

M A R C O S   Δ   N T I L



IMMIGRANT

# IMMIGRANT

I am a Mayan Q'anjob'al, a Guatemalan, an immigrant, a son, a brother, a husband, a father, and a tech entrepreneur: my ancestry roots are my strength, and my people's history my testimony.

M A R C O S   A N T I L

Copyright © 2022 Marcos Antil

All rights reserved.

First edition: March 2023

m@MarcosAntil.com

**Foreword by Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel Peace Laureate 1992**



MarcosAntil.com

Contributor: Gustavo Montenegro

Cover photographer: Yana Antil, @yanastar\_art

Director of cover photography: Emilio Méndez, Saúl

Translation from Spanish by:

Beatriz Aguilar Arroyave and Helaine Nightingale de Walton

ISBN: 979-8-9877434-1-6

It is prohibited, without written authorization from the copyright holder, under sanctions established by law, the total or partial reproduction of this work by any means or procedure including, but not limited to, reprography, word processing or the distribution of copies by rental.

*For Yana*

I've come to realized that my purpose in life is to serve. If at any given moment I forget my purpose of service, life will hand me solitude.

# CONTENTS

	Txutx, yuj wal tioxh	i
	Foreword	vii
1	Los Angeles, California	Pg. 1
2	My Umbilical Cord Tied Upon a Tree	Pg. 13
3	Farewell Santa Eulalia	Pg. 21
4	The Lost and Found Boy	Pg. 29
5	Lucía and Marcos	Pg. 41
6	A Little Dove in flight	Pg. 53
7	The Ancestral Inheritance that Saved My Life	Pg. 59
8	Blood of our Blood	Pg. 67
9	Cocolá Grande	Pg. 83
10	Fire in the Mountains	Pg. 95
11	Empty House	Pg. 107
12	The Kid with Long Hair	Pg. 117
13	Coyote and Roadrunner	Pg. 129
14	Welcome to the USA	Pg. 139
15	Just Another Q'anjob'al in Los Angeles	Pg. 151
16	To the Teacher, With Love	Pg. 167
17	And Justice for All	Pg. 175
18	A Bridge to be Built	Pg. 183
19	Proud Immigrant	Pg. 197
20	Perfect Moments	Pg. 205
21	Reprogramming Oneself is Always Possible	Pg. 211
22	Seven Seconds	Pg. 221
23	To Live, Once Again	Pg. 233
24	Comes the Time to Blossom	Pg. 241

25	There Always is a New <i>Day</i>	Pg. 249
26	Launching Off to Fly	Pg. 255
27	My Beautiful Guatemala	Pg. 263
28	XumaK	Pg. 269
29	A Guatemalan Dream	Pg. 279
30	An Angel Among the Stars	Pg. 291
31	We All are Marcos	Pg. 301

TXUTX, YUJ WAL TIOXH



With mist in their eyes, the mountains awaken with dry leaves rustling in their hands, while the moisture on the stones says good morning to the bare feet of the girl, Lucín Cuxin<sup>1</sup>. She is going on an uphill trail to take food to her Uncle León. Long before the sun rose, he went to the fields to harvest the crop. A kind soul, he always stands up for Lucín when her mother gets annoyed and wants to punish her for not washing the clothes well, for not keeping the fire burning, or for not grinding the corn properly for the *masa*<sup>2</sup> to make tortillas.

The steps of that girl—who in time became our mother, her gaze at sunset, her work cultivating the fields, and her yearning sighs, can still be felt in the gentle breeze that flows in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango, and the nearby villages. For years, for decades, even though she was far away from her homeland as an immigrant in Los Angeles, California with my father and us—her children, she returned, either in dreams while asleep or awake. She went back to the trails in the mountains, to the forest, to the furrows recently plowed, as if time had not passed. From time to time, she would tell us stories about how she worked planting crops, about her unfulfilled desire to go to school, about the endless days in faraway plantations, stories that she lived again in her memory as though time and distance were non-existent, as though the light of those mountains had stayed still forever, as if she had never gone away from Chibal Chiquito, the village where she was born, where houses looked like earrings that every hill wore with pride.

---

1 Lucía Marcos in Q'anjob'al

2 Paste made by grinding corn by hand on a traditional stone.

But the distance did exist, and the exile was real. Time continued inexorably, the fog dissipated in slow, swirling circles...and condensed again in the mornings, forming shapes of animals' heads, flowers and faces that the wind devoured. The fields smiled with their teeth of corn in many, many seasons of rain that fed the transparent and rumbling rivers, while the wheat played at being the sea on the mountain slopes.

