

The Journey of My Life

Connie's Story

In 2013, Connie's life in Colombia was in danger. In her eagerness to escape, she gave thousands of dollars to someone who promised to escort her to the U.S. Instead, he brought her to the Bahamas where he left her. She was taken to a remote hide-out where she lived in one room with 11 other travelers, all men. One night, they were put into a four-person boat destined for Miami. A thunderstorm raged and the boat leaked. Here is her story, excerpted and edited from "Immigrant Voices."



In this photo, a U.S. Coast Guard boat approaches 10 people on top of an overturned vessel, off the coast of the Bahamas. All 10 people were safely taken on board by the Coast Guard crew. (U.S. Coast Guard [photo](#) in the public domain.)

Drifting on the Water

The idea was to take this little boat to Miami Beach. But the boat broke down in the middle of the ocean. There was an electrical storm that night, a huge storm with rain and lighting. We were drifting on the water. The night was really dark. It was terrible. The water was starting to come into the boat.



Find the Bahamas on this map. What else can you identify?

Everybody started to ask, "What are we going to do now? Do you have life jackets?"

No.

"Do you have at least a light or something?"

No.

"Do you have a phone, some way to call your friends to rescue us?"

No. Nothing.

At that point, we started to pray. Nobody said anything. We were just quiet and waiting. I

said to myself over and over, "Thanks, God, for bringing me home! Thanks, God, for bringing me home." I didn't know what home meant. We were 12 people in one boat with the capacity for four.

"Consuelo, we're going to die."

Somebody behind me said, "Consuelo, we're going to die."

"Nobody has died yet. Right now, we are alive and we are here."

I said, "I don't know. What can I do? Just relax. Nobody has died yet. Right now, we are alive and we are here. Do you have faith? Do you have a god and believe in something or somebody? So pray. That's the only thing we can do now."

God sent us the Coast Guard, and they rescued us. How? I don't know. They took us to Palm Springs, Florida, and they put us in jail. I was in jail for four months. I told them the truth about why I was here, and I applied for asylum. After four months, I was allowed to leave. I flew to Boston to live with my friend.

I started to work in Boston as a housekeeper, and I studied English. I worked all the time. I am available to learn anything. Maybe I don't know how to do something, but I have the ability to learn. Whatever you need me to do, I can do it.

I Am an Optimist

Living here in the United States, I learned to think positively. That's why I love this country. In this country, I changed my mind, and I changed my life. In Colombia, I was always in the comfort zone. My whole life was drinking, smoking, dancing. Stupid things. It was not the best way to live. Here, my life is very different. I don't have a lot of money, but I'm still richer than I was in Colombia where I had money. Being rich is not about how much money you have; it is how rich you feel that you are.

I am an optimist. I expect the best things in my life. No matter what, I'm not my circumstances! I don't think about what happened to me. I think about what I can do with the things that happened to me. To be happy, to live in peace, is my decision.

Many immigrants come to this country alone, with no family. We have nothing and we feel bad.

Another Writer Seeking Asylum

Find out what asylum is, and read another story by an asylum-seeker on pp. 12-13.



"Immigrant Voices" is a project of the Gardner Adult Education Program in Boston, MA. Read a full transcript of the interview with Connie (Volume 2, episode 5) here: <https://gpaesol.files.wordpress.com/2021/03/e-book1.15.21correxvolume2val-1.pdf>. Listen to the audio here: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1273232/6917135-connie-from-colombia>

But no. We have to find a way to feel better, to make our home wherever we are. I have hundreds and hundreds of friends that I haven't met yet. I am not alone.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the author's general attitude when she faces a challenge? How do you know? Point to places in the text where she reveals her philosophy of life.
2. The author says, "In this country, I changed my mind, and I changed my life." What does she mean by that?
3. Read the story by Kim Ly on pp. 22-23. Compare and contrast these two stories.

Connie now lives in Los Angeles, building her business as a well-being coach and awaiting news on her petition for U.S. citizenship. During her time in Boston, she was an ESL student at the Gardner Pilot Academy Adult Education program in Allston, MA.