parent writings from Whittier and Volta elementary schools
**About Alessandro Volta Elementary School**

Volta is a neighborhood school that offers a comprehensive general education curriculum with a full spectrum of special education and bilingual services. Volta builds upon the talents and cultural capital of all students by providing rigorous instruction that prepares them for college, careers and the global workforce. Within a safe and supportive community, Volta uses language and culture to build internal capacity, tolerance and a global appreciation for the contributions of others.

**About Whittier Dual Language Elementary School**

Whittier is a HeadStart – 8th grade school, specializing in providing dual language program for all its students. Whittier brings together both Spanish and English speaking students and families for the opportunity of a promising future of being bilingual, bicultural, and academically enriched.

**About the Community Writing Project and Real Conditions**

The Community Writing Project offers writing workshops to people who ordinarily do not consider themselves to be writers, and publishes their reflections and stories about everyday life in *Real Conditions* magazines. Because only the collective efforts of ordinary people can make a better world, we are interested in the creative expression and unique understanding of those who have been relegated to the margins of society, including the poor, the oppressed, immigrants, and those who risk their privilege to join them. Their stories are found in these pages.
PRESENTACION

Every week for the past five months, a group of parents at Whittier and Volta Elementary Schools dropped their children off at school at 8:15 a.m. and then made their way to the room where we held the school’s parent writing group. Week after week the women arrived, caught up briefly on school or family matters, served themselves a cup of coffee, some sweet bread and fruit, and then settled into the task of reading, writing, and discussing the issues that matter most to them -- the topics that we share with you in this edition of Real Conditions.

Starting the day early is customary for these parent writers. Whether or not they work outside the home during the day or at night, whether they are raising children with a spouse or on their own, they get up at the crack of dawn every day to make sure their children get to school safely and on time, book bags and homework in tow. Over the months these women’s dedication to every facet of their children’s present and future has poured out into their writing and conversations. Through their writing and sharing, they have also woven their writing groups into communal webs of support, exploring the importance of taking care of themselves after a life of taking care of others, often since a young age. The following passage, written collectively by the Whittier moms, conveys, we believe, the experience of both groups: “We meet every week to write stories and have discussions about our lives, about our children and grandchildren, and about other experiences we have. It is a way of unburdening ourselves, of sharing ideas about our problems, and of celebrating our accomplishments.”

Each reader will benefit from the stories these women generously share: in their unwavering devotion to family; the humor they bring to the severest of situations; their fearless efforts, often in the face of overwhelming danger, to provide the best possible life and opportunities they can imagine for their families; their unswerving commitment to community, in a city they have embraced far more than it has embraced them; their insistence on the value of people over things; their assertion of the value of education as a source of self-betterment and civic engagement.

We encourage you to read these stories slowly so that you can savor their simple, enduring truths. — the editors

INTRODUCTION

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PARTE 1

Escritos del grupo “Compartiendo Cuentos”

*Writings from the “Sharing Stories” Group*

Whittier Dual Language Elementary School
LAS ESCRITORAS / THE WRITERS

Angelica Cordova
Alicia Grajeda
Suyapa Lello
Guadalupe Patino
Luz Maria Perez
Jessenia Ruiz
Josefina Tercero

Cuando yo tenía 13 años había mucha inquietud en mí. Mi meta principal era ayudar a mi mamá, pues fuimos muchos de familia. Yo quería salir a estudiar fuera, pero mi papá era muy estricto. Decía que las mujeres eran para trabajar en casa. Pues yo salía de la escuela a trabajar en casa y cuidar a mi hermanito más chico.

Una vez llegaron unas monjitas al pueblo. Yo me quería ir con ellas pero no me aceptaron porque era menor de edad y no tenía permiso de mis papás. Cuando fui mayor me fui a la ciudad de México. Estuve siete años con unos religiosos. Estudié un poquito en un colegio muy grande que se llama Anglo Español de Zaragoza. Extrañaba mucho a mi mamá y a mi hermanito, pero tuve unas experiencias muy bonitas. Aprendí a abrirme paso en la vida, que mucho me ha servido. Allá había mucha disciplina. Cada tres meses se cambiaba de empleo. Eso me estresaba mucho. Yo decía, “Ahora, ¿qué me irá a tocar?” Cuando me dieron el empleo de enfermería, fue bonita experiencia, pero mucha responsabilidad. Tenía que inyectar a los compañeros, lo que me daba mucho miedo.

