



Crossing Borders

Sergio Troncoso,
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In my life,

I have crossed many geographical, linguistic, cultural and even religious borders to the point where I often ask myself where do I belong, who am I really and who am I becoming.

I grew up dirt poor on the Mexican-American border of El Paso, Texas, and went to Harvard and Yale. Although I was raised Catholic by my Mexican parents, I now attend services for [Jewish] High Holy Days on Manhattan's Upper West Side with my wife and two boys, Aaron and Isaac. Yes, I am a traveler between cultures and religions, but I do know who I am. The question that often burns in my mind, however, is why these border crossings are not attempted by more people. They should be.

I understand **it is perilous to cross to the other side**, whatever that "other" side is. You traverse into a no-man's land. You leave your "home" and possibly risk alienating those who stayed behind. I have been asked by many Latino writers and friends if I am now Jewish. I know often there is an undercurrent of surprise and even anger, at least by the most weak- or fearful-minded, when I proudly tell them about my wife, Laura, and my children. I was at a Latino book festival recently, at a restaurant with four writers. We were discussing the links and differences between Judaism and Christianity, a discussion I had prompted. I turned to a poet, who had been quiet for most of the evening, and pointed out that the artist on her T-shirt, Frida Kahlo, was half Jewish and half Mexican-Catholic. The poet, a proud Mexicana, seemed stunned at first, and then looked at her T-shirt as if she were looking at it for the first time. Yes, I said, **we create pure beginnings to simplify things**, maybe to build our self-esteem, but in reality we are interrelated, *mestizo*, in more ways than we can imagine.

The other peril to crossing borders is that you might not be accepted by your new family and friends. Laura and I met in college, and after seven years together, when we announced we were getting married, let us say I did not get a heroic welcome at her parents' kitchen table. But I never gave up. Laura's aunts and

uncles, brother and sister, took me in almost immediately. During that time, our two wonderful boys had been born, and **we had survived** a serious personal trial. In many ways, that horrible trial not only opened old wounds, but also finally allowed them to heal forever. **I was dedicated** to Laura, and to our children. Laura's parents understood that is what mattered most of all.

In this personal history of crossing borders, I have often admired Ruth and her dedication to Naomi. Ruth, a Moabite, married Naomi's son, who soon died. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, she urged Ruth to go back to her home and the gods of her people, but Ruth refused. "Do not ask me to leave you," Ruth said. "Wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Only death will part us." Through hard work and **perseverance**, Ruth **eventually found her place in a new land**. The greatest king of the Israelites, David, came from a long line of ancestors beginning with Ruth. So, indeed, there are **no pure beginnings**, [from] **survival**, [through] **perseverance**, [to] **dedication** and [then] **reaching out to the "other" side**.

Reflection:

- Where is my first "homeland"?
- Do I still "live" there?
 - If so:
 - What keeps me "here"?
 - If not:
 - What borders have I crossed?
 - What drew me?
 - How did I change in the crossing?

SOME SCRIPTURE STORIES OF BORDER CROSSINGS:

- Ruth and Naomi: The Book of Ruth
- Conversion of Paul: Acts 9:1-22
- Council of Jerusalem: Acts 15
- The Areopagus: Acts 17:21-34
- Strangers no longer: Ephesians 2:17-22