

The Road to Quetzalcóatl

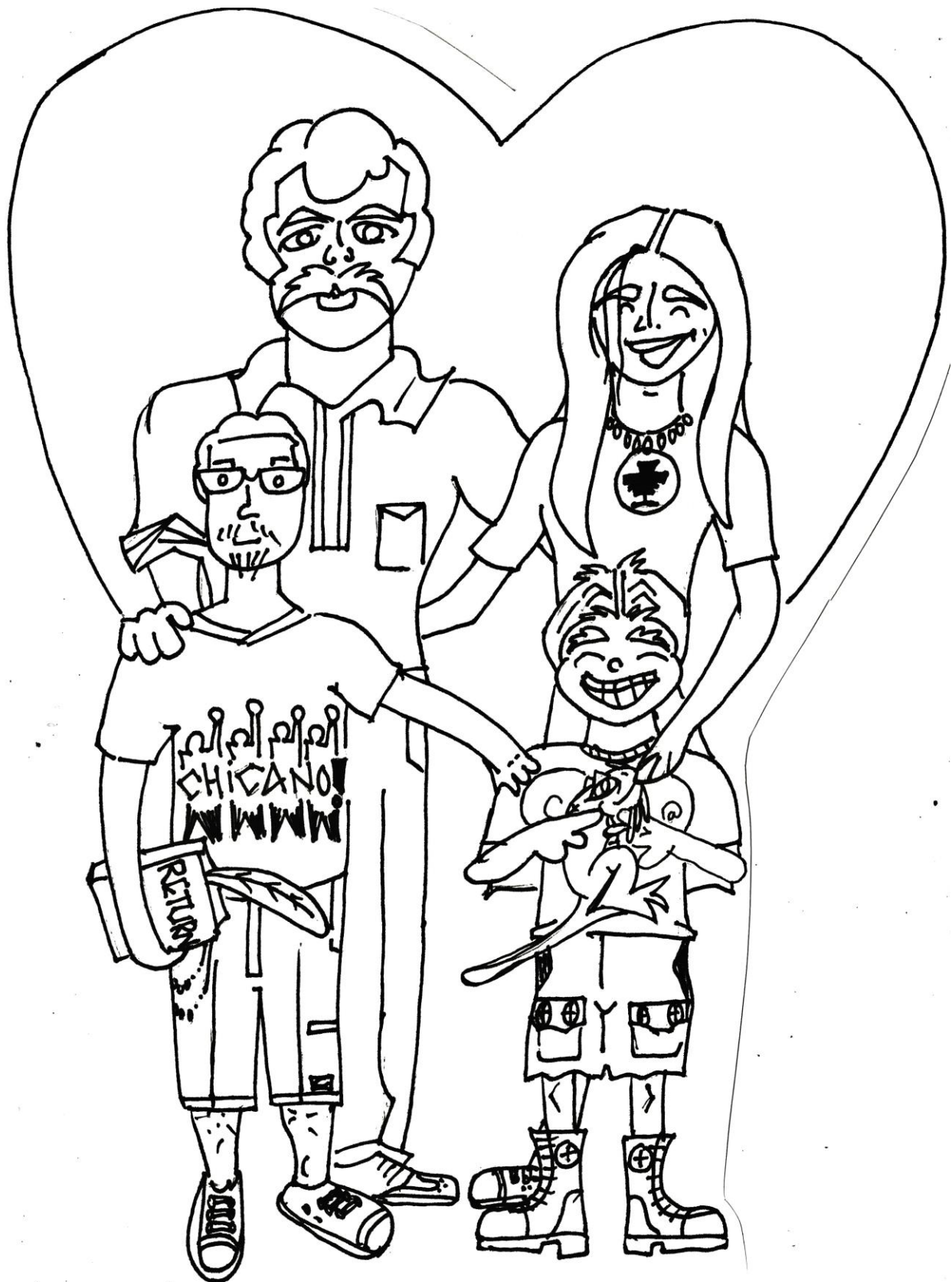
by

Angel eFe Sandoval

Puro
Chicano
Love

CalifAztlán
2014
c/s

to my brothers: Monchi, Jano, & Panchito;
and to my college carnales de La UER,
with a special q-vo to the Aldana brothers—
Cesar and the late Diego.

