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For Immediate Delivery

## **Where Does the World End?**

My father always hated trucks. He rode in his first vehicle when he was eight. It was a faltering pick-up his parents used to bring their apples to market. That ride left him in a coma for three weeks and a funeral service since he was pronounced dead. My grandmother cried by his bedside until he finally squeezed her hand. Now, 14 years later, at 22, he left for the United States in a pickup. This time, his left hand squeezed his seat and his right steadied a camera.

He was coming from Guatemala City, where years of civil war, political corruption, and constant kidnappings had left no reason to stay. Well, besides my mother. Recently married, my parents decided to begin new lives in the U.S. But, poor as they were, only one could travel north. At the time, *coyotes* (that is, the people who arranged for migrants to enter into the U.S) were notoriously unreliable, ruthless, liars, and expensive. And yet, the options in Guatemala were rapidly fading. He would go north, find a job, and send back letters and money. He would arrange for my mother to meet him in California. And indeed he did.

The hardest part of the deal to keep was sending letters. My father received no formal education, spoke no English, and could only sweet *talk*, not sweet *write*. He decided to send pictures instead. He would kick out all his roommates from his one bedroom apartment to show my mother that he had a place for her when she arrived. He showed her the bustling supermarkets, heaven-bound buildings, and most importantly, the landscape.

The longest trip my father had taken by that point was from the Yucatan highlands to the Guatemala City, and eventually to a pizzeria where he annoyed my mother. My father's face is covered with scars from the accident; he stands at 5' 1" on a good day; and has terrible table manners. You can imagine that the knockout that is my mother wanted nothing to do with him. But as, Gabriel Garcia Marquez once said, "he is ugly... and sad, but he is all love." People, if you annoy a woman enough, she'll marry you. And she did. But only under the condition that he would show her the world.

So, these pictures were his big chance. And boy did he deliver. He chronicled the trip through Mexico, capturing the deserted countryside, weird flora, and, of course, the moments before dawn when the sand dunes resembled the sea.

He was robbed in Mexico—even though he didn't have much to take, but managed to salvage his photos. They were out of focus, thumb-filled, and beautiful. My mother waited patiently for almost a year before the pictures he sent became a film in her mind. They traveled east. This time by plane, both piled over the small window, even though they weren't in the window seat. They soon built a family together. First raising my sister Argentina, and then me.

Shortly after arriving in Virginia, they could no longer travel. The cost of raising a family met with the realities of the work force picked at their dreams. Voyages to around the country now involved cramped buses, short paces, and forgettable sites. I saw his pictures collect dust.

So the night my father asked me, “*¿Frankito, donde termina la tierra?*” “Frankie, where does the world end?” I didn't realize he was speaking literally. But he was. He's seen California, Virginia, Quebec, but he has never seen where the world ends. He explained this to me, upset, defeated. He never learned about Columbus's Indian misidentification, the City on a Hill, Lief Erickson, Ghengis Khan, and all the trivia we are so eager to forget as school children. That the earth is, in fact, an ellipsoid, and any beginning or end only reveals to man his folly and bias.

He asked me again. *¿Frankito, donde termina la tierra?*” Say something I thought. Anything. I tried to think of all the obscure places that could be considered the edges of the earth: Tierra de Fuego, Antarctica, Greenland, the place where Tom Hanks was casted away, but nothing seemed right. A name would mean nothing. But for my father there seemed to be no end, but now he had just given up.

His withered face looked at mine. I hesitated. Finally, I told him I didn't know, I must have looked as confused as he did. He told me I would have to buy him a helicopter one day to explore the question. I agreed. “Bueno,” he replied, happy.

Now, I am post-Columbian. But I cannot shake the feeling that the world does *not* end. My father some time after said, the world ends where you stop going forward. And I hope every day that my father never thinks the world ends.