Pero me enfermé y regresé a Zamora, Michoacán. Allí trabajé en una mueblería de line blanca. Me gustó mucho. Estuve contenta porque pude comprar a mi mamá estufa, refrigerador, y muchas otras cosas, pues esta fue toda mi ilusión, poderla ayudar económicamente. Después me fui a trabajar en una mueblería de estilo colonial donde le compré a mi mamá una mesa grande y todo lo de un comedor.

El mismo año uno de mis hermanos que estaba en Chicago con mi papá me invitó de vacaciones por dos semanas. Acepté. Tenía una amiga de la primaria que ya vivía en Chicago. Ella me fue a visitar y me preguntó si quería trabajar, pues ella era “manager” de una fábrica. Le dije, “No, Elena, vengo por muy poco tiempo.” Dijo, “Pero aquí te quedas tú sola en casa.” Entonces al otro día comenzé a trabajar. Me quedé seis meses y después me regresé a México.

Luché por regresarme a Chicago por motivo que me gustaron los dólares. Comparando un sueldo de México a este país, fue mucho más lo que se ganaba. Y así pude enviar dinero a mi mamá. Regresé en 1968, y hasta la fecha aquí estoy. Le doy gracias a Dios por haberme abierto las puertas de este país. Como decía mi tío Roberto Grajeda, conocido por el Charro Cárdenas, “Aquí estamos y de aquí no nos vamos. Y si nos vamos, nos regresamos.”
I am from a small town from the state of Michoacán named Valle de Guadalupe. It’s very pretty. There is much water there. Strawberries, avocados, peaches all grow there — lots of vegetation. But it is very empty. Most of the people are in the United States. In December and January there are many festivals for the Virgin of Guadalupe and for Christmas all the emigrants arrive. After that, it is left empty.

When I was 13 years old, I became very restless. My main goal was to help out my mother, as there were many of us in the family. I wanted to leave, to go away for my studies, but my father was very strict. He said that women were meant to work in the home. So I left school in order to work at home and to watch over my littlest brother.

Once some nuns came into town. I wanted to go with them but they didn’t accept me because I was a minor and I didn’t have my parents’ permission. When I came of age, I went to Mexico City. I stayed seven years with a religious order. I studied a little bit at a large school called Anglo Español de Zaragoza. I missed my mother a lot and my little sister, but I had some very nice experiences. I learned how to make my way in life, which has served me well. There was a lot of discipline there. Every three months, we changed jobs. That was very stressful for me. I would say, “Now, what will I have to do next?” When they gave me the job of nurse, it was a nice experience but a lot of responsibility. I had to give injections to my companions, which made me very nervous.

But I became ill and returned to Zamora, Michoacán. There I worked for a white linen furniture store. I enjoyed it a lot. I was happy because I was able to buy a stove, refrigerator, and many other things for my mother. This was always my dream, to help her economically. Afterwards I went to work in a colonial style furniture store where I bought my mother a big table and a whole dining set.

That same year, one of my brothers who lived in Chicago with my father invited me to come for a vacation for two weeks. I accepted. I had an elementary school friend who already lived in Chicago. She came to visit me and asked if I wanted to work, since she was a manager at a factory. I told her, “No, Elena, I’m only here for a very short time.” She said, “But you’re here by yourself in the house.” So the next day I began working. I stayed for six months and then I returned to Mexico.

I worked hard to come back to Chicago because I liked the dollars. Comparing a salary in Mexico to this country, one earned so much more here. And that way I could send money to my mother. I returned in 1968, and up to the present, I am still here. I give thanks to God for opening the doors to this country to me. As my uncle Roberto Grajeda, known as Charro Cardenas, used to say, “This is where we are, and this is where we'll stay. And if we leave, we will return.”

**MAKING MY WAY IN LIFE**

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Cuando mis hijos fueron chicos y empezaron a ir a la escuela yo siempre los apoyaba prepararse para la escuela por la mañana. A las 5 a.m. les ponía la radio en un programa que se llamaba “El Gallito.” El locutor se llamaba Chapa. Los despertaba el gallo cantando por radio, y yo les decía, “Ya levántense, ya es hora de que se levanten.” Los llevaba a la escuela y yo me iba al trabajo.

**ALICIA GRAJEDA**

**THE LITTLE ROOSTER**

When my children were young and started to go to school I always helped them to get to school in the morning. At 5 a.m. I would turn the radio to a program that was called “The Little Rooster.” The announcer's name was Chapa. Hearing the rooster sing on the radio would wake them up, and I would say, “Wake up, children, it’s time to get up to go to school.” Then I would take them to school and I would go to work.
Creo que en mí algo ha cambiado, es que dialogo un poco más con mis hijos. Escucho y platico más con ellos. Antes no lo hacía pero creo que ahora nos entendemos mejor. Pues antes no escuchaba a mis hijos. Sólo les gritaba y no esperaba que me dijeran que pasaba.