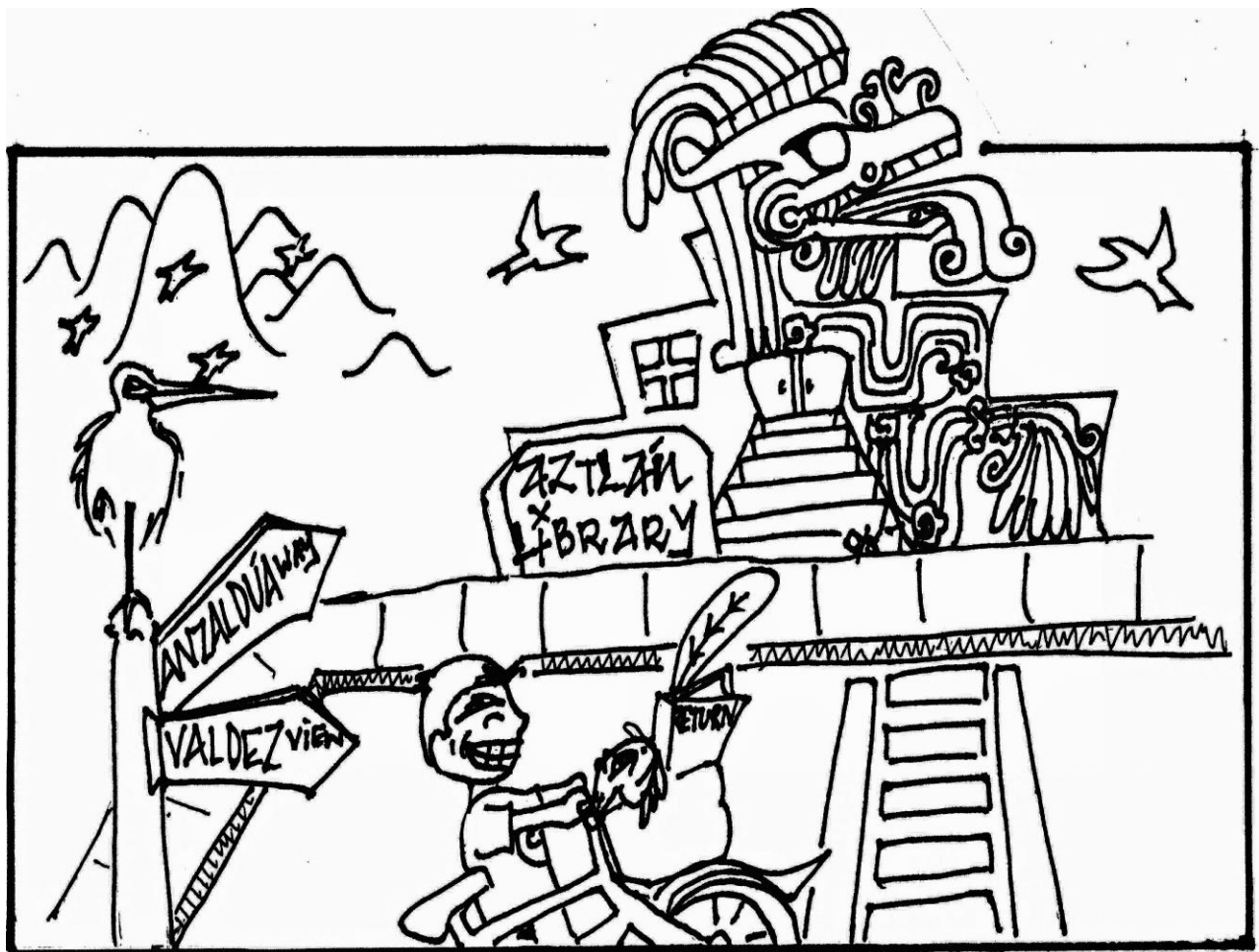


“Diego, the best place in the world to find yourself in is in a library,” César always tells me.

