling through city plazas. Then, nine years ago, she was forced to leave the United States because she had come to the country illegally. At the time, Alex was 5, Ryan was 3 and Brannon was just 2 months old, and they stayed with their father. The only time they could cuddle on her bed was when they visited her in Tijuana, a city on the Mexico side of the border.

Instead of telling stories about Mexico, Sanchez Paulsen found herself dealing with questions from three children. They didn't understand why a border stood between their parents.

Then the boys became the ones creating stories.

They came up with a series of schemes to get their mother back to the United States. One of their ideas involved a trampoline to bounce over the border wall. Another was to attach a bunch of balloons to her limbs. They also thought of putting her in a box.

One time, when Brannon was about 3, he asked if it would be OK to turn her into little pieces of paper.

“This way I can take you with me across the line,” he said. “And then I can put you together with glue when we get back home.”

## **An Educator Helps Turn Stories Into Books**

On the many nights she spent alone, Sanchez Paulsen wrote what she describes as the most important bedtime story she'll ever tell. It was a fantastical tale about a young elf who joins with his brothers to battle dragons. They visit their mother in the land of the fairies.

That tale, “The Little Elf,” is now part of a collection of bedtime stories written by mothers and fathers living in Tijuana. They all have been separated from their families. The book project is called “Cuentos Para Dormir,” or “Bedtime Stories.”

For nearly a year, educator and activist Sophia Sobko has crossed the border to Tijuana almost weekly. She helps the parents turn their stories into books.

“I went to the library and could not find a single book explaining deportation to a child,” she said. “This showed me that there is a need. So many kids are growing up so confused and so affected by this.”

Sanchez Paulsen's story says: "But even though, for the little elf, his life seemed normal, he knew his family was not like others. His friends had a dad and a mom and he didn't. His brothers tried to help him with his confusion. They said, 'We think it's normal, but we know it's not a normal life,' and they were right — it wasn't normal to grow up without a mother."

## **Her Story Helps Explain The Unexplainable**

In 2006, Sanchez Paulsen was certain she would get permission to come to the United States. She told the boys they'd celebrate the next day at Disneyland.

Instead, immigration officials told her she could not enter the U.S. for 10 years, which was the law then.

The plan was to have the boys stay with her in Mexico, but the schools were better in the U.S., and it was safer, so they stayed there.

She said her story gives her a chance to explain a situation she found hard to explain to her children.

Her story continues: "The city where mother firefly was locked into smelled of salt, loneliness and a lot of love from the parents separated from their children. The atmosphere was gloomy and sad, and even though she felt much anguish, she also had a lot of faith that one day they would be together again in the happiest city in the world where they were once very happy."

### **She Thinks Of Missed Moments**

Sobko said the group has raised \$2,000, enough money to make books for 10 parents. She hopes to have some of the books placed in libraries throughout the country.

Sanchez Paulsen said she often thinks about the important moments she's missed in her boys' lives. She was not there for their first days of school, graduations and awards.

They visit her about twice a month in Tijuana. When they sleep over, they gather on her bed for a bedtime story.

On the nights she's alone, she stares out her bedroom window and watches the lights atop the border fence. She knows her husband and boys are on the other side.

## Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-7].

*They came up with a series of schemes to get their mother back to the United States. One of their ideas involved a trampoline to bounce over the border wall. Another was to attach a bunch of balloons to her limbs. They also thought of putting her in a box.*

Which word from the paragraph helps you understand the meaning of the word "schemes" in the paragraph?

- (A) ideas
  - (B) series
  - (C) attach
  - (D) involved
- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Her Story Helps Explain The Unexplainable."

*Her story continues: "The city where mother firefly was locked into smelled of salt, loneliness and a lot of love from the parents separated from their children. The atmosphere was gloomy and sad, and even though she felt much anguish, she also had a lot of faith that one day they would be together again in the happiest city in the world where they were once very happy."*

Which answer choice BEST describes the meaning of the word "anguish" as used in the paragraph?

- (A) mild comfort
  - (B) moderate weakness
  - (C) extreme hope
  - (D) intense sadness
- 3 Which section of the article is organized chronologically?
- (A) "Her Story Helps Explain The Unexplainable"
  - (B) Introduction [paragraphs 1-7]
  - (C) "An Educator Helps Turn Stories Into Books"
  - (D) "She Thinks Of Missed Moments"

- 4 How does the section "She Thinks Of Missed Moments" contribute to the article?
- (A) It defines important concepts.
  - (B) It gives details about the present.
  - (C) It explains the cause of a certain event.
  - (D) It provides a solution to a problem.