



Video Story Transcript

BETWEEN WORLDS

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Link to YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/ObBG-Y-wgis>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi. My name is Olga Loya and this is an excerpt from a longer story called *Nepantla: Between Worlds*. This story takes place in the late 1940s and early 1950s in East Los Angeles.

English . . . Spanish. American . . . Mexican. Spanish . . . English. Mexican . . . American. All my life I felt like I was straddling worlds and I could never seem to find my balance. I had never even put it into words but I knew I didn't quite fit anywhere.

One day I met a woman who was putting up an art show called *Nepantla*.

As we talked I asked her, "What does *Nepantla* mean?"

She said, "It is a Nahuatl term. Nahuatl is the ancient and still-used language of Mexico. It is the language that the Aztecs spoke and speak. *Nepantla* means "between worlds."

I stared at her for a while, just thinking.

"*Nepantla*," I repeated. "*Nepantla*—between worlds."

For the first time, I had a word for what I had been feeling all those years!

I thought, "I have been in a state of *Nepantla* all my life."

Where I grew up there were many Mexicans and some Japanese and Jewish people. I knew I wasn't Japanese or Jewish but I wasn't sure about being Mexican. I was six years old when I went to my mother and asked her, "Mamá, am I Mexican?"

She looked at me for a long time and then she said, "Yes and no, *Mijita*, little one."

"Yes and no?"

"Yes and no."

"What does „yes and no’ mean?"

"You are Mexican but you are American. You were born here in Los Angeles, California in the United States. You are a Mexican American just like your father and me."

"Oh, okay, Mamá."

I decided to ask my Grandma Loya, too. Of everyone in the family, I trusted her the most. I loved being with her and I wanted to see what she had to say.

I went to my *abuelita*, grandmother, and asked her, "*Abuelita, soy Mexicana, Grandmother, am I Mexican?*"

Making the sign of the cross, she said, "*Que dios te bendiga, May God bless you. Ay si mijita, oh, yes, my little one, sus bis abuelos, y yo y tus otro abuelos vienen de Chihuahua, México. Ay, si, mijitia, eres Mejicana. Your great grandparents and grandparents and I come from Chihuahua, Mexico. Vives aquí en America pero eres Mejicana! You live here in America, but you are Mexican!*"

"Okay, Abuelita!"

I was living in East Los Angeles where everyone spoke Spanish. Well, at least the adults spoke Spanish to each other, but they didn't speak Spanish to us children.

They didn't speak Spanish to be mean or to deprive us of our *cultura*. They wanted us to fit in, not to have an *accento*. They wanted us to be *Americanos*!

It was the 50's and schools didn't allow you to speak Spanish either. If a student spoke Spanish, the teachers scolded, "Don't speak Spanish in school!" If a student continued speaking Spanish, the student got sent to the Vice Principal. The Vice Principal made the student wait and wait. Finally, the Vice Principal called the student into his office and said, "Didn't we tell you not to speak Spanish in school?! Why can't you people understand?"

If a student kept speaking Spanish, the Vice Principal came to the classroom and stood in the front of the room. He said to the one who had been speaking Spanish, "Come to the front of the classroom—now."

The student would go to the front of the classroom shaking. Then the student put his or her hand out for what was going to happen. "Whap!" The Vice Principal hit the student on the hand. If the student moved the hand away, the Vice Principal hit again, even harder.

I thought to myself, "*Chihuahua*, this Spanish is dangerous!"

At the same time that I was not allowed to speak Spanish, I was hanging around with my Japanese friends. All through elementary school, at least once a week they went to a Japanese after school program. Sometimes I went with them. I sat and listened to the lessons about their culture and their language.

As I listened I wondered, "So, where are the Mexican after-school programs? How come nobody is showing me about my culture and my language? What's wrong with us that everyone acts so ashamed?"

I was filled with questions and I didn't know who to ask. When I tried to ask my family questions, everyone said, "Don't ask so many questions. You don't need to know that stuff."

I was in the sixth grade and still didn't have a sense of myself.

I just didn't know where I belonged, but I wanted to find out.