

voyage

ISSUE 01:
SALZBURG, AUSTRIA



A journey through Austria

Discover the history of Salzburg, its most well known landmarks, and advice for the new migrant to feel at home.

All that's left behind

A photo essay by Phil Moore, detailing the abandonment and loss of belongings as refugees flee their homes.

Meet the migrants

We interview three migrants who have immigrated to Salzburg over the years, and record their stories and experiences.

a journey

a change

voyage

NZ European. Swiss. South African born living in England. Thousands of different ways in which we describe our nationality and heritage, our birthrights and passports we hold. Some 232 million immigrants are living in the world today, and for many of us, our parents, or grandparents, we are one of them. We trace our heritage so carefully around the world, curating family trees and lists of great great grandparents, tracing our roots in order to gain a sense of ourselves – where we come from, where we are now, and how that makes us who we are.

Some cities around the world are particularly unique in their draw for immigrants, they boast a unique melting pot of culture, cuisine, religion and most of all people, and attract a wide range of cultures that blend together to create new ones. We begin to identify with many aspects of these cultures and become more open minded to the other possibilities out there – who could we be if we lived elsewhere, or had been raised in a different culture, by different minded people? Culture defines our values and ways of life, but by shifting around the world we allow those values and ways to be challenged and changed.

Your passport does not define you, and you can choose to change and reevaluate the life and cultural values you have grown up with. Voyage targets these kind of people – ones who have taken the leap into the unknown, left the familiarity of their childhood life and home, and made a radical change that will forever stay with them, or, the ones that need to courage to do so. We search into cities around the world to discover what makes them unique destinations for immigrants, and for those who now live there to discover their experiences, and most of all help provide a path for those wanting to do the same.

Issue 01: Voyage Magazine

voyagemagazine.at

Cover Photography
Lili Stellingwerf



37

Migrants and
migration:
Ahmedu Fatima

05

Journey through
Austria: A history

43

Eat, drink, see, do:
Salzburg

15

Migrants and
migration:
Muhammad Besharan

51

Migrants and
migration:
Sylvia Cortes

23

All that's left
behind:
Phil Moore

55

Up next:
Cape Town, South
Africa

a journey through austria

WORDS BY LAND SALZBURG
PHOTOS BY LILI STELLINGWERF

Issue 01: Salzburg, Austria





Issue 01: Salzburg, Austria

A brief history, and introduction to Salzburg, Austria.

08

The Federal State Land Salzburg is the heart of the heart of Europe. However, Salzburg not only profits from its central location in the middle of Europe, Land Salzburg has so much more to offer: As a Land of culture it offers everything from classical to traditional folklore events, as a Land of economy it is home to innovative technological enterprises, successful small and medium sized businesses and organic farms, as a Land of sport it has produced world class athletes and offers a comprehensive range of leisure facilities for everyman, as a Land of nature it welcomes guests from all over the world offering classic sightseeing as well as breath-taking natural beauty spots and as a Land of knowledge it is dedicated to the acquisition of knowledge and boasts modern research facilities as well as universal education for thousands of children and adolescents.

Mozart and the Krimml Waterfalls, Hermann Maier and the Giant Ice Caves, superb skiing and the Salzburg Festival, Christian Doppler and the Hohe Tauern National Park, the Celtic Village, Red Bull and the eternal ice of the Großvenediger mountain range – Land Salzburg is unimaginably multifaceted.

Salzburg can be regarded as the oldest and most important cultural and spiritual centre in present-day Austria. Although it had already been elevated to the rank of archdiocese in 798 and from the late Middle Ages onwards had formed a spiritual principality in the Holy Roman Empire, Salzburg is one of Austria's youngest lands. The development of the region and its ultimate separation from Bavaria, its mother country, was agreed in the fourteenth century but it was not until 1816 that Salzburg was incorporated into Austria. Of Austria's present-day lands, Salzburg is the only one to have been ruled as an independent state by a prince-archbishop and it is the only one of the many spiritual principalities of the Holy Roman Empire still to exist as an independent land.

