



Orange Blossom

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It is funny how certain scents send you back in time. The slightest hint of orange blossoms transforms me back to my childhood. I do not particularly care for one particular memory associated with orange blossoms - nevertheless I do feel a certain nostalgia and peace as I recall my first encounter with migration for the purposes of work. My father decided to uproot us for the first time when I was seven years old. We migrated to Florida to follow the citrus harvest cycle. I no longer was in my familiar surroundings and strangers surrounded me. Although we were poor and lived in a three-room house surrounded by citrus orchards – it was just our family – it was home and it was good.

When we arrived in Florida, they revealed to us to the migrant camp where we were to live - in a barracks surrounded by an orange orchard. Somehow, I knew it was no longer home and I did not like it. I did not understand why so many families lived together in one big house or why we had to share a bathroom. I do recall my mother's heeded warnings not to go anywhere by myself especially the bathroom. As an adult, I understand the reasoning behind that warning.

I missed being outdoors, climbing the trees in my front yard and I wanted to go back home. I guess my mother wanted the same thing because we moved shortly thereafter to a house my family rented. It was then that I felt a little bit more at home again. My father hauled the harvested oranges in his truck to the canning company. They would process the oranges into orange juice so we really did not work in the fields. My mother's job was to do payroll for the people who picked the oranges.

I remember that it was late August and my mother took us to the neighborhood school and registered my brothers and I for the new school year. What a sight we were! My mother with six children and only three of us were school age. It was then that I first heard that I was a **migrant**. I do remember my mother speaking to the receptionist in her broken English and insisting we attend school. I knew my mother was a little perturbed and I did not understand why but I recognized that "tone" she used when she was not happy. The receptionist remarked by saying that most migrant children did not attend school and my mother stated very firmly that her children did. I got that gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach again and I did not want to go to that school.

The second grade teacher in Florida was not very friendly unlike my first grade teacher back home. Funny, I do not recall her name. She would always make remarks that made me feel like something was wrong – her tone of voice said it all. She would comment, "you smell so nice", or question me about who would do my hair. I recognize now that she was being condescending - but I did not know that then.

I made a friend the short time I was at the migrant camp. Her name was Frieda. I asked my mother why Frieda did not go to school and her reply surprised me – she said her mother would not let her because she has to work. Again, I did not understand but I knew it did not feel right. I thought all children had to go to school and so began my quest for education.