

# ORAL PRESENTATION

Hello everyone, my name is Laura Quintero Anton, and I'm going to tell you about the process of making my thesis project, "El Camino del Quetzal." This visual essay tells the story of Gally, an undocumented immigrant who crossed the border in search of a better life, but more importantly, to help her family that she left behind in Guatemala. Gally's story is filled with challenges, courage, and hope.

*Hola a todos, todas y todes, soy Laura Quintero Antón y les contaré sobre el proceso de hacer mi proyecto de tesis, "El Camino del Quetzal". Este ensayo visual cuenta la historia de Gally, una inmigrante indocumentada que cruzó la frontera en busca de una vida mejor, pero sobre todo para ayudar a su familia que dejó atrás en Guatemala. La historia de Gally está llena de desafíos, valentía y esperanza.*

This adventure getting to know Gally, and people like her, began in the summer of 2023 in the fields, orchards, and plant nurseries of Hillsboro and Cornelius. You might be wondering what I was doing in places like this. What was an artist doing in a nursery? That summer, I started volunteering, since helping my community is one of the things I love most, in addition to art. So that summer, I worked as a volunteer recruiter for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP). This program helps people who work in migrant seasonal farmwork to earn their high school diploma, or GED, completely free of charge. My job was helping a recruiter to find students who wanted to earn their high school diploma and possibly have a better career in the future. That's where inspiration came to me. It was beautiful to see my people working so hard, always with a smile on their faces, committing to night school and weekend study. This dedication to trying to make a better life for themselves filled me with pride, and I thought: the stories of these hardworking people need to somehow be shared with the bigger world.

In the fall of that same year, I began the academic research for this important project. I was very curious to know the reasons why people leave their friends, family, and homes on a dangerous migration journey to a country with a very different culture and language. I am also an immigrant, but the way I arrived in this country was different, and in a much safer way. So I began searching for academic articles, and I read about migration statistics, focusing on undocumented Latin American immigrants. One of those days, I came up with the idea of looking for volunteers in the LatinX immigrant community where I worked as a volunteer. I even asked the PCC HEP program director for permission to look for volunteers for my thesis project. A few weeks later, I met with Gally and her husband, and I asked if they would like to volunteer for my project. I briefly explained that I would like to create some kind of picture

book or comic illustrating their stories for the purpose of showing a bigger audience their difficult journey. On the day of the interview, I gave them a consent form, so I could record their testimony, and I made it clear that their identities would be protected.

I decided to do this project because this story is an example of many other stories of people who cross the border. It's important to make real stories visible, especially in these times when we encounter misinformation and disinformation in the news about this population. As an immigrant, I feel a responsibility to use the privilege I have to support my undocumented brothers and sisters. I can safely use my freedom of speech to tell Gally's story and make my community visible. I recently heard someone say that "the cure for indifference, discrimination, and oppression is to create community." This visual essay is a reflection of how proud I am of my community, the Latinx community, the migrant community. In these last few months, where the political climate has been a chaos of lies and changes that don't make any sense, I have done my part by focusing on finishing each of the illustrations, putting an intention into each one of them: an intention of respect, dignity, and pride. As Rigoberta Menchu said in an interview, "We always have to fight from a place of love." Today, through this project, I fight with love, admiration, and pride for the struggle of my people.

*Decidí realizar este proyecto porque esta historia es un ejemplo de muchas otras historias de personas que cruzan la frontera. Es importante visibilizar historias reales, especialmente en estos tiempos en que nos encontramos con misinformación y desinformación en las noticias sobre esta población. Como inmigrante, siento la responsabilidad de usar el privilegio que tengo para apoyar a mis hermanos y hermanas indocumentados. Puedo usar con seguridad mi libertad de expresión para contar la historia de Gally y visibilizar a mi comunidad. Recientemente escuché a alguien decir que "la medicina contra, la discriminación y la opresión es crear comunidad". Este ensayo visual refleja lo orgullosa que estoy de mi comunidad, la comunidad latina, la comunidad migrante. En estos últimos meses, donde el clima político ha sido un caos de mentiras y cambios sin sentido, he hecho mi parte enfocándome en terminar cada una de las ilustraciones, poniendo en cada una de ellas una intención: una intención de respeto, dignidad y orgullo. Como dijo Rigoberta Menchú en una entrevista: "Siempre tenemos que luchar desde el amor". Hoy, a través de este proyecto, yo lucho desde el amor, la admiración y el orgullo por mi gente.*