*Mamá* always dreamt of going back to Santa Eulalia, to the haven of the humble little house with clay walls, and wood tiles, she wished to light the fire that would illuminate the night, longed to be out in the fields and watch the sun come out to give life to the newly planted seeds, and to see, after a heavy downpour, the swirling of crystal clear water on the side of the road. But at the same time, even though we carried proudly the roots of our Q'anjob'al<sup>3</sup> background, she knew it was not really feasible to go back because her children had lives, careers and businesses that had blossomed in the United States of America, where her smiling grandchildren were born.

Now, she is finally here, about to be received by the same soil for which she longed. *Mamá*,<sup>4</sup> here is *Papá*<sup>5</sup>, here we are, your children: Andrés, the wise protector, Juana that died when she was four but is alive in our hearts; Leonardo, the patient guide of higher

---

3 The name of this ethnic group is written as recommended by the Academy of Guatemalan Mayan Languages.

4 Mom in Spanish

5 Dad in Spanish

goals, me, Marcos, who keeps in my memory and in my steps those mysterious dreams that you once revealed to me; Eulalia, always generous and devoted; María, with enormous strength behind that loving face; Antonio, the enthusiastic family man, always pursuing higher goals, Juanita, an excellent professional with a sensitive soul at everyone's service, and Abdías, the only one that was born in the United States, yet carries very proudly our Q'anjob'al Mayan spirit. This misty morning, we are all grateful to God for your life, for having had you with us—Mother.

It is March 21st, 2016. The rain does not stop. It falls as if it were crying with us at your funeral. This is a time to say farewell, but also to say welcome; this is your great spiritual return, beloved, anticipated, timeless in fulfilling your wish to be mountain, heaven, sunlight, pebbles, newly planted corn, blossoms and rainfall. Today you become our Angel in Heaven.

Now you are free, *Mamá* Lucín. Thank you for sharing your heart with us; and for leaving so much of you within our hearts.

We will miss you.

## FOREWORD

The life of Marcos Antil narrated in "IMMIGRANT", is a living testimony full of truth that leaves droplets of humanity on each of its page. It awakens the human conscience and shatters the silence about the cruelty experienced by the most dispossessed of the planet, becoming a story that represents collective memory.

Behind his words, one listens to whispers of wisdom from our Mayan ancestors and the kindness of their advice. Marcos Antil left clear footprints when he faced uncertainty, loneliness, fear and helplessness as he moved forward despite pain and sorrow, forging him into the hero of his own story.

What is most admirable about the author is how he constantly communicates hope and faith, tenderness as that of the smile of a child, creativity and triumph, and how this vision always led him to make his dreams come true. He exemplifies deep strength.

Reading this work, leaves the reader's heart filled with a sense of peace and harmony. Marcos Antil is a grandson of the Mayas; from the womb he has held a staff of authority granted to him by the blessing of the Ajaw Q'uq Kumatz<sup>6</sup>, which imbued him with the magic of Paiconob<sup>7</sup> and the protection of the grandfather tree

---

<sup>6</sup> One of the Mayan spirits, the Creator

<sup>7</sup> The original site where Satna Eulalia was built

in Paxil Kayala<sup>8</sup> which received him in its branches, wherefrom his umbilical cord was hung.

The depths of the traces of time are felt when opening the pages of his father's memory, the dreams of Mrs. Lucín Cuxin, the death of little Juana and the vesting of Marcos Antil with the sacred *güüpil*,<sup>9</sup> all this reality is impressive and only the greatness of dignity can defy it.

Marcos Antil reminds us that we are whole—worthy human beings, that we are triumphant, with a great ancestral connection whose roots come from the depths of our Mother Earth. Marcos Antil's life is thrilling and inspiring, he invites us to heal our souls from hatred, resentment or envy, thus proving that nothing is impossible.

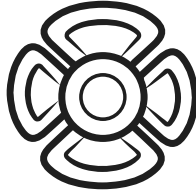
Rigoberta Menchú Tum

Mayan K'iche', Nobel Peace Laureate 1992

---

8 Names of the villages where corn originated, according to the Mayan belief.

9 Güüpil: a traditional, meticulously hand-woven blouse worn by Mayan women.



1

## LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

1990: The searing blast of pressurized steam hit me so fast, it was impossible to see it coming. In half of an instant, the burning vapor clouded over me, and in the other half, it dissipated while I held my excruciating, throbbing arm. I must have screamed, but I do not remember any sound other than that of a hissing mechanical gust. It was a miracle that my face and neck were not burnt, I had instinctively turned around, yet the sting of the heat reached up to my shoulder. It was awful, unbearable, embarrassing, but what hurt most were the voices ringing in my ears.