Salzburg can be regarded as the oldest and most important cultural and spiritual centre in present-day Austria. Although it had already been elevated to the rank of archdiocese in 798 and from the late Middle Ages onwards had formed a spiritual principality in the Holy Roman Empire, Salzburg is one of Austria's youngest lands. The development of the region and its ultimate separation from Bavaria.

“Geographically, politically, artistically and culinarily, all roads have led to Salzburg for centuries. The results speak for themselves.

**Imperial grandeur.
Cutting-edge culture.
Stunning natural beauty.**

Austria doesn’t just embody the great European traditions -- it’s the essence of Europe itself.”



St. Peter's Abbey
Salzburg, Austria



Often described as a “Baroque jewel” or the “Rome of the North” Salzburg’s beauty is acclaimed and valued the world over and attracts more than 5 million visitors a year. The city’s historic centre or Old Town was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996.

The awarding of this distinction was substantiated as follows: “As the ecclesiastical centre of Central Europe the significance of the former city-state ruled by archbishops dates back to early occidental cultures. The heart of Salzburg is formed by the episcopal see, the oldest uninterrupted archbishopric in the Northern Alps dating back to the Carolingian dynasty and the Cathedral with the working cloisters of St. Peter and Nonnberg. It is from this ecclesiastic centre point that the historically intact and well-preserved city has emerged. Through the centuries the archbishops commissioned famous artists of the time culminating in a vivacious, interwoven mixture of medieval and baroque architectural monuments in the Old Town forming a unique urban ensemble dominated by the Hohensalzburg Fortress.

Through the centuries the archbishops commissioned famous artists of the time culminating in a vivacious, interwoven mixture of medieval and baroque architectural monuments in the Old Town forming a unique urban ensemble dominated by the Hohensalzburg Fortress. Under the impressive silhouette of church spires and domes, rows of burghers’ houses with their compact facades line the open squares and winding alleys to the left and the right of the Salzach River. Intrinsically tied to the Genius Loci Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the city’s long music and festival tradition has greatly contributed to the flair of this unique monumental city.” In Salzburg the protection and preservation of historic sites goes beyond preserving monuments and historic buildings. The Land’s cultural heritage is particularly present in small monuments old farm houses and estates, in parish churches but also in the many palaces, ruins and castles scattered through Salzburg.

1000

Construction of Hohensalzburg Fortress commences in 1077 followed by the building of St Peter’s Church in 1167.

1400

The city walls are built, and the construction of key buildings in the city, including the Franziskener-Church (1408), begins under the ever watchful eyes of the Prince-Archbishops.

1815

Salzburg is officially annexed to Austria at the Congress of Vienna.

700

St. Rupert, "the founder of modern Salzburg", orders the building of St. Peter's Church, St. Peter's Monastery, and the Nonnberg Convent.

1300

The building of the gothic church St. Blasius commences in 1327.

1756

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart - composer and genius musician - is born at 9, Getreidegasse on January 27th.

1852

Salzburg's oldest café 'Café Tomaselli', on the Alter Markt, opens its doors for the first time. It would go on to become a living institution, host to royalty, famous musicians and actors from around the world.

1945

World War II Allied bombing destroys 7,600 houses. Although the town's bridges and cathedral’s dome are destroyed, most of Salzburg's buildings are left standing.

1997

The 'Old City'of Salzburg is placed on UNESCO's list of the world's cultural heritage sites.

timeline

Important events throughout the ages

1818

Parts of Salzburg are destroyed by a devastating fire. On December 25th, the Christmas carol 'Silent Night, Holy Night' is played for the first time in St. Nikolaus' Church, Oberndorf.

1938

Austria is annexed to Germany during the 'Anschluss' in an attempt to unify both German speaking populations under one nation.

1964

The world famous film "The Sound of Music" is made in Salzburg.

A man with a mustache, wearing a white cowboy hat, dark sunglasses, and a dark patterned button-down shirt, stands in front of a wall made of plywood. To his right is a brick wall with a black door frame. The background shows a brick building with a window. The overall scene suggests a location in a conflict zone or a place undergoing reconstruction.

