

Childhood Memory

An Autobiographical Short Story
by Maria Norma Martinez

It wasn't clear to me what it might be like. I knew that it might be different. Mamá and Papá reassured me that I would be home after awhile. They told me there would be other little girls and boys that would become my friends. All I knew is that I was going to wear a brand new dress and new shoes and I loved wearing new clothes. I knew that if I had gotten new clothes, this was something special.

Mamá and Papá always made me feel special in those days. I felt happy when Mamá let me play with her make up and I looked into the mirror and pretended that I was the beautiful grown up lady that I had seen on the television. I felt happy in my room when I played the toy piano that Papá had set up in front of the television so I could watch American Bandstand and sing at the same time. During the afternoons, Mamá would make fresh, flour tortillas and I liked when she would give me one off the hot *comal* and put butter on it for me. It was so delicious! Papá would come home later in the day and he would hold me and tell me what a pretty girl I was-- "¿Mija, porqué estas tan bonita?" I would smile as he asked why I was so pretty. I felt good inside. It felt good living in the little white house on Harliss Avenue with the big swing in the backyard that hung down from a huge walnut tree. This was my home. The place where I felt safe and good and wanted.

The day came that I would leaving for awhile. "Vas a la escuela.", my mamá told me. My papá would take me in his big Chevrolet car to this place not far from home. I wore my new clothes, but I did not feel good today. I was afraid. I would be leaving my mamá, my papá and my little brothers for a few hours, but I would be back.

My teacher, Mrs. Trussler, never spoke to me. I did not know what she was saying to the other children. She did not speak like my mamá and my papá. The other boys and girls would play with me sometimes. I did not know what they were saying. I watched the other little boys and girls. I waited and I watched alot. Everyday I would to sit in a chair in a big circle with other boys and girls and someone would give me a carton of milk and a graham cracker. It was the only time I felt good while I was there. It wasn't the *tortilla de harina*, the warm flour tortilla from Mamá's kitchen, but it was good.

"I'm gonna kill you," is what I mostly remember about kindergarten. Chantel's words where frightening. Everyday I knew that Chantel, the only little girl who would talk to me, would be at school and everyday she would take me to the bathroom when the teacher would ask who wanted to go with me. I knew I would hear those awful words again. I don't remember how I learned what they meant but I remember that I was afraid. I did not want to come back to this place that was supposed to be good for me. I could not tell my teacher. She did not know how to talk to me. Mornings became daily struggles with Mama telling me that I had to go. I would cry as I got dressed and put on my shoes and I cried as I slowly walked away from my home to the place where I did not feel safe or good or wanted.

One day Papá went to the school and talked to the teacher. He spoke some English and told her that I was afraid to go to school. He told her about Chantel. I do not remember what happened after that, but I know that we moved from the little white house on Harliss Avenue months later.