It was a small but disastrously careless moment directly in front of the industrial steam iron at the clothing factory where, because of my persistent nagging, I had landed a summer job. That was the only work a fourteen-year-old, Mayan Q'anjob'al Guatemalan immigrant could hope to get in downtown Los Angeles, 2,800 miles from the village of Nancultac, close to Santa Eulalia in the region of Huehuetenango where I was born. I longed for the serenity of my hometown when watching those endless freeways with ten lanes of traffic. I missed the green hills while living in the cooped-up small

room that my family rented in an apartment complex where other immigrant families from Guatemala and the rest of Central America lived. We had come to the United States of America to save our lives, running away from a war that was blindly doing away with lives in cities, towns, villages, highways and byways. In that crucial and traumatic new beginning, we had to find any job we could to pay for food and a roof over our heads, just like many thousands of other undocumented Latin Americans, or immigrants from other continents.

My original idea was to work in the sewing industry as soon as I arrived in Los Angeles, just as the rest of my family did. To my great surprise, in the United States, it is illegal for children to work. My mother said that I must go to school. There was a high school near the apartment building where we lived, and I thought that was where I would study. The previous October, I had finished elementary school in Guatemala, and in November I traveled to join my family who was already established in a suburb of Los Angeles. I had just turned fourteen years old on October 4<sup>th</sup>, but I still was not the required age for an American high school where years count more than the grades one has passed. Thus, I had to spend three months in middle school, whereafter I started the four years of high school: a step that was not easy at all.

To be admitted to school, various requirements had to be met: medical exams, vaccines and paperwork. This last requirement was the most difficult for a young, undocumented immigrant. *Don*<sup>10</sup> Matías Felipe, the Pastor of the church “Christ is Coming Soon” which my parents attended, helped by providing references for our family and obtaining letters of recommendation for us.

That selfless gesture was the first helping hand anyone gave to integrate me into the American School System. But at that moment, I did not

---

10 Don is word used before the name of a man, or doña for a woman to show respect.

see it that way. After a few days, my desire to go to school melted down: I found school to be a boring, overcrowded and an absurd prison.

It was torture to go to classes.

I didn't have any friends.

It was a different language.

I was totally out of place, lost. I felt shunned.

I didn't want to be there. I wanted to earn dollars, just like the stories told by relatives of immigrants back in my hometown.

I was anxious to work and to earn a per hour wage, as my older brothers, Andrés and Leonardo did, as did my father Marcos Andrés. They spent long days sewing clothes in factories, colloquially known as "*factorías*"<sup>11</sup>, located in neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city, to support my mother Lucía and my brothers, to pay the "biles"<sup>12</sup>—gas and electricity bills, and debts. We had so many needs that my mother had to look for work in another factory.

I wanted to earn money to buy clothes, sneakers, ballcaps, a Walkman and to spend on the arcades —those amazing venues that housed dozens of video game machines. There, time flew, it was daytime when you went in, and when you came out, it was night. One could spend hours aboard a spaceship, or a race car, or dodging digital obstacles in the imaginary worlds that appeared on the screens.

My partner-in-crime during those stints was my cousin Marcos, who got his name for the same reason I did: Because our grandfathers, on father's side, had the name Marcos. So, to distinguish between us, we called him Maco.

---

11 English root words, pronounced and written as if they were in Spanish. *Factorías* for factory.

12 English root words, pronounced and written as if they were in Spanish. *Biles* for bills.



Those were fun and unforgettable times amongst the sounds of shooting, dots being devoured, harmless gunfire and characters that melted down. Everything there was hypnotic, I could say addictive, one day I spent more than forty dollars between Mortal Kombat, high speed motorcycles and lonely warriors that died again and again but I only needed to put in another *cuora*<sup>13</sup>, a quarter, to continue fighting against mysterious enemies that laughed when they “killed” me. Another coin, another life, and so on until they were finished.