Muhammad Besharan

This is Muhammad, who I first met last year in Iraq. At the time, he had just fled the war in Syria and was working as a clerk at my hotel. I left Muhammad with the expectation that he'd soon be travelling to the United Kingdom with fake papers.

Here, he will tell me the story of the tragic events that have occurred since we last met.



Children play at a refugee camp in Muhammad's hometown in Syria.

“The fighting got very bad. When I left Syria to come here, I only had \$50. I was almost out of money when I got here. I met a man on the street, who took me home, and gave me food and a place to stay. But I felt so ashamed to be in his home that I spent 11 hours a day looking for jobs, and only came back to sleep. I finally found a job at a hotel. They worked me 12 hours a day, for 7 days a week. They gave me \$400 a month. Now I found a new hotel now that is much better. I work 12 hours per day for \$600 a month, and I get one day off. In all my free hours, I work at a school as an English teacher. I work 18 hours per day, every day. And I have not spent any of it. I have not bought even a single T-shirt. I’ve saved 13,000 Euro, which is how much I need to buy fake papers. There is a man I know who can get me to Europe for 13,000. I’m leaving next week. I’m going once more to Syria to say goodbye to my family, then I’m going to leave all this behind. I’m going to try to forget it all. And I’m going to finish my education.

Before leaving for Europe, I went back to Syria to see my family once more. I slept in my uncle’s barn the entire time I was there, because every day the police were knocking on my father’s door. Eventually my father told me: ‘If you stay any longer, they will find you and they will kill you.’ So I contacted a smuggler and made my way to Istanbul. I was just about to leave for Europe when I received a call from my sister. She told me that my father had been very badly beaten by police, and unless I sent 5,000 Euro for an operation, he would die. That was my money to get to Europe. But what could I do? I had no choice. Then two weeks later she called with even worse news. My brother had been killed by ISIS while he was working in an oil field. They found our address on his ID card, and they sent his head to our house, with a message: ‘Kurdish people aren’t Muslims.’ My youngest sister found my brother’s head. This was one year ago. She has not spoken a single word since.”

“We could see no land, no lights, only ocean. Then after thirty minutes the motor stopped. I knew we all would die.”

For two weeks my tears didn't stop. Nothing made sense. Why did these things happen to my family? We did everything right. Everything. We were very honest with everyone. We treated our neighbors well. We made no big mistakes. I was under so much pressure at this time. My father was in intensive care, and every day my sisters called and told me that ISIS was getting closer to our village. I went completely crazy. I fainted in the street one day and woke up in the hospital. I gave the rest of my money to a smuggler to help my sisters escape to Iraq. Now I only had 1000 Euro left and I was stranded in Turkey. My father recovered from his operation at this time. He called me and asked how I'd paid for his surgery. I told him that the money came from a friend. He asked if I had made it to Europe. For the first time ever, I lied to my father. I didn't want him to feel guilty about his surgery. I told him that I was in Europe, and I was safe.

After I told my father that I'd made it to Europe, I wanted nothing more than to turn that lie into the truth. I found a smuggler and told him my story. He acted like he cared very much and wanted to help me. He told me that for 1000 Euros, he could get me to a Greek Island. He said: 'I'm not like the other smugglers. I fear God. I have children of my own. Nothing bad will happen to you.' I trusted this man. One night he called me and told me to meet him at a garage. He put me in the back of a van with twenty other people. There were tanks of gasoline back there, and we couldn't breathe. People started to scream and vomit. The smuggler pulled out a gun, pointed it at us, and said: 'If you don't shut up, I will kill you.' He took us to a beach, and while he prepared the boat, his partner kept the gun pointed at us. The boat was made of plastic and was only three meters long. When we got on it, everyone panicked.



The smuggler told us that he would guide us to the island, but after a few hundred meters, he jumped off the boat and swam to shore. He told us to keep going straight. The waves got higher and higher and water began to come in the boat. It was completely black. We could see no land, no lights, only ocean. Then after thirty minutes the motor stopped. I knew we all would die. I was so scared that my thoughts completely stopped. The women started crying because none of them could swim. I lied and told them that I could swim with three people on my back. It started to rain. The boat began to turn in circles. Everyone was so frightened that nobody could speak. But one man kept trying to work on the motor, and after a few minutes it started again. I don't remember how we reached shore. But I remember I kissed all the earth I could find. I hate the sea now. I hate it so much. I don't like to swim it. I don't like to look at it.