César has been bringing me to the Aztlán Library for two years, ever since I turned seven and our family moved to this neighborhood. César and I have spent a lot of our free time in this library. And actually, we spend so much time here, César calls Aztlán our home.

Aztlán Library is modeled after the Temple of Quetzalcóatl in the ancient city of Teotihuacán—“The Place Where Men Become Gods.” Big egret birds point the way to Aztlán, so it is easy to find the road that leads to the intersection of Luis Valdez View and Gloria Anzaldúa Way—César calls it the “bellybutton”—where Aztlán sits like a mystical mountain.

On weekend days, like today, all kinds of people from the community come together and gather inside La Raza Cósmica Conference Room in Aztlán to talk about their favorite books. Today is my day to share. I will share a special book—a book of precious knowledge—that César gifted me last weekend.



César, by the way, is my older brother. He went away to college last week.

Actually, this all happened nine days ago. Our family was enjoying a carne asada afternoon in the backyard of our home when, out of the clear blue sky, Mom and Dad announced that we, as a family, would take a road trip and drive César to his new school, an out-of-state university.

With an aguacate in his hand, Dad turned to me and said, “Diego, get your clean chones and your cuate, Quetzpalin, ready ’cause we’re leaving just as soon as we see the dawn star!”

Quetzpalin is my pet lizard, a plumed basilisk. Some people call the plumed basilisk the Jesus Christ lizard, because it can run across water! César says Quetzpalin is my precious twin and spirit guide—I suppose he says this because Quetzpalin is always by my side. “Cuetzpalin”—with a “C”—means *lizard* in Náhuatl, a Native American language spoken by many groups of people in central México and Central America. César taught me that.

After we were stuffed from eating carne asada tacos that afternoon, we slowly stuffed our small teardrop trailer with all the stuff needed for the road trip. Then, right before daybreak the next day, we started our trek across the Southwest in search of César’s college.

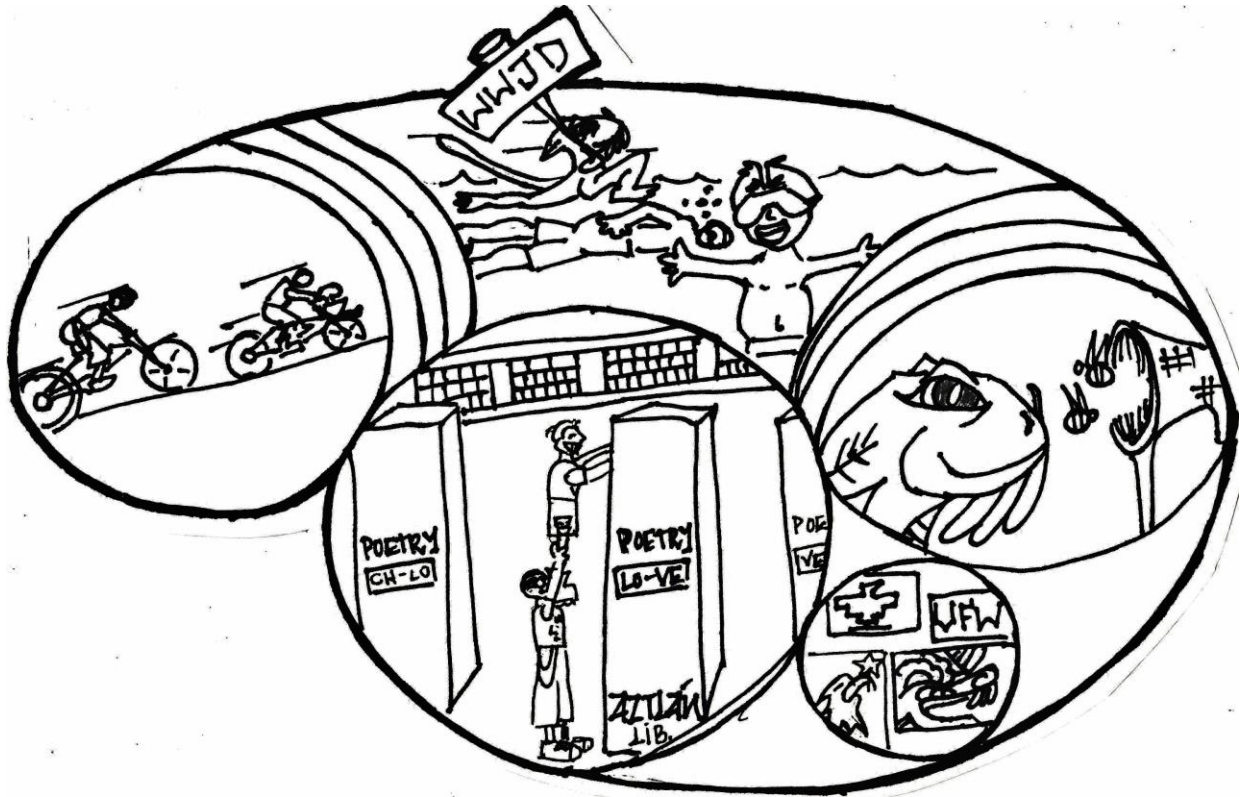
While I sleepily nestled next to César in the backseat of our loaded minivan, I thought about how much I would miss him. With César far away, I wondered to myself...

