

## *Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents*

### DREAMS AND MEMORIES OF AN IMMIGRANT GIRL

I came to America from Guatemala to be reunited with my mother when I was 10. When I arrived, I did not know how to speak, write, or understand the English language. In the beginning, it was extremely hard for me to communicate with my teachers or classmates. Kids at school would bully me and laugh because I couldn't speak or understand English. I worked hard in and after class so I could read, write, and speak English.

In 2010, my three siblings and I were removed from my mother's care due to child abuse. My mother had started working nights and returning home drunk late. She would disappear for 2 or 3 days at a time, leaving my brothers and I home alone. Every time she came home, she was either drunk or in a bad mood. She had no time to give us a hug or ask if we were okay. She started abusing by hitting us with the iron cord, which left marks and bruises all over our bodies. We weren't able to go to school because my mother was afraid the teachers would see our bruises. I was scared that one day she would end up killing one of us.

My siblings and I were so scared we would be separated from each other. Luckily there was a family that took the four of us together. We lived with them for about a year and then were able to return back home with our mom. Another year passed, and my mother went back to her old ways. But this time it was a lot worse. One night we were removed again and placed into different foster homes. The hardest part of that night for my sister and I was saying goodbye to my baby brother, who was only 3, and my older brother, who was 16. We didn't know where we were going or even with whom. The last thing my older brother said to me that night was "I love you guys, and we will be together soon."

They took my sister and I to an unknown woman's house, and we lived there for a few months. Then the pastors from my old church took care of my siblings and I, which lasted through my first 2 years of high school. After that I requested to be placed in a different foster home because one of the pastor's grandsons was being physically abusive. My social worker placed me into Martha's care. I lived with her and her husband and other foster youth from the age of 15 until my 20s. Martha did her best to take care of me and always advised me about the proper way. She treated me like her own daughter and believed in me. After I graduated high school I attended college to start my nursing career, with the hopes of eventually being a neonatal surgeon.

The world has been very hard and cruel to me, and sometimes I still ask myself, "What did I do wrong?" But, I also know that every obstacle I faced had a reason behind it. Sometimes life places you in difficult situations, but with a positive mentality and a strong heart, anyone can overcome any obstacle. I know that as long as I am able to take one breath and then the next, there is hope to make it in this world.



I admire my mother because she had to work very hard day and night to one day reunite her children so we could be together as a family again. Now that I am older, I see things from a different perspective, and I see how much she struggled. I would give up anything just to see her smile.

I want thank my foster parents for taking care of me, providing a home when I most needed it, advising me, and giving me the love my mother was unable to provide. Thanks to my social workers for making sure I was okay and for giving me a Green Card so I could work and attend school. Thanks to my independent living program coordinator for working with me regarding work, school clothing reimbursement, scholarships, and job opportunities. And a shout out to the Alliance for Children's Rights for giving me the opportunity to work with them and learn more about the foster care system.



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