

The Weight We Carry

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In Pearsall, Texas, stress doesn't come and go, it settles in your bones.

It's not the kind of stress you hear about in movies or school talks. It's not anxiety over tests or missed deadlines. It's heavier. It's survival. It's watching your parents count out cash at the end of the week, knowing it's still not enough. It's ten-year-olds walking into the fields instead of summer camps. It's the silence after someone collapses under the sun and no one says anything, because we all know what it is. It's part of the job.

After school, we didn't go home to rest. We went to work. Some of us, the "lucky ones," got jobs as cashiers at Dollar General, drive-thru at Dairy Queen. But most of us ended up out in the fields. That's where I spent my summers: boots sinking in the dirt, bodies hunched low in the weeds, squinting at fruits under the burning sun. Our crew would walk from one field to the next, checking for ripeness. If the crop was ready, we picked it. If not, we moved on, tired from the walk but with no other option.

The weeds had to stay tall so the fruit wouldn't burn from sun spots, but those weeds hid snakes. Every now and then someone would scream that it meant snakes got to them. If someone just dropped and didn't move, it was heat exhaustion. Either way, we'd carry them to the truck with no air conditioning, splash some water on their face, and hope they came to. Then we'd go back to work.

One day, I dislocated my kneecap. It popped out while I was walking down a slope, and I couldn't put any weight on my leg. I sat there for a while, sweating, breathing through the pain, then limped back to the truck. The next day, I showed up to work. Not because I was healed I wasn't but because I had to. No work meant no money. No money meant no choice.

That's the kind of stress we carry. And we're taught not to talk about it.

I remember an old man who came back to work just one week after heart surgery. We all looked at him with quiet respect, but no one told him to go home. No one stopped him. We couldn't afford to. He was just doing what we all did: pushing past pain, pretending it didn't matter. It was just another day in Pearsall.

People like to say, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." In Pearsall, we don't say that. We don't say much of anything. We just keep going. Even when it does hurt. Even when we shouldn't. And that silence, that toughness starts to shape who you are. You begin to think that talking about stress makes you weak. That if you stop, even for a second, you're falling behind.

I've seen people break under that silence. Not loudly, not in dramatic ways. Quietly. Slowly. I remember a friend who used to laugh, who stopped showing up, who stopped looking anyone in the eye. Some bent and found a way to stand back up.

Others didn't. The foreman would say, "They took the easy way out." But I don't think it's easy to walk away from everything you've ever known. I think sometimes the weight just gets too heavy.

What scared me the most was seeing how many people tried to leave to chase something more only to come back months later, defeated. It was like the fields had a pull on us, like the dirt itself didn't want to let us go. I started to wonder if I was stuck too. If this was all there would ever be. If surviving was the best I could hope for.

But even in that fear, something inside me kept

going. Maybe it's stubbornness. Maybe it's the same thing that kept me working on a dislocated knee. But I started to look at stress differently. Not as a weakness or something to hide, but as proof. Proof that I've carried weight most people never will. Proof that I know how to keep moving, even when everything inside me wants to stop.

I don't know exactly where I'm going. But I know what I've come from. And that means something. Because in a town like Pearsall, you don't get to pick the weight you carry but you do get to decide what you'll do with it.