

5 What are coyotes?
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6 What are La Ligra?
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10 What was life like for Soledad when she first arrived?
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1 Where does Soledad come from?
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2 Why did Soledad's father take her to the USA?
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3 How long did it take them to get to the USA?
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4 Describe the journey on the bus and in the van
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ILLEGAL MIGRATION TO THE USA

At 14, I walked through the desert to reach the US. My story didn't end there:
Soledad Castillo's story

I was born I was born in Honduras in 1992. My parents broke up before I was born and when I was five, my father left for the United States. I lived with my mother and my sister and we were the poorest family in our small neighbourhood.

I was only 12. When my father returned to Honduras to see me for the first time in 10 years, I asked him to take me back to the United States because I didn't have anything left in Honduras and I wanted to start a new life.

It took us more than a month to get to the United States. We travelled from Honduras to Guatemala on a bus. There were gangsters on board who put a gun to my head, asking for all my money. I didn't have any, but they didn't believe me. We stayed in Guatemala for a day and then got in a van to travel to Mexico. We had to lie down with many people, one on top of the other. The coyotes [smugglers] put cardboard on top of us so la Migra [the authorities] wouldn't see us if they pulled us over. It was hard to breathe.

We then walked through the Mexican

desert for days. There were around 20 people in our group from all over the world. Some people got lost and didn't make it. On the second day, I became too weak, so my father paid the coyotes extra for a little pill to give me energy. After that, we rode in a van from Texas to northern California. There was a hiding place under the floor where they put us. It was a very long trip and we had to stay quiet the whole time.

When we got to Hayward, California, where my father lived, it seemed really fancy. I was blown away by the glass buildings. But reaching the US wasn't the end of my struggles, only the beginning. I wasn't able to go to school because I had to work. I got fake papers that said I was 21, even though I was really 14. Then I started working at a laundry doing two shifts a day. I started at seven in the morning and I got out at one the next morning. I was also sending money to my mom.

When I turned 18, I moved to San Francisco to continue my education. Accessing housing and the education system was difficult. I eventually enrolled at City College and got a job at

Safeway, ringing up customers, cleaning the floor. I was working full-time and taking classes but lived in poor conditions.

Many Americans think that migrants come here to take their jobs, to do bad things, to take advantage of the country. These ideas are not right – we are not bad people. I came here to survive, to do better in this world, to help my family and other people. There was no way to survive in my homeland. I was suffering from extreme poverty. I didn't choose to come here; I didn't have another option. And it's been hard here in the United States: learning a new language; working multiple jobs and still being unable to make ends meet.

7 How many people travelled through the desert?
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8 What happened to Soledad in the desert?
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11 What type of work did Soledad do?
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12 Why did Soledad come to the USA?
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9 What was Soledad's first impression of California?
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