

El Salvador
GUARDIAN
STORIES



Johana Mejía
EL SALVADOR

I AM EARTH AND WATER:

my walk along the El Ángel valley



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I was eight years old when I already wanted to run, without even being an athlete, without prior warm-up, without any knowledge of what it meant to walk on the sidewalks of Salvadoran communities. In my own way, I began to look at what was happening around me and ask the why and the what for of what was happening around me. So the years went by and, as a teenager, I began walking a spiritual path that made me feel that not everything was lost, that I could be an athlete. So, I decided to stay for approximately two years, training in those paths of solidarity and love of neighbor. Now that I remember, I thank my mentor who carried me in her womb, for letting me enter that first path, for not cutting off my wings or sensitivity.

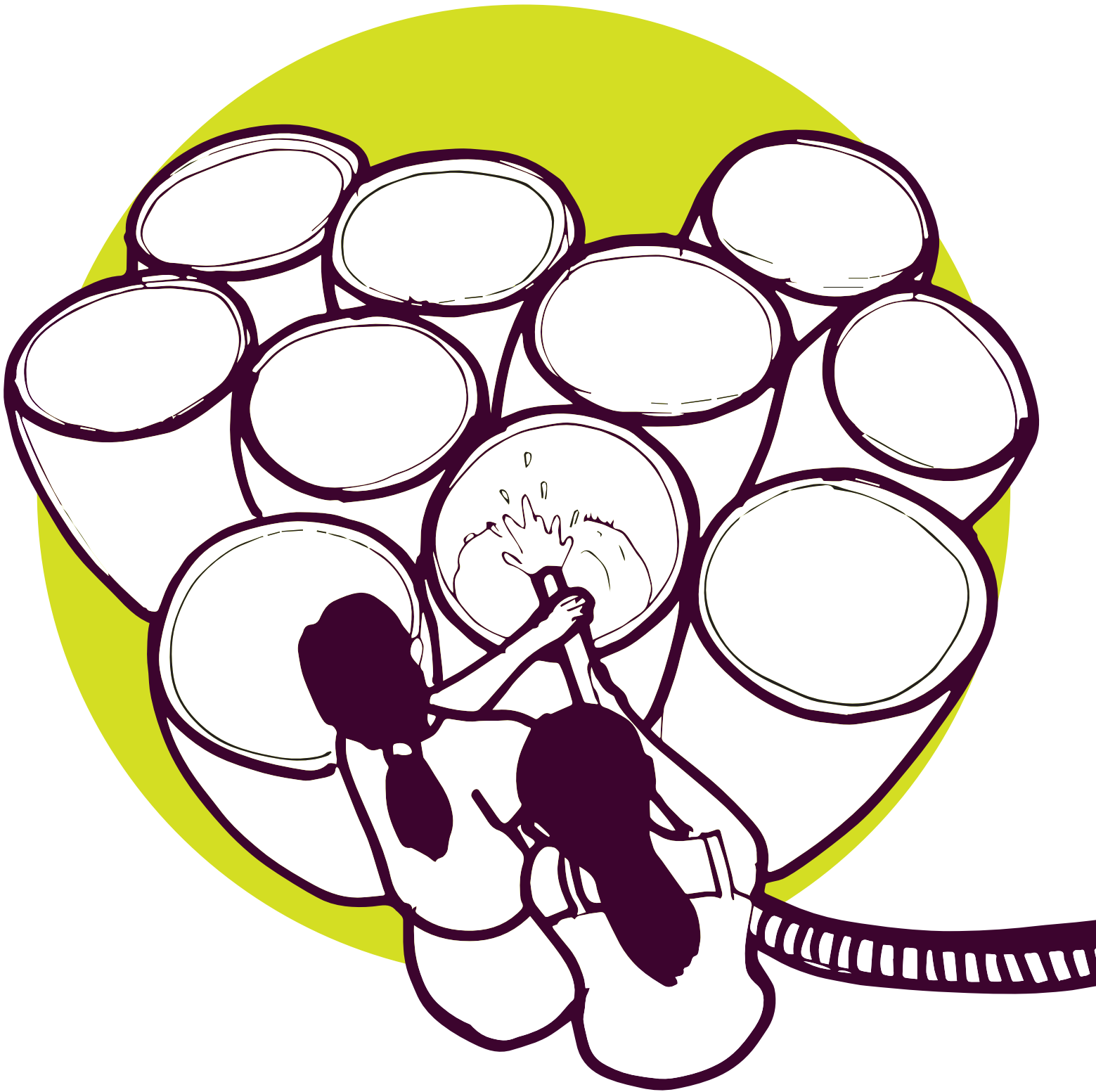
On that road, I could see that there were more paths that I could cross and enjoy the bitter-sweet fruit of its trees. How good those times were! If I hadn't lived through them, I don't know what would have become of me.

