

# Accident on Highway 35

written by Guest Contributor | October 6, 2017



*Excerpted from a memoir.*

It was a Saturday morning. My son was in Venezuela on a short vacation with my husband, and I wanted to hear my younger son's voice as a way of saying goodbye to him before cutting my veins to bleed in the summer heat. I sat in the recliner on the back patio across from the maple tree and listened to his voicemail message. I had a bottle of wine, a tall glass, and a sharpened knife on the table. As soon as I put the phone down, it rang. It was my older son. He was in Colorado, but his lease in Oklahoma had expired. He needed help moving out.

"Mom, please can you go to my apartment in Norman and move me out? Also, can you keep my stuff for a couple of months while I finish my internship?" he asked.

I got up from the chair, crossed the street, and borrowed my neighbor's pick-up. Norman – the college town where the University of Oklahoma is located – was a good two and half hours away from Ponca City. I cautiously drove the distance in three hours, as I was using a borrowed vehicle. His college friends were there to help me pack and load Ramón's belongings into the truck, but not everything fit. I promised to come back the next day for the rest. I returned the pick-up to my neighbor and went to sleep.

*Suicide could wait a day or two. My son needed me.*

The next day I got up around ten, ate breakfast, and started driving. When I passed the 15 mile marker going southbound on the I-35 to Norman, a white pick-up about 1000 feet ahead of me, driving northbound, veered off its lane into the opposing traffic. It struck an SUV, sending it flying into the air. The SUV landed head first in a ditch past the shoulder on the right. Cars collided and skidded in the aftermath.

I drove to the shoulder and called 911. After signaling to the incoming traffic to slow down, I walked to the scene. The SUV was in flames. Somebody rushed toward it with a fire extinguisher. I saw the disfigured bodies of two men in the front seat of the SUV. Liquid poured from their heads. The occupants had died on impact. I called 911 again. Others tended to the driver

of the white pick-up.

"Anybody speak Spanish here?" someone yelled.

"I do," I said.

"Please, take care of the woman in the center lane."

We were in the plains on a sunny Sunday at 100 F. Tall grass bordered the I-35 on both sides. I walked to the median, a patch of grass large enough to contain two vehicles side by side. There I met a woman with intense black eyes trying to run to the crashed SUV. "¿Cómo se llama Usted, señora?" I asked.

"María. Yo quiero ir para el otro lado a ver a mi esposo. ¿Por qué nadie lo está ayudando?" she asked.

"Your husband is in a better place now," I said. The fact didn't register, so she asked again why nobody was rushing to help her husband like they were rushing to help the occupants of the other vehicle.

They were migrant workers, roofers driving from Nebraska to Texas for work. Her husband had been driving ahead of the rest of the family with his friend. The woman followed behind with their daughter and her brother-in-law.

"We just stopped about a mile ago, and he blessed the girl. He's a good father. Ayúdelo, por favor."

I helped the mother and child communicate with the first responders that had been my students only a month before when I lost my job. I greeted the firefighters in Spanish as they came to assist the woman. "Necesitamos sus clases, Sra. Coiman," one of them said after I had interpreted their questions to the woman. "I'm sorry but the college will not pay for the program anymore," I said. We didn't have time to elaborate any further.

I looked at the disoriented girl, a rag doll without anyone to hold her tight, her mother sobbing and screaming, and her uncle like a toy robot going around in circles with his hands over his head, raising his eyes now and again to the bright sky. I thought about my younger son, only eleven-years-old, and what I had been about to do before my older son's call. I had planned to leave my child too.

I spent three hours on that highway in the scorching Oklahoma heat with a child who had just lost her father, and a woman who lost the man she loved. I couldn't do this to my sons. Never.

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**Lisbeth Coiman** is a bilingual writer standing (unbalanced) on a blurred line between fiction and memoir. She has wandered the immigration path from Venezuela to Canada, to the US, and now lives in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in [Hip Mama](#), [YAY LA](#), [Nailed](#) and [The Literary Kitchen](#). She also writes short fiction and poetry, and blogs at [Lisbethcoiman.com](#). Her upcoming memoir, *I Asked the Blue Heron*, to be released on November 4, celebrates friendship among women and draws attention on child abuse and mental illness.