Maco was like a brother to me in the loneliness of our exile. When we were children in Santa Eulalia, we had fun-filled afternoons, we shared our hopes, our discontent, our questions, our dreams... as we did during our teenage years in Los Angeles. When I was old enough to get a driver’s license, he was the one who taught me to drive. We also learned English together; we were registered in afternoon classes to speed up our integration into the American Educational System.

This is why I cried so much when he left this world at an early age. Cancer took him away when he was only twenty-six years old. I will never forget his smile while we ran back to the hypnotizing machines, behind our parents’ backs. We knew that a scolding was inevitable, but it didn’t matter... “Study!” they repeated, my father, my mother, my siblings, my aunts, and uncles, but I didn’t want to. I hated classes because all the subjects were taught in English and, even though most students were Latinos, I understood absolutely nothing.

The only subject I liked was math, because numbers and arithmetic, algebraic or geometric operations were a kind of universal language, even though I did not see them as something useful in my future life, except as a means to count the money that I desperately desired to earn.

---

13 Colloquial pronunciation for “quarter”, a USD\$0.25 coin.

“I want to work!” I would tell my family. “Get me a job at the *factoría*!” But due to my age and the labor laws in the United States, no one could give me a steady job. I needed to wait until summer vacation, which is from June to August; waiting all those months seemed never-ending.

At last one day, my father, who probably knew what was going to happen, said:

“All right, we have made arrangements for you to work during the summer.”

At the factory where they worked there were no vacancies, but Uncle Palín<sup>14</sup> got me a job at the factory in which he worked.

I couldn’t opt for the better-paying jobs, like cutting fabrics or sewing pants or shirts, because of the size of the machinery: the work was too heavy and complex for a teenager like myself, despite the fact that I thought I was as good as a grown man.

I had to choose between *trimear*—trimming the leftover bits of threads or fabric-- or ironing the completed garments. I chose to operate the steam iron because all I had to do was place the finished pieces on a base, bring down the press and let the steam off: a jet of boiling heat left them ready to be packaged.

That was easy as pie for a guy as smart as me. Plus, the pay was better than the one for trimming.

In my mind I calculated how much I would earn in 2, 4, 8 hours; in 2, 4, 8, 16 and more days. How easy! And without having to go over those awful lessons, or having to listen to the boring teachers, or doing homework.

I think my mother was alarmed when she heard that my father had decided to let me take a job, and if she knew about his plan, she concealed it very well.

---

<sup>14</sup> Bernabé, in Q’anjob’al

Occasionally, I had accompanied my father and brothers to see what they did in the factory, so in my mind I had completely mastered how to operate the steamer.

The owners of the factories, were loud and very demanding about efficiency: “Time is money”<sup>15</sup>. They also paid a lot of attention to the quality of the garments, but that would not be a problem for me. Especially, because during the last year that I lived in my town, the parish school in Santa Eulalia had workshops on various trades and I had chosen the tailoring class. I thought I knew how to cut fabrics and how to use sewing machines. Of course, the ones in my town were pedal machines, while the ones in that factory were electric and very fast.

No one can do this better than me, I thought. I had to put a pair of pants in place, press the pedal that let out a cloud of steam, and repeat the process on the other side of the garment. The next, one sleeve, then another, turn it around and again, on to the next pair of pants or shirt. It didn’t matter. What an easy way to make money, I thought. The first month flew by. The dollars dazzled me.

I don’t know what I was dreaming of. Maybe I was counting the days left until I had to go back to school. Not too many days to go, and I don’t want to go back to classes! —I repeated to myself, when something jolted me back to reality: a blast of burning steam was upon me. Oh my God!

What did I do? What happened? Did I lift the pedal too soon?

My reflex was to turn my face away, but the accident happened in the fraction of a second. In an instant thousands of bees were stinging my arm. It was searing red. I felt the pain all the way up to my neck, near my ear, it was overwhelming.

The boss, used to getting things done with precision, without delay or

---

<sup>15</sup> *Time is Money*, this phrase is credited to Benjamin Franklin, Founding Father of the United States (1706-1791), included in the book *Advice to a Young Tradesman*, from 1748.

excuse, began to shout. I didn't understand his language, but it was clear that he was very angry, and following the direction to which his finger pointed, I understood that he did not want any problems and was ordering me to leave. Uncle Palín tried to explain, but finally he informed me that I could not go on working there, first because of the accident, and second because his boss said that I was fired.

The way home was torturous. I cried all the way because of the pain in my arm, but more than anything because of the blow to my self-esteem. Walking, and then going on the bus, and again going on foot along those long Angeleno blocks should have made the suffering subside, but it didn't.