The island we landed on was called Samothrace. We were so thankful to be there. We thought we'd reached safety. We began to walk toward the police station to register as refugees. We even asked a man on the side of the road to call the police for us. I told the other refugees to let me speak for them, since I spoke English. Suddenly two police jeeps came speeding toward us and slammed on the brakes. They acted like we were murderers and they'd been searching for us. They pointed guns at us and screamed: 'Hands up!' I told them: 'Please, we just escaped the war, we are not criminals!' They said: 'Shut up, Malaka!' I will never forget this word: 'Malaka, Malaka, Malaka.' It was all they called us. They threw us into prison. Our clothes were wet and we could not stop shivering. We could not sleep. I can still feel this cold in my bones. For three days we had no food or water. I told the police: "Please give us water."

I begged the commander to let us drink. Again, he said: ‘Shut up, Malaka!’ I will remember this man’s face for the rest of my life. He had a gap in his teeth so he spit on us when he spoke. He chose to watch seven people suffer from thirst for three days while they begged him for water. We were saved when they finally they put us on a boat and sent us to a camp on the mainland. For twelve days we stayed there before walking north. We walked for three weeks. I ate nothing but leaves. Like an animal. We drank from dirty rivers. My legs grew so swollen that I had to take off my shoes. When we reached the border, an Albanian policeman found us and asked if we were refugees. When we told him ‘yes,’ he said that he would help us. He told us to hide in the woods until nightfall. I did not trust this man, but I was too tired to run. When night came, he loaded us all into his car.

Then he drove us to his house and let us stay there for one week. He bought us new clothes. He fed us every night. He told me: ‘Do not be ashamed. I have also lived through a war. You are now my family and this is your house too. After one month, I arrived in Austria. The first day I was there, I walked into a bakery and met a man named Fritz Hummel. He told me that forty years ago he had visited Syria and he’d been treated well. So he gave me clothes, food, everything. He became like a father to me. He took me to the Rotary Club and he told them my story and asked: ‘How can we help him?’ I found a church, and they gave me a place to live. I committed myself to learning the language.



TEXT AND IMAGES
BRANDON STANTON
humansofnewyork.com



“I practiced German for 17 hours a day. I read children’s stories all day long. I watched television. I found a church, and they gave me a place to live. Right away I committed myself to learning the language. I practiced German for 17 hours a day. I read children’s stories all day long. I watched television. After seven months, it was time to meet with a judge to determine my status. He was so impressed that I’d already learned German, that he interviewed me for only ten minutes. Then he pointed at my Syrian ID card and said: ‘Muhammad, you will never need this again. You are now an Austrian!’”

all that's left behind

PHOTO ESSAY BY PHIL MOORE

Issue 01: Salzburg, Austria

Imagine leaving behind your home, your life, fleeing war and persecution, taking with you only what you can carry. Thousands of kilometres later, these fragments of your life lay discarded on the roadside and platform edges, the only traces that your anguish passed through these nondescript towns. You are left with the clothes on your back, and the promise of what lay ahead. At each point along the way, items of clothing, a lost shoe, crushed sunglasses, marks these passages.







Issue 01: Salzburg, Austria



All that's left behind: Phil Moore







Issue 01: Salzburg, Austria



All that's left behind: Phil Moore



Ahmedu Fatima

Ahmedu was the eldest son, the pride of his parents, and had four siblings. When his mother and father separated, his life changed. He was determined to make his fortune in order to reunite his parents and help his siblings.

This is his story.

