

A Sad and Hard Story

Will It Turn Out Well?

Stefany Merino

In El Salvador, there has been a lot of violence and unemployment. Many people decide to immigrate to the United States. One of these people was my mom. And then, 13 years later, I followed her.

My Mom Left When I Was 9

In 1999 my mom made the hard decision to leave us with my grandma. I was nine years old, and my sisters Joseline and Abigail were three and one. Three years later, our grandma died. My mom could not come back to El Salvador, and she had to ask our aunt to take care of us. While we lived with my aunt, the father of my little sister showed up. He decided to take her, and so he separated us. Then my aunt decided to emigrate too, leaving us alone again.

At 17, I Was in Charge

As a 17 year old, I had to take responsibility for me and my two sisters. (My little sister had come back to us.) I didn't have anyone to give me advice or tell me what to do. When I was 19 years old, I got pregnant and became a single mother of a beautiful boy. I worked at a beauty salon. While I was working, a day care took care of my son,



Me (left) and my sister Joseline when she was 12 years old.

and my sisters went to school.

As a big sister, I tried my best. But all I did was not enough. My middle sister started to have bad friends. If I gave her some advice, she would get angry with me. My mom from the U.S. could not do anything



Here we are together in El Salvador: my sisters Joseline and Abigail, and my son and me.

either. One day, we received a call asking us for money. They knew we had family in the U.S. They were members of a gang. They said if we did not pay, something bad would happen.

My Sister Is Kidnapped

On December 21, 2012, my middle sister Joseline, who was 17 years old, disappeared. This Christmas was the saddest Christmas for us. Five days later, I decided to go to find her. I went to the police, the hospital, and also the morgue. I found her at the morgue. Gangsters had killed her. They hit her hard on the head, suffocated her, and burned her face. I felt a pain so strong that even after 10 years, it is still there.

Escaping to the U.S.

With the pain of having lost my sister Joseline, I decided to come to the U.S. with my three-year-old son. My little sister Abigail had to stay there with her father's family who took care of her. While my son and I traveled through Guatemala

and Mexico, one cartel kidnapped my group. But a miracle of God happened: they let me and my son go free.

I was tired and exhausted from a month of traveling, but finally we arrived safe and sound. I can't describe the happiness of seeing my mother after 13 years. She had a new family, a husband, and two sons. They made me feel at home again. It was another country but a new beginning. My sister Abigail arrived in 2015. Her safe arrival made me feel calm and happy.

When I Close My Eyes...

I started to work at a beauty salon. My boss and coworker made me feel comfortable. Now I have been working at the same place for nine years. They are like a family to me. After a few years, I have a new partner, and we have a four-year-old girl.

It was hard to adapt to my new country. The homes and streets were different, and I didn't like the climate. Sometimes, I closed my eyes and felt like I was in my old country. I wanted to go back in time to when my sister was alive.

Applying for Asylum

One of my goals was to study and learn English and to know other cultures.

This country has opened doors to big opportunities for me and my family. Unfortunately, I



This is my small but big family: my new partner and me with our daughter and my son.

do not have documents. I applied for asylum, but the lawyer only took my money and then disappeared. My case was closed. Only my son had a special case and he has been able to get documents. I would really like this sad and hard story to turn out well and that a miracle of God can happen to help me get some documents.

AFTER YOU READ: Write a letter to Stefany reflecting on her story. Refer to specific details you read in her essay. Share a story from your life that shows how you can relate to her story.

What is Asylum?

Asylum is a form of protection granted to individuals who can demonstrate that they are unable or unwilling to return to their country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of:

- race,
- religion,
- nationality
- membership in a particular social group,
- or political opinion.

Source: www.rescue.org/article/it-legal-cross-us-border-seek-asylum

Stefany Grandos Merino is a student at Chelsea Public School's Intergenerational Literacy Program in Chelsea, MA. She was born in San Miguel, El Salvador, in 1989. She is the mother of two children and has been working as a stylist for 12 years. She is passionate about everything she does, and she values each person in her life.