I started the project with the simple idea of telling Gally's story, but at first I wasn't sure whether to do a children's book, a comic, or a visual essay. Everything started to take shape just a few months ago, in the fall of 2024, during my first semester as a senior. I decided to go for a 20-page visual essay, but some things changed earlier this year. I realized that Gally's story has a lot of important themes and significant moments, and 20 pages would not be enough to tell the whole story. So I had to make several changes to what I wanted to include in the story and what I had to sacrifice, and the story ended up being 24 pages. Why a visual essay? I think the visual essay format allows me to better unfold Gally's story, using illustrations to take us through an emotional journey that would be much more difficult to design or adapt into a picture book or comic. This project is for a young adult and adult audience. However, I believe that if a parent sits down with their 9-year-old kid to read the story, the child can understand the story and the emotions depicted because my stylized illustration is more oriented toward children.

I decided to keep the text in Spanish because my primary audience is the Latin American immigrant community. However, I believe anyone who is not a Spanish speaker can understand the context of the story through the illustrations.

*Decidí mantener el texto en español porque mi público principal es la comunidad inmigrante latinoamericana. Sin embargo, creo que cualquiera que no hable español puede comprender el contexto de la historia a través de las ilustraciones.*

Gally is a Guatemalan woman whose number one reason for coming here is to help her family. LatinX people are mainly focused on family values, and for us, family always comes first. Gally feels a great responsibility to help her mother since her father has an alcohol problem. So one day, she says goodbye to her family with a backpack full of dreams and hope. The challenging adventure of crossing the border was a physical and emotional challenge for Gally, from which she still suffers post-traumatic stress. Despite being afraid, tired, hungry, and thirsty, Gally did not give up. Even after being detained and deported to Mexico on her first attempt, she crossed the border again because, on top of feeling the responsibility to support her family, she now had financial debt with some dangerous people, which she would not be able to pay if she returned to Guatemala. The story shows her risky journey. And once across the border, Gally also had to face intense culture shock. She is currently fighting to overcome the language barrier by taking ESOL classes. She is a hardworking, humble, brave, and courageous woman. She does not like to stay still and is always looking for ways to be a better person.

*Gally es una mujer guatemalteca cuya razón principal para venir aquí es ayudar a su familia. Los latinoamericanos nos centramos principalmente en los valores familiares, y para nosotros, la familia siempre es lo primero. Gally siente una gran responsabilidad de ayudar a su mamá ya que su papá tiene problemas con el alcohol. Así que un día, se despide de su familia con una mochila llena de sueños y esperanza. La desafiante aventura de cruzar la frontera fue un desafío físico y emocional para Gally, del cual aún sufre estrés postraumático. A pesar del miedo, el cansancio, el hambre y la sed, Gally no se rindió. Incluso después de ser detenida y deportada a México en su primer intento, ella cruzó la frontera de nuevo porque además de sentir la responsabilidad de apoyar a su familia, ahora tenía deudas financieras con personas peligrosas, que no podría pagar si regresaba a Guatemala. La historia muestra su arriesgado viaje. Y una vez al otro lado de la frontera, Gally también tuvo que enfrentar un intenso choque cultural. Actualmente, ella continúa luchando para superar la barrera de lenguaje tomando clases de inglés como segundo idioma. Gally es una mujer trabajadora, humilde, valiente y audaz. A ella no le gusta quedarse quieta y siempre está buscando maneras de ser una mejor persona.*

The story has very dramatic moments, and to express Gally's feelings and emotions, I used several resources that helped me to express them, such as textures, repetitive mark making, and specific color palettes for each moment in the story. Most of my textures were made by hand with charcoal and inks. I used various types of paper to make the textures more expressive, and then I scanned each one to digitize them.

Although I used the same color palette throughout the book, I chose specific colors for specific emotions. Different shades of blue express sadness or nostalgia. We can see this color palette at different moments in the story, such as when Gally is in the detention center,

or when she faces culture shock and isolation due to the language barrier.

To express fear and anxiety, I used highly contrasting colors, such as dark blue contrasting with yellow, orange, and red. These elements of color, combined with the repetitive marks and patterns in the textures, create an atmosphere of fear of the unknown or aggression. We can see this in the illustrations where Gally crosses the border and is persecuted by the border patrol.

Throughout the journey across the desert, Gally runs out of water, and the weather is very hot. In these pages, I used a warm color palette, with orange and yellow to match the stress of the protagonist. I chose this color palette because it evokes suffocation, thirst, and hunger, and Gally was feeling those feelings intensely at that moment in the story.