Lo que me hizo cambiar fue que me invitaron a unas pláticas para cómo saber escuchar a los hijos y saber ayudarlos en sus problemas. Me siento muy contenta porque creo que sí lo he logrado.

LISTENING TO MY CHILDREN

I think that something in me has changed. It's that I discuss things a little more with my children. I listen and talk more with them. I didn't do it before. But I believe that now we understand each other better. Before I didn't listen to my children. I just yelled at them and didn't wait for them to tell me what was going on.

What made me change was that I was invited to some talks about how to listen to your children and how to help them with their problems. I feel very happy because I believe I have accomplished this.
A mí lo que más me ha gustado de la escuela de mis hijos son los talleres que imparten para la comunidad. De esos talleres, el que más me ayudó a transformar mi vida fue el de auto-estima, porque de allí me di cuenta de mis errores y empecé a realizarme mejor como mamá, esposa, y amiga, y desempeñar papeles en mi comunidad que anteriormente nunca pensé poder lograr. Pues, yo siempre pienso que con una gran auto-estima podremos entender mejor la vida.

Participar en ese taller fue una experiencia de mucha ayuda, y yo la tomaba con mucho respeto, como también a mis compañeras del taller. De esa manera conocí a muchas personas nuevas. Pude entender mejor su situación y logré tener una buena comunicación con mis compañeras. También, lo más importante fue que mi vida en familia mejoró mucho. Yo no sabía que la palabra auto-estima tenía un significado tan grande e importante en nuestra vida diaria.

Este taller lo impartía la organización de Frida Kahlo en el lonche de la escuela Whittier. Lo impartía dos personas muy importantes en mi vida, y que nunca se me van a olvidar. Sus nombres son Leila y Jacqueline. A través de ese taller fui conociendo a más personas que me han ayudado a convertirme en una persona con capacidad para realizar mis valores y perder mis temores en este país.

Estos talleres de auto-estima son fundamentales. Para mí el auto-estima es el principal punto de partida para llevar mi vida mejor y poder ayudar a las personas que están en mi alrededor. Todos los días puedo brindarles amor, humildad, una gran sonrisa. Estas son para mí los ingredientes para vivir feliz. Ahora sólo espero que las personas que lean estas palabras reconozcan que en esta vida todo podemos comprar menos el tiempo y la felicidad.

TIME AND HAPPINESS

What I have enjoyed most about my children’s school are the workshops that they provide to the community. Of those workshops, the one that helped me the most to transform my life was the one on self-esteem, because at that point I became aware of my mistakes and began to come into my own as a mother, wife, and friend, and to take on roles in my community that I never thought I could achieve before. Well, I always think that with healthy self-esteem we can understand life better.

Participating in that workshop was a very helpful experience and I approached it with great respect, as did my workshop companions. In this way I met many new people. I could better understand their situation and was able to develop good communication with my companions. Also, most importantly, my family life improved greatly. I didn’t know that the word self-esteem had such significance and importance in our daily life.

This workshop was given by the organization Frida Kahlo. It was led by two people who have been very important in my life, and whom I will never forget. Their names are Leila and Jacqueline. Through that workshop I met more people who have helped me become a person with greater capacity to enact my values and lose my fears in this country.

These self-esteem workshops are essential. For me self-esteem is the principal point of departure for making a better life and for being able to help the people around me. Every day I can offer them love, humility, a big smile. These are for me the ingredients for a happy life. Now I only hope that the people who read these words realize that in this life we can buy everything except time and happiness.


todo somos ayotzinapa

El día 26 de septiembre 2014 ha sido una fecha simbólicamente importante, la cual le he dado seguimiento a esta caos en México. Estoy hablando nada más y nada menos de los 43 estudiantes desaparecidos de la Normal de Ayotzinapa, Guerrero.

Este caso me ha llenado de coraje y tristeza, no más de pensar en los momentos tan tristes y desesperantes de los padres de esos estudiantes — que nadie quisiera estar en sus zapatos. Pero no todo es malo en esta lucha, porque los días 3, 4, 5, y 6 de abril tuve el gusto de conocer a tres personas que han sido afectado directamente. Estoy hablando primero del tío de un estudiante desaparecido. Otro es uno de los estudiantes que lo llamaremos “44” porque pudo escapar milagrosamente de sus secuestradores. La otra es la madre de otro estudiante desaparecido. Tuve