**“On one occasion,
an Italian policeman
head-butted him for no
apparent reason.
Perhaps he wished to
express his dislike for
immigrants, perhaps for
dark-skinned people.”**

I met Ahmedu for the first time during a tour of the main mosque in Catania. The imam, a cheerful and welcoming Arab, was showing us around the building. Ahmedu, like many other desperate immigrants before him, was helping to clean the mosque as a token of gratitude for the hospitality. Something about him struck me. He had an air about him, the way he carried himself. His long journey from home had not demolished his poise and confidence. I went up and talked to him. He seemed distant and defensive. When I asked him his name, he gave it mechanically, as if answering an official. I then said with a smile that my name is also Ahmed. We were connected, I said. There was a faint smile on his face.

Beneath his poise, I sensed that here was an extraordinary person with an extraordinary story to tell. I was determined to interview him for my project but he left shortly afterwards and when we arrived the next day, it was not certain if he would be there at all. Just as we were about

to leave, he turned up. He was reluctant to talk. Illegals know that talking to strangers can land them in trouble. We began our long interview with a tense Ahmedu holding the stage. Ahmedu said he was the eldest son, the pride of his parents, and had four siblings. When his mother and father separated, his life changed. He was determined to make his fortune in order to reunite his parents and help his siblings. “I want something to make my family happy,” he said.

His father bade him well, and he set out on a hellish journey without documents or money that took him through the vast expanse of Africa through Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Libya. His journey took one year and two months. Ahmedu recounted the horrors he encountered on the way, of the times he was jailed by corrupt policemen, of the pain he felt in his body due to the hunger in his stomach. There were many times when all he could feed himself with was water. When he could, he found employment as a helper to a barber, hawking water,



Roads Ahmedu walked through Africa, on his year-long journey to Europe.



or serving food, which gave him enough money to get to the next destination. Sometimes he could save something to send to his father -- always with a request to include his mother. He would also try to ring when he could so that he would have news of his family. He struggled merely to survive, never quite sure when he would be able to continue his journey towards his ultimate destination of Europe. He repeated two words as he talked, “not easy”, “not easy.”

Ahmedu recounted the climax to this nightmare journey when he was crammed with about 100 people into a small open boat on the shores of Libya, nearly drowning in the commotion following the outbreak of gunfire in the port. The passengers were heading for Europe with no money and no papers. What they had was nothing more than the dreams that travelers carry with them. Water was scarce and the food tasted of petrol. Ahmedu felt sick. Very soon the boat developed leaks. The passengers were asked to use their plastic water bottles to



bail out the water before the boat sank. Cold, hungry, confused and uncertain, Ahmedu was rescued by the Italian coastal authorities and found himself in Sicily.

On their arrival, Ahmedu and the other migrants were herded into a school hall. They were given clothes and after a few days allowed to leave. But if Ahmedu thought his problems in Europe were over, he was mistaken. They were just beginning. He began to sleep on the streets of Catania. It was cold, and he had no warm clothes. He foraged for food in rubbish heaps and drank as much water as he could to stave off his hunger. On one occasion, an Italian policeman head-butted him for no apparent reason. Perhaps he wished to express his dislike for immigrants, perhaps for dark-skinned people, or Muslims. Shocked, Ahmedu collapsed in a heap of tears. When recounting the incident, his eyes filled up with water. The indignity and humiliation were too much to bear. He could do “nothing,” he said.

“I can just sit and cry. I just sit and cry.” He may have frozen to death on the streets if a kindly Sicilian had not informed him about the central mosque that could provide shelter. Without an official document or a single dollar in his pocket, Ahmedu’s only concern was that he had not spoken to his family in 25 years, and did not have the means to do so. It was playing on his mind and kept coming up in our conversation. When we gave him the means to ring home, he was visibly moved. When I asked him what kept him going, he mentioned his faith, but most of all the thought of doing something that would help his family and bring his parents back together again, if they were still alive.



TEXT AND IMAGES
AKBAR AHMED
huffingtonpost.com

eat, drink; see, do

Would you rather live like a king or a world-renowned classical composer? Salzburg is world renowned for many things, including historical landmarks and birth-places of artists and composers. With cakes and beer as traditional must eat foods, Salzburg is a place a place to explore and eat your way around. Here are some of the best ways to get to know the city, and cement your status as a local.





Festung Hohensalzburg

WORDS AND PHOTOS
SALZBURG TOURISM

Salzburg’s most visible icon is this mighty 900-year-old cliff-top fortress, one of the biggest and best preserved in Europe. It’s easy to spend half a day up here, roaming the ramparts for far-reaching views over the city’s spires, the Salzach River and the mountains. The fortress is a steep 15-minute jaunt from the centre or a speedy ride in the glass Festungsbahn funicular . The fortress began life as a humble bailey, built in 1077 by Gebhard von Helffenstein at a time when the Holy Roman Empire was at loggerheads with the papacy. The present structure, however, owes its grandeur to spendthrift Leonard von Keutschach, prince-archbishop of Salzburg from 1495 to 1519 and the city’s last feudal ruler. Highlights of a visit include the Golden Hall , where lavish banquets were once held, with a gold-studded ceiling imitating a starry night sky. The Golden Hall is the backdrop for year-round Festungskonzerte (fortress concerts), which often focus on Mozart’s works.

Mozart's Geburtshaus

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Salzburg’s most famous son, was born in this bright yellow townhouse in 1756 and spent the first 17 years of his life here. The house in which he was born is now one of the most frequently visited museums in the world. No other place makes the person behind the artist Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his music as palpable as his birthplace. Mozart’s ‘Geburtshaus’ guides guests through the original rooms in which the Mozart family lived and presents a range of artefacts, including historical instruments, documents, keepsakes and mementos, and the majority of the portraits painted during his lifetime. Today’s museum harbours a collection of instruments, documents and portraits. Highlights include the mini-violin he played as a toddler, plus a lock of his hair and buttons from his jacket. In one room, Mozart is shown as a holy babe beneath a neon blue halo – we’ll leave you to draw your own analogies...

Schloss Mirabell

Prince-Archbishop Wolf Dietrich built this splendid palace in 1606 to impress his beloved mistress Salome Alt. It must have done the trick because she went on to bear the archbishop some 15 children; sources disagree on the exact number – poor Wolf was presumably too distracted by spiritual matters to keep count himself. Johann Lukas von Hildebrandt, of Schloss Belvedere fame, remodelled the palace in baroque style in 1721. The lavish baroque interior, replete with stucco, marble and frescos, is free to visit. The flowery parterres, rose gardens and leafy arbours are less overrun first thing in the morning and early evening. The lithe Tänzerin (dancer) sculpture is a great spot to photograph the gardens with the fortress as a backdrop. Sound of Music fans will of course recognise the Pegasus statue, the steps and the gnomes of the Zwerglgarten (Dwarf Garden), where the mini von Trapps practised ‘Do-Re-Mi’, amongst other Sound of Music favourites.



HOTEL ALTSTADT

Salzburg chocolatier Paul Fürst invented the Mozartkugel ("Mozart ball") in 1890 and named it after his city's most famous son. The pistachio, marzipan and nougat core is coated in milk chocolate and until today handmade in the Konditorei Fürst at Alter Markt square. Much cheaper and almost as tasty are numerous other brands of Mozartkugel, sold everywhere in Salzburg - if not Austria.

The history of beer in Salzburg goes back well over 600 years. When you visit Salzburg today, you'll find that this legacy has resulted in a very diverse beer culture, with ancient traditions and cutting-edge brewing technology making their mark in equal measure. With 11 breweries in Salzburg, and 10 breweries in the city's immediate surroundings, Salzburg is indeed Austria's beer capital. The historic Augustiner Bräu Kloster Mülln occupies the halls of a former monastery and still uses old machinery to brew its beer. After acquiring all of that hard-earned beer knowledge, you'll know your Stiegl from your Augustiner Pils and will be able to order like a local when you next sit down to enjoy your new favorite brew in the historic ambiance of Salzburg's Old Town.

Nowhere is the chocolate richer, the apricot jam tangier and cream lighter than at the home of the legendary Sacher Torte. The cafe is pure old-world grandeur, with its picture-lined walls and ruby-red banquettes. Sit on the terrace by the Salzach for fortress views.





Sylvia Cortes

Sylvia's parents are immigrants, very traditional. And in Sylvia's house, the men are men, the women are women, just like back in the old country. I had the opportunity to speak to Sylvia about what its like for her, growing up in modern Europe, with the pressure of tradition forever on her shoulders.

Sylvia

My brother goes, “Oh, I want tortillas.” And my mom, just like right there on, she’ll just turn off the TV and she’ll go make them. And my brother goes, “I want money.” And my mom’s right there taking my money. He goes, “Wash this shirt for me. I want to wear it tomorrow.” And there goes my mom, washing the shirt. And it’s not like that with me. That’s the way she thinks. That’s the way she is. She’s like, he’s a boy. For instance, he can’t cook for himself. He’s a boy. He can’t do this because he’s a boy. That’s a woman’s job. My mom always has this little saying that really annoys me. Sometimes when the house is dirty, she says, “Oh, it looks like there’s never been women in the house,” making it sound like women are supposed to clean. And I’m thinking, Dad can clean. She goes, “No, he’s supposed to be in the garage fixing the car or something.”

Ira Glass

It’s a typical American story in this country. From the time she was little, Sylvia spoke English better than her parents. She was the one in the family who’d call the phone company or the utilities. She translated teacher conferences. If the family was going somewhere and needed directions, Sylvia was the one who would walk up to a stranger and ask for them. And now, nearly grown up, she wants to be an American girl in a way that her parents don’t completely understand. She goes to a big, integrated public school. A few years ago, she started listening to The Cranberries and Nirvana and Metallica, not the kind of stuff her parents knew growing up in small towns in rural Mexico.

Sylvia

My mom wants me to be a typical Mexican girl. When I was younger, before I had my cotillion, I used to start liking alternative music. Cotillion’s like a coming out party when you turn 15. You have a huge party. You get your own beautiful

dress. It’s long, and it’s big. I started liking alternative music around the age of 14, around the time they started making my cotillion. And I remember my cousins used to say, oh, as soon as you hit your cotillion, you’re going to start liking Mexican music. And we’re going to start taking you out. Because in my family, as soon as you hit 15, you’re allowed to go to Mexican dances. But you usually go with your older cousins.

And that’s where my mom wanted in me. My mom wanted me to be like my cousins. They went to Mexican dances. They had Mexican boyfriends. I mean, she wanted me to dress like them. She didn’t want me to dress kind of alternative. And now sometimes we get into fights and I tell my mom, I’m not like my cousins. I’m like, my cousins are already like 19, 18, and they’re already pregnant or married. I’m like, is that what you want me to do with my life?”

This weekend, this is a particularly urgent question in Sylvia’s life. This weekend, January 31, 1998, Sylvia turns 18. She’s legally recognized as an adult, capable of deciding for herself what she’ll do with her life. And she and her mom have been talking about what she’s going to do. Sylvia wants to go to a four year college, wait to get married, wait to have kids. And her mom is trying to understand.

Sylvia

Sometimes she’s kind of like, yeah, do what you want. Do what you want. Become whatever you want. And there’s just times where, like, why do you want to do that? Why do you want to do that? Why do you think you’re better than everybody? Why do you think you’re special? I’m like, Ma, I don’t think I’m special. I just want to do something with my life.

Ira Glass

When her mom was young, back in Tamaulipas, her mom wanted to go to school.

She was admitted to a good school nearby, but her grandfather told her no. He said the only reason the girls go to school is to get boyfriends. So she stopped going in sixth grade. Now she spends most of her time at home, raising Sylvia's brother and sister, taking care of the house, rarely leaving the house.

Sylvia

My mom has lived in a box all her life, and I feel like a lot of Mexican women have. When you live in a box, you raise your children in a box. And sometimes I'll just try to climb out. And she's like pushing me in or I'm trying to poke a hole in the box and she tapes it right back up.

Ira Glass

So Sylvia is living at home, senior in high school, engaged in an ongoing discussion with her mom about what she should be after graduation in four months and whether she'll live a life like her mom's.

Sylvia

She's too scared to get out of the box. She is. She even told me. She's just too scared. I mean, if she has to go to my godmother's house, all she has to do is take one bus and go straight. And she just gets off at a certain stop and walks a block or two. That scares my mom that she's by herself. It scares the hell out of her being by herself. It just really scares her.

And I'm always by myself. And I'm always doing things by myself. And I'm always doing things that I want. And I think sometimes she admires me that I'm not scared, but at the same time, she just doesn't-- it's like she admires me that I'm not scared, but I think at the same time she hates me because she's scared.

Ira Glass

Describe the box that she's in.

Sylvia

I would guess it's just the typical Mexican family, where you're married and you have children and you die together. And you travel once in a while to your homeland, and you have usually Mexican music and laughter and drinking and partying. And all the cousins coming together and all the aunts coming together.

Ira Glass

Do you think she's unhappy? I mean, that sounds like it could be actually kind of nice.

Sylvia

Yeah, it could be nice, but, I mean, when you only hang around with that kind of people and that certain people and they're-- because they're kind of also-- not like bigots or something, but they're also really-- kind of like the way she thinks.

Ira Glass

Everybody thinks the same way. And they're not so crazy about people who think differently.

Sylvia

Yeah, it's kind of like I'm the outcast of the family. I'm like the black sheep. That's why I really never depended on my parents because I really never had them when I wanted them. And also I never really asked for anything. I never really wanted anything from them. And now that I'm almost going to turn 18, they noticed that I really don't ask anything from them.

I remember one time. It's really specific. It happened last year. It just popped into my head. I remember that my grandparents come every summer. And all the uncles and aunts come to the house because our grandparents are there and stuff like that. And I was working, and when I came home, one of my aunts came. She's the second oldest in the family, and I find her really



really bitter. She's my aunt, and I love her and stuff like that, but she's really bitter. And she had told my mom that really got me mad. This woman who I talk to maybe once or twice a year. And because my mom was raised by this aunt-- she sees her as a mother figure, too-- she has a lot of respect for her. She told my mom that the day that I grew up, I'm going to be ashamed of my parents and especially of her because she has no education and because she's an immigrant of this country.

And I told my mom, how dare she say that? She knows nothing about me. Does she want me to become like her kids? Her oldest daughter got pregnant at 16. And her youngest son is kind of like a drifter. He really doesn't know what he does.

And I'm like, this woman has the idea that I'm going to be ashamed of my mom because I'm going to have an education and because I'm going to have a career?"

I suggest to Sylvia that her parents might understand her situation better than she acknowledges. After all, they themselves escaped the box of their own early lives, uprooted themselves from rural Mexico to inner city Chicago, to a country where they didn't even speak the language. Sylvia doesn't buy it.

But as we talked, one of the most striking things is how there's still a part of her, the biggest part of her, that wants her parents to simply understand her and how she sees her own life. She still wants to be part of the family.



TEXT AND IMAGES
IRA GLASS
thisamericanlife.org



cape town

SOUTH AFRICA

Table Mountain from Signal Hill,
Cape Town,
South Africa

UP NEXT:

Living in South Africa can offer expatriates a unique experience sampling a diverse and rich culture. South Africa is located on the southern tip of Africa and is bordered by Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. It has nine provinces; Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Natal, Northern Cape, the North West and Western Cape. It's most well known cities are Pretoria (the executive capital), Cape Town (the legislative capital), Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein and East London. While most people think of Safari and wild animals when they contemplate Africa, there is much more to living in South Africa than this. The cities in South Africa are not unlike other cities around the world with sprawling skyscrapers, cosmopolitan dining and bar areas and shopping malls to suit all budgets.

Editor

Lili Stellingwerf

Graphic Designer

Lili Stellingwerf

Copywriters

Land Salzburg

Brandon Stanton

Ira Glass

Ahkbar Ahmed

Lili Stellingwerf

Photographers

Brandon Stanton

Phil Moore

Ahkbar Ahmed

Lili Stellingwerf



EU € 6
GBP £ 4.5
NZD \$ 10
US \$ 6.5

voyagemagazine.at



KUTHE PRAGUE