My favorite pages are the ones full of hope, where I show Gally as the empowered, determined, and hardworking woman she is. The color palette is vibrant in these pages, and the textures are soft and friendly. This coexistence of color and subtle textures in the final pages of the story evokes a celebration of Gally's accomplishments, and a recognition of all the sacrifices she had to make at the beginning of her journey.

Another important element within the story, which could be identified as a secondary narrative, is the symbol of the quetzal. This bird only lives in southern Mexico and Guatemala. The quetzal is part of the Guatemalan flag and accompanies Gally throughout the story. The quetzal is a kind of guardian animal, a protective Nahual. The ancient Mexicas, or Aztecs as they are known today, considered the quetzal a sacred bird. The quetzal's plumage has beautiful colors, especially on its tail. The quetzal appears only at key moments in the story as a symbol of prosperity. In some pages, we can only see some of the quetzal's tail feathers, since the colors green, blue, and turquoise symbolize happiness, courage, hope, and greatness. For example, the last page of the book includes several feathers and a frontal view of the quetzal accompanying Gally and her husband as a symbol of good fortune. Gally's character design features colors similar to those of the quetzal's feathers. Gally carries hope in the green of her sweater, just like the quetzal in its plumage.

*Otro elemento importante dentro de la historia, que podría ser identificado como una segunda narrativa, es el quetzal. Esta ave solo habita en el sur de México y en Guatemala. El quetzal es parte de la bandera de Guatemala, y acompaña a Gally a lo largo de la historia. El Quetzal es como una especie de animal guardián, un Nahual protector. Los antiguos Mexicas, o Aztecas como se les conoce actualmente, consideraban al quetzal como un ave sagrada. El plumaje del quetzal tiene colores hermosos, especialmente en la cola. El quetzal aparece solo aparece en momentos claves de la historia como un símbolo de prosperidad. En algunas páginas solo podemos apreciar algunas plumas de la cola del quetzal ya que los colores verdes, azules y turquesa simbolizan felicidad, valor, esperanza y grandeza. Por ejemplo, en la última página del libro incluye varias plumas y un quetzal de frente acompañado a Gally y a su esposo como símbolo de buena fortuna. El diseño de personaje de Gally tiene colores similares a los de las plumas del quetzal. Gally lleva consigo la esperanza en el verde de su suéter al igual que el quetzal en su plumaje.*

In addition to the visual elements in the project, the text is fundamental. I chose quotes taken directly from the interview with Gally. It's very important to me to preserve the authenticity of the story, so I tried to keep the text as accurate as possible.

So far, everything sounds very harmonious and fluid in my creative process, but it wasn't always that way. I had to change my composition and the way I used color on multiple occasions. The most challenging pages to draw for me were the ones that expressed Gally's most intense emotions, as I am a very empathetic person, and I could feel those emotions when I was working on them. At first, the colors were too contrasting and the textures were too intense. At one point, I felt like the color palette wasn't working toward the goal I had in mind. Yes, I had moments where I hated some of my compositions, and I felt frustrated at not knowing how to solve problems after spending so much time working on them; during some moments, I felt stuck.

Fortunately, I had help from my midterm evaluation panel. Aida Salazar and Gloria Felix gave me a lot of great advice and feedback that was inspiring. Aida Salazar is a writer with extensive experience telling stories. She advised me to make some small changes to the text to make the story flow more easily, specifically when Gally is in the detention center, and on the next page where she is crossing the border again. Aida told me that she felt the story was disrupted and confusing. At that point in the project's evolution, I didn't have enough text to explain how Gally came out of the detention center, and why she was crossing the border again.

Gloria is an accomplished illustrator with a great career, and her feedback helped me sort through things that my brain wasn't sure how to solve. She told me the story expresses a lot of strong emotions, and that I needed to give my audience a break, especially in the moment when Gally crosses the border again. Like Aida, she felt the story needed more fluidity in that part, and she suggested adding some quetzal feathers to express a bit of hope, and these changes will be a connection with the final pages of the story, where I portrayed Gally empowered and happy.

So, a few days after doing a deep analysis, I evaluated which illustrations needed more work, and then I took a small step back and went back to looking for inspiration in other artists' work. I reread some graphic novels, like "Kusama," by Elisa Macellari, and realized that the artist uses repetitive patterns in her illustrations to create a chaotic environment while maintaining the same color palette. Although Macellari's illustration style is more graphic than my own, her work gave me an idea of how I could use the existing textures while being more subtle with the colors. After I had a better idea of what I needed to modify, I started working on the spreads where Gally is just crossing the border. I changed the color of the water texture from yellow to blue, and only used the most contrasting colors around the boat, and in some parts of the water to emphasize the characters inside the boat.

