

Story I: Jamie's Story

My name is Jaime. I am a Guatemalan citizen who came to the U.S looking for a better future for myself and my children. I remember growing up in Guatemala; I had to walk barefoot in the mountains because my parents were so poor that they could not afford to buy shoes for me and my siblings. There were days when I only got a small meal per day. We could not go to school or buy clothes since we could not afford that. We used to live in a small house made of palm tree, and I could only dream about getting a bigger house for my parents.

When I was 18 years old my father decided that I should get married because it was the only way of saving me from being forced to join the military. At that time the military was fighting against the guerrillas and was recruiting every person they could. If a person would not join he/she would be blamed for supporting the guerrillas. During the conflict in Guatemala I witnessed a lot of injustices which up until today I couldn't talk about because I feared for my safety. Time after time I saw people disappear because they would share what they saw. For fear of my safety, I have become a silent witness of a lot of injustices committed against indigenous people in Guatemala.

Through hard work my eight siblings and I built a "better" house for my parents. We were all happy because we were able to provide something better for our parents. Our joy did not last long because in 1998 the severe winds and rain of hurricane Mitch took away our pride along with our house. We spent two weeks without a dry place to sleep and only enough food to have one meal per day. During that time I could only think of when I was just a little boy without food, clothes, and shelter. I cannot forget the faces of my brothers and sisters; they would cry and constantly ask why God had forgotten about us.

Now, I have four daughters who are sixteen, thirteen, nine, and three years old respectively. One of them is about to go blind. That was another reason why I came here; I wanted to work in order to be able to pay for her medicine. I looked for jobs in Guatemala, but I was unable to find employment. With a broken heart I left my home town and my family. I wanted to be safe and forget about all my traumas from childhood. So I decided to come to the U.S. Also, I did not want my children to go through what I lived through in Guatemala; I was hoping to bring them with me when I had enough money. But unfortunately it didn't work out. On May 12, 2008 my life fell apart along with my dreams. Now, here I am in Postville trying to put the pieces of my life back together and hoping that President Obama will fulfill his promise of working for comprehensive immigration reform.

Story 2: Genesis' Story

My name is Genesis. I came to this country because I have a son with asthma. He needs two shots twice a week, and each shot costs \$80.00. I could hardly provide for food and clothing let alone extra medicine in Mexico. Unable to provide for his medicine in Mexico I saw the necessity to cross into the United States in order to keep him alive. At the time I did not know the challenges I was going to face.

The first challenge I faced when coming to the U.S was crossing the border without losing my life. I faced a lot of challenges on my way to Postville such as the risk of sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and physical abuse from the human traffickers and from the employers once I arrived. I will never forget the time when the human smuggler locked me in a restroom for a whole day without food or water. He did not let me communicate with my family for three days because I was unable to pay the \$2,000.00 he charged me to cross me into the U.S. How could I forget when he made me walk in through sewer water up to my neck in order to cross the border! I ended up acquiring rashes on top of bruises as the result of being exposed to chemicals and sewage water.

My second challenge was not being able to find employment due to my legal status. I looked for a job in CVG in Monona and in Wapsie Produce in Decorah, but both places turned me down. I heard from all my friends that it was easy to obtain a job at Agriprocessors because they did not require legal documents to work there, but the job was poor pay and physically demanding. It was not uncommon for me to have to work 17 hour shifts while being exposed to different types of chemicals making \$7.75/hr as a Quality Assurance Technician. I knew I had to endure whatever I could in order to provide medicine and food for my precious two year old son, Emiliano, who I miss so much. I miss not being with him on a daily basis, his hugs, and words of love.

I also had to face discrimination, not only because I am Hispanic, but also because I am a woman. I was discriminated because they knew I was undocumented, the accent I have when I speak English and the color of my skin.

I had risked my life, left my precious son to come to the United States to help save his life and at the same time help my parents with their financial problems. I thought that if I worked hard I was going to be able to support my family. I was not able to do this in Mexico.

And now here I am in Postville, unable to work. I'm not with my son and I'm just hoping that with the help of God and friends in Postville that I will be able to help my precious son. I also hope that President Obama will see that the laws are changed and we'll be able to see comprehensive immigration reform.