

Is there anything more human than contradiction? We are a planet of over seven billion, yet we are each alone. We shower our children with affection; we can sneer at the children of others. We feel love and hate and fear and excitement—sometimes all at once. We claim citizenships through the randomness of birth, holding one little blue or red or green passport, while feeling pulled in many directions, being of many places even if we don't admit it.

The borderlands have forced me to own up to my contradictions. With Mexico but a stone's throw away, you can't avoid thinking about the "other side" of things, *al otro lado*. El Paso is all the things at once. It's American and it's Mexican. It's colonized and it's indigenous. It's Miss Border City singing the "Oh, say can you see" at the minor league Chihuahuas game with the crowd cheering, "Ayyy!". (It's an American baseball team staffed by Anglos and named the Chihuahuas.) It's pineapple with Tajín washed down with a Miller Lite. It's dollar stores in Spanish and hot dogs with green chile. It's strip malls and more strip malls and more strip malls with every chain store you can think of; it's mountains and deserts and canyons untouched. It's a desert down the street, one that is as dazzling as it is dangerous. It's a university campus full of Chicano kids putting on *Real Women Have Curves* in spite of protestations from their peers. It's an [art exhibit about ugliness](#) that is just too gorgeous to hold in your heart without aching. It's "Look at me, look at my last name, [I can't be racist against my own people](#)." The roar of an F-150; living in the quiet shadows.

Yes, these are contradictions. They're hard to gather in your arms at the same time. It's so much it makes me want to close my eyes and shake my head in disbelief. But that is the reality of living, especially in this complicated, hard, and beautiful place. And what place isn't complicated, hard, and beautiful?

It is through the contradictions that we can live in the "in between." That's the only real place, anyway.