In addition to these changes, I also modified the composition on the pages where Gally meets an American who offers her "help," but later he leads her directly to being detained by the border patrol. At first, I had a figure of a farmer offering them food, and the image was inside a vignette which was surrounded by terrifying hands. On the back, I had the face of a creepy creature with violent and disordered textures and marks. I think this page was the one I struggled with the most; I didn't like the composition, the colors, or the texture, and now that I think about it, this was the last page I finished editing. In the end, I decided to use a slightly more symbolic and simpler resource in the composition. I left Gally and the other

migrant at the table, and I included threatening hands in blue with shades of yellow and orange. These symbolic elements complemented the fearful expression on Gally's face very well.

Returning to Aida and Gloria's recommendations, I decided to include a few more elements on the page where Gally crosses the border again. She is carrying a larger backpack that is bigger than in other illustrations, and the quetzal appears flying above Gally, showing her the way, leaving a few feathers behind to remind her that there's still hope. I also included some buildings in the background to represent L.A., the destination Gally had to first reach to meet her uncle. These changes gave the story better continuity.

I would like to publish my project in the future, and to achieve this goal, I will pursue residency programs that focus on supporting new artists in the publishing world, or I will apply for grants that support this type of project. Gally's story is a story of empowerment; it's a story that breaks the stereotypes imposed on Latin American immigrants. Undocumented immigrants are considered a vulnerable population for not having "papers," which exposes them to all kinds of abuse and manipulation. They cross the border, risking their lives. By many, they are called "los mojados," or "wetbacks", which are terms that try to take dignity and power away from them, but in reality they are very brave people who have sacrificed many things to help their families first, and to help themselves second. They work twice as hard as the average person. They do jobs that other people don't want to do, and to be honest, without immigrants working in the fields, greenhouses, kitchens, and many other places, we probably would not have food on our tables.

*Me gustaría publicar mi proyecto en el futuro, y para cumplir con este objetivo me daré a la tarea de buscar programas de residencia que se enfoquen en apoyar artistas nuevos en el mundo de la publicación o aplicare a concesiones apoyan este tipo de proyectos. La historia de Gally es una historia de empoderamiento, es una historia que rompe con los estereotipos impuestos a los inmigrantes Latinoamericanos. Los inmigrantes indocumentados son considerados una población susceptible por no tener "papeles", esto los expone a todo tipo de abusos y manipulación. Cruzan la frontera arriesgando sus vidas. Muchos los llaman "los mojados", término que intenta quitarles dignidad y poder, pero en realidad son personas muy valientes que han sacrificado mucho para ayudar a sus familias primero y a sí mismos después. Trabajan el doble que una persona promedio. Realizan trabajos que otros no quieren hacer, y siendo honesta, sin los inmigrantes trabajando en los campos, invernaderos, cocinas y muchos otros lugares, probablemente no tendríamos comida en nuestras mesas.*

This entire artistic journey would not have been possible without the emotional support of several people who were always there for me, some from a great distance, but all always believing in me. I am deeply grateful to my mentor, Molly, for always cheering me on and giving me very useful advice throughout this creative adventure. I also want to thank my partner for being there and believing in me when I didn't have much faith in myself. Thanks to my sister and my parents, who, despite the distance, always sent me encouraging messages or listened to me on the phone during one of my many anxiety attacks.

*Toda esta travesía artística no hubiera sido posible sin el apoyo emocional de varias personas que siempre estuvieron ahí para mí en casa o en la escuela, y algunas a gran distancia, pero todas siempre creyendo en mí. Estoy profundamente agradecida con mi mentore Molly por siempre echarme porras y darme*

*consejos muy útiles durante toda esta aventura creativa. También quiero agradecer a mi pareja y compañero de aventuras por estar allí y creer en mí cuando yo no tenía tanta fe en mí misma. Gracias a mi hermana y mis padres que a pesar de la distancia siempre me mandaban mensajitos de ánimo, o me escuchaban al teléfono en una de mis tantas crisis de ansiedad.*

Last but not least, I want to thank Gally for trusting me and letting me tell her story. I am so proud of her. As I mentioned before, this project also aims to build community, and community also brings new friendships.

*Por último pero no menos importante quiero darle las gracias a Gally por confiar en mí y por dejarme contar su historia. Como lo mencioné antes, este proyecto también tiene como objetivo crear comunidad, y la comunidad también trae consigo nuevas amistades.*

Thank you so much, Muchísimas gracias, Tlazocamati.