Who will ride bikes with me all the way up the hill to King Tiger Park or all the way down the valley to the Sleepy Lagoon Public Pool?

Who will help me with my math homework when Quetzpalin and I run out of fingers and toes to count on?

Who will tell me Pepito jokes that keep me laughing or rattle off Spanish rhyming riddles—adivinanzas—that keep me guessing?

Who will help me catch crickets and sacrificial flies to feed to Quetzpalin?



Who will teach me how to draw angel-winged plumed basilisks and eagles with temple-like steps for wings?

Who will sing with me “It was BEAUTIFUL to be (a CHICANO that day)” on Sundays in sync with sacerdote Sal Castro? Simón. Amen.

And who will help me pick out challenging books at the Aztlán Library and show me how to present them to the community grownups on weekends?

Dad, from behind the steering wheel of our minivan, looked back at the half-asleep César and me through the rearview mirror and with a playful smile on his face said, “¡Van a ver! When you two wake up, we will be in *four* states at once!!!!” ...And when we woke, we were!

Our first road-trip stop was the Four Corners Monument. After eating our sack lunches, we took a family picture of us standing on top of the famed quadripoint marker. Quetzpalin wouldn’t look at the camera; he was distracted by a giant coiled cloud above us.

That cloud followed us as we drove through the neighboring Native American lands, which are full of beautiful rock formations. We drove with our heads poking out of our minivan’s windows, so we could better see the majestic monadnocks and sandstone spires and buttes all around us.

That night we camped out atop a high and huge mesa. The starry sky above told us interstellar bedtime stories billions of light-years old. “All we have to do is look closely and connect the dim dots,” César said as we stared up at the stars. Then César found a favorite constellation and told me the story of Quetzalcóatl.

A looong, looong, looong time ago, Quetzalcóatl was in love...in love with books, in love with learning, in love with wisdom. Happily, Quetzalcóatl spent the days and nights reading books and writing the many Stories of The People, telling and retelling Los Cuentos Puros.

...One day, after Quetzalcóatl had finished reading all of the Poetry books in the city’s tiny amoxcalli—the dusty underused library—the Wind blew in and used the prehistoric dust gathered on the books to tell Quetzalcóatl about the wonders of college, the legendary house of a billion books. The Stars, too, showed it was time to go and pointed the way to this faraway place. Quetzalcóatl could see the way. And Quetzalcóatl could see that The People, who loved and wanted Quetzalcóatl to stay home, were sad to hear this news.

Quetzalcóatl then said to The People, “I have been called forth, and I must go and follow the circular path of my journey. Please remember what we have learned together. Remember—I will return.”