The only thing that kept me going was the thought that my family would shower me with love and comforting words. I was looking forward to my mother's embrace, reminiscent of those days when I often got sick, and she would pick me up and hold me like a baby even though I was already five years old. I assumed that being a hard-working young man and having accidentally burned myself, my parents and siblings were going to feel sorry for me.

Nope—they didn't! No one gave me words of comfort.

One by one, they simply came to tell me that if I went on with my stubborn idea of working instead of studying, those kinds of injuries and pain was what I had ahead of me.

"This burn is nothing, much worse things happen at the factories! So, get over it and stop whining! Nobody is asking you to work."

"That happens to you for disobeying."

"You'd better learn to follow advice."

"I told you so!"

I am convinced that seeing me like that, my mother's heart was broken and longed to comfort me, but she didn't. Nobody did.

A few days later the huge blisters that I had on my arm burst and the pain got worse. They could not bandage me because the gauze would stick to the wound. They applied an ointment, but it was as though they were putting salt on it.

“But it was only an instant of steam...and look how it hurt my arm!” I bawled, in tears.

I could not find a comfortable position for sleeping. If I was slightly careless and rubbed my arm against the sheets, the pain was awful. Those were sleepless nights that would send me into a maze of anger against myself.

Slowly, in the silence of the early hours of the morning, that accident helped me discover the way to my future life; to listen to my parents’ experienced words in ways that I had not listened before.

My absurd rebelliousness made me realize its consequences.

They told me many times:

“The garment factory is a hard place to work, you better study so you can get a job that pays better, without taking those risks!”

“Study and you will be able to have a better wage per hour without killing yourself!”

“Make an effort, study, we will support you so you can have a better future.”

Even in dreams I listened to the echo of my parents’ voices, telling me the same things: set in the fields in our hometown, in a high-rise building, and in an unknown street that moved in a strange way.

I do not know why, during so many months I thought that what they told me were lies, that they wanted to run my life, while instead I was free and could make the right decisions about my own future. Typical teenager! But that injury made me realize that I did not have the experience, good judgement, nor preparation to make the best choices.

The rest of the summer vacation was not pleasant in the least, but those days made me think about the difficult homework from school, the long explanations that the teachers gave us - a few hours in a classroom were practically nothing compared to the strenuous labor of a garment factory, and I finally understood that those who worked there did it out of sheer necessity.

I was not being respectful of the courage of so many people that stayed in those jobs for years and years, for lack of other opportunities.

"I will go to school!" I announced to my parents and to my older brothers, "I promise I will do my best to get good grades, but I want this burning pain to go away!"

Mother and Father only smiled.

As soon as classes began, I went back to high school. I had changed, I was a different person. I wanted to learn how to change my world, to find a better horizon for my life and that of my family, I wanted new, broad, and profound answers, but more than anything, I wanted to ask new questions to solve new problems.

In some way, the accident that burned the skin of my arm, also incinerated my unfounded, childish, and fickle ideas.

In life there are no short-cuts.

From mistakes, one must learn.

In a few weeks the wound was healed, new skin grew, but the experience marked me and with the passing of years it still spurs me on to transforming myself into a new and better person.

I am Marcos Andrés Antil, a digital marketing entrepreneur, founder of XumaK in the United States of America with offices in Los Angeles, Miami, Colombia and Guatemala, with clients that include many Fortune 500 companies in more than twenty-five countries.

I am the son of Marcos Andrés, grandson of Marcos Andrés and great-grandson of Marcos Andrés; the fourth of nine siblings, born into a family

## I M M I G R A N T

of the Mayan Q'anjob'al ethnic group. When I was five years old, I almost died amongst the fog, and thanks to my mother Lucín Cuxin I survived because, in a moment of dire need, she did not hesitate to offer her precious inheritance from her ancestors as payment to the traditional woman healer that saved my life.

I am the one who at the age of fourteen, crossed the border into The United States of America with no papers, and without any family, just like so many children did back then because of the war, and like others who do so now to get away from poverty, hunger, and criminal violence. I am the one that while studying at High School in Los Angeles, California wished to become a Lawyer or a Doctor, and who was passionate about Political Science, but because of lack of financial resources, or a formal immigration status, was denied access to the majority of universities that had accepted me, I am the one that while working weekends as a gardener, found an unexpected link into the Technology Industry.

This is my story.

