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Camino a las Estrellas

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A teenage girl wearing a giant coat waddles onto an empty football field during the New Mexican summer. Her pockets are bulging with rocks and weights. She begins her work out. The director told Sylvia Acevedo she wasn’t strong enough to carry a full set of drums for the upcoming marching band season, but she was going to prove him wrong. Camino a las Estrellas is an autobiographical account beginning with Sylvia’s childhood in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She spends the early years of her life speaking Spanish and participating in Mexican traditions among people who look and sound like her. However, after her toddler sister’s scarring bout with meningitis, Sylvia’s mother insists they relocate to predominantly English-speaking part of town complete with a mortgage, paved streets, and a middle-class school. Eventually, she earns an advanced degree, begins a career in engineering, and achieves the presidency of Girl Scouts of America.

Sylvia possesses all of the traits of America’s golden child. She’s bright, self-reliant, and proactive. However, after her childhood move she is torn between drifting away from her rich cultural heritage and embracing what her mother assures her is an environment full of opportunity. Sylvia finally finds a path forward through the local Brownie troop. She begins then to shatter expectations! Being a Hispanic female on the border in the seventies, Sylvia finds herself restricted by stereotypes and role expectations thrust upon her both by her cultural community and by the male-dominated professional communities of her time. For example, although Sylvia qualifies for a prestigious scholarship in engineering, two men are first sent from the university to ascertain whether or not her femaleness will interfere with her academic performance. Sylvia must also overcome the effects of domestic violence, which shakes her home life as a teenager. Thus, the book’s themes are meant to inspire girls, especially those who feel marginalized. The empowering pro-Girl Scout theme is very conspicuous for this reason. In short, Sylvia encounters numerous potentially-stifling situations, but she shrugs, smiles, and stuffs them in her pockets. Then she dives into her exercises!

*Contains moderate violence.