I went to sleep thinking about Quetzalcóatl’s story. In a dream I had that night, I heard César’s voice echo the words of Quetzalcóatl: “Please remember what we have learned together.”

The next day, Mom and Dad drove us to see the famous Alamo. On our way there, we said “Alamo!” so many times that, after a while, it sounded like we were saying the letters *L-M-O* in rapid-fire. When we got there, there was a long line of people waiting outside of the Alamo. Then they opened the Alamo, and the long line of moving people looked like a side-winding snake.

Up close, the Alamo’s façade and fortress walls looked weathered and worn and beat up.

César said the Alamo was a mission, which is like a school. But, he said, a looong time ago, this school taught hate and fear and intolerance. Soon, its students and the people of the surrounding communities turned into hateful people. And in turn, The hateful People—that is, The People who were then full of fear and hate—turned a holy place of learning into a military post. This, César said, meant The People had forgotten what their ancestors had learned with Quetzalcóatl. It meant Quetzalcóatl was truly far away from home, far away from The People’s hearts and minds.

Inside the Alamo, we sat down at a peaceful garden and talked with tired and thirsty tourists the entire day.

The following day, we drove up all the way to the Grand Canyon, where Mom and Dad snapped a billion pictures. As we peeked down...down...down the steep cliffs of the Canyon, Quetzpalin nervously clung to my shirt collar.

César told me the Grand Canyon was billioooOOOoons of years old. The Grand Canyon, César said, reminded him of Quetzalcóatl's thorny journey after leaving home—it was a long and deep and ancient road. Pointing at the Colorado River a mile below, César pointed out that Quetzalcóatl's body flowed the way of the river.

We slept outdoors again that night. And that night I, by myself, was able to connect the stars and clearly see Quetzalcóatl in the sable sky. Like a giant corn plant, Quetzalcóatl sprouted out of the horizon, plumed upwards, and became the Milky Way.



In the morning, as we got closer to another state border, we got to see how the U.S.-Mexico border fence jumps sand dunes in the desert. Someone had spray painted Quetzalcóatl's long colorful body on that metal wall. And right below the morning sun, Quetzalcóatl's image made the metal barrier melt like a mirage in the middle of the hot, dry desert.

That afternoon we arrived at Chicano Park, a whole park under a highway bridge and its connecting on-ramps. Artists had painted colorful murals all over the place—on bridge supports and concrete pillars and abutments and wing-walls. I looked up at the scaly bridge above us and imagined I was looking at the underbelly of Quetzalcóatl. I knew Quetzalcóatl was present here to protect Chicano Park's treasures—the murals, the nopal garden, the kiosk, and the Emiliano Zapata bronze statue.

César said that this was The People's park, because The People had created and nurtured Chicano Park. The People had resurrected their spirits—and the Spirit of La Causa—and had given life to Chicano Park. This meant The People were remembering what Quetzalcóatl had taught them once upon a time. This meant that Quetzalcóatl was returning home!

After a short visit, we were back on the road, and after a short drive, we reached César's college.

We made our way to the college dormitories, where César now lives while he studies at his college. The place looked like a crowded birthday party! Colorful wall posters and glittery welcoming banners floated close to the ceiling. One poster said: "Happy Move-in Day!" A banner read: "Welcome New Students & Parents!"

There were families of different kinds and sizes helping older brothers and sisters carry stuff-stuffed boxes into dorms. Everyone smiled and greeted one another. Lively music was playing, and people with boxes in their hands danced in place in the crowded hallways and rooms.

Quetzalcóatl, dressed in the animated posters and sparkling banners, danced over the heads of everybody.

When we reached César's room, we met César's cool roommate and his friendly family. Then we helped César unpack and decorate his side of the dorm with black and red ink-posters.

Later, when Mom and Dad and Quetzpalin and I had to leave to return home, César told me about a secret gift he had left for me on top of the bookcase in my room.

On the long trip back home, I thought about the secret gift a lot. But I mostly thought about César and everything César had said to me.