I walked through many places, with the desire to be light in the midst of the despair of many people. Of those vulnerable, disadvantaged, violated; of those upon whom were imposed (or touched) day to day with fewer privileges than those that I could have conquered. In all the paths I crossed, I fell in love with myself and I could feel and understand that I was in the right life, the one that broke me with pain and suffering every time I saw, heard, felt, or smelled inequality.

On the community paths, I learned to love diversity, to look at new horizons, to challenge myself, and to accept that my passage through life was worth it, and that, if I did not position myself in front of it as what I was, the steps had not been worth it the past thirty years. That's how 2018 arrived, when for reasons I still try to decipher, I was able to see the help that my hometown was moaning for. It was that community who saw me take my first steps who was asking me for help, and that I had not been able to look at years ago, as I was dedicated to my larger journey.

I stood in front of my hometown. It was my dear Apopa! A place of water, vapors, mist, and socio-cultural wealth that was being looted by companies that don't care about life, but only their millions, vile money that is extracted from Mother Earth! And which costs my people tears and suffering.

The disaster which my city had become was evident. Chaos was taking over, unhealthiness reigned in the streets of the communities, the overcrowding of certain population groups was evident; economic, food, and all kinds of deficiencies deepened. And constitutional rights were violated over and over. But this panorama wasn't enough. Local governments and state institutions lent themselves to make the territory available to extractivism, using up the few remaining natural resources in Apopa.



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They were once again the disgusting oligarchy and bourgeoisie of this country that insisted on stealing the water, the land, and the natural resources of the territory. With this, the social gaps that weigh so heavily on the shoulders of those of us who live in vulnerable territories were widened. What had already been ripped from us was not enough, the years of life that had been taken from us by looting our land, but rather the intention was to build a mega city under the pathetic and false discourse of economic progress.

At that moment, I knew that I had to stay at home, in the territory, defending the lives of my own, of present and future generations, and safeguarding the little life that was left to the previous generation.

All of this was a challenge for me, because I was facing many difficulties and the community differences typical of towns, but worse still, I was facing the great economic capital that with its power crushes you, persecutes you, corners you, intimidates you, and looks to hurt you and weaken you.

Two years have passed since I stayed with my community to face the fight for the defense of the El Ángel valley; a place where we have experienced many troubles, where corruption, impunity, violence, harassment, and fear spread.

Accompanying my territory has led me to experience unimaginable sensations. Unfortunately, I cannot describe what I live, think, and feel in each of the actions taken to defend the land where I was born and where I grew up.

Being on the march, defending water, demanding a law that regulates the use that has historically been given to natural resources in our country has only provoked in me the rooting of my convictions. In each march, protest, street blockade, and more; only the desire for justice can flourish in me. My body screams, my gaze claims, my voice fights, and my eyes reflect the yearning for water and social justice for my territory. My body has been able to show me the most wonderful sensations of my life, each time defending the water of my community because when you are there, in front of that destroyed territory remembering its before and after, you are only feeling impotence, rage, but also what arises is the strength, coherence, conviction, bravery, and desire to stay facing the companies that plunder my land.

It is enough to recognize my roots, to realize that what we still call the El Ángel valley will soon be history because the oligarch and bourgeois gaze is on my people. Because here there is wealth, biodiversity, and endless resources they are trying to snatch away.

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Searching, wanting to be, and becoming an environmentalist in Apopa, next to El Ángel valley, whose path is already permeated by destruction, is not an easy thing because the price paid is high. It is enough to see how you are classified as antisocial, marginalized, persecuted, stigmatized, and your rights are violated along with all those who denounce injustices to know that defending life makes you the target. But seeing how the Periquera micro-basin dries up due to the effects of construction of what will be a “first world” housing project and knowing that the Chacalapa river micro-basin is threatened with disappearing makes me fight, even knowing that we can hardly win.

It is not possible to remain immobilized in the face of such cruel destruction to which my Apopa has been, is being, and will be subjected. It only remains to weave networks of hope and organized struggle that feed the defense of life and resist until there is victory.

The El Ángel valley has given me a lot, starting with life, friends, and excellent companions in the struggle. It has given me the opportunity to fall in love with every inch of the land and myself. That’s why I never get tired of raising my voice and shouting that the Chacalapa water defends itself!

From north of the Salvadoran capital, where the El Ángel valley still exists, on the slopes of the San Salvador volcano, the communities, we, will continue fighting and leading the battles we have to face to defend life.

The El Ángel valley is for me what your favorite place is for you... That place that allows you to be and to do.