When we finally arrived home, I flung open the front door of our house and ran as fast as I could to my room. Quetzpalin tried his best to cling to me as I swerved past living room loveseats and sofas and rushed into the hallway where I pushed through open closet doors to get to the gift.

Wrapped in resplendent paper and sitting on the bookcase, as promised, was César's present. I slowly picked it up with shaky hands and gently shook it as I pressed an ear to it and listened. It made no noise, gave no clue—this was definitely a secret gift.

I carefully unwrapped it. And when I lifted the gift box lid, a burst of colorful lights from inside the present splashed the image of Quetzalcóatl on my shirt.



“RETURN,” a title shouted at me from inside the gift box. It was a poetry book! I held my gift up to the sky for a moment. My fingertips could feel that it was full of love and precious knowledge. Instantly, I knew I had to share this special book with The People of Aztlán.

So today, I will share this book and what César has taught me with The People in La Raza Cósmica Conference Room. I will show them the long quetzal feather bookmark and the short letter from César that were inside the book. I have read and reread César’s letter. I have memorized César’s message; I carry it with me and know it by heart.

“Diego,

I love you.

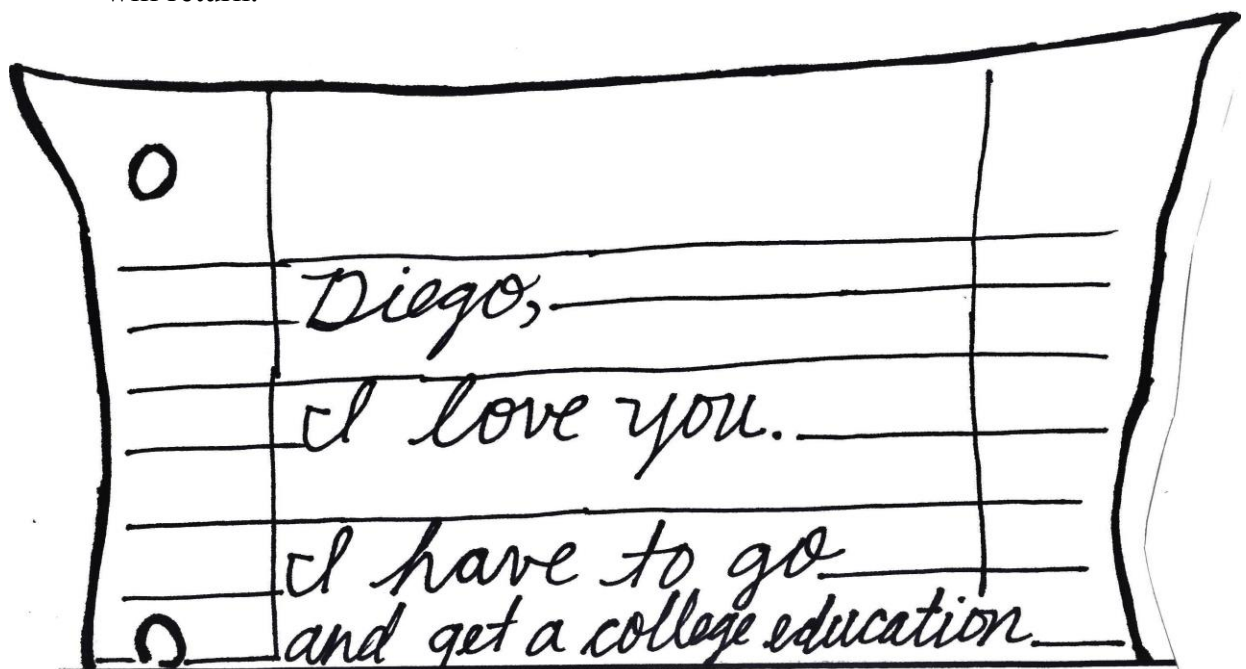
I have to go and get a college education. This will help me on the road to becoming a wise and intelligent leader of The People. Thanks to our parents, I know the way. Please remember all the things that we have learned together.

I love you, Diego.

Your Carnal,

César.

P.S. And remember—every chance I get, every holiday break, every summer—I will return.”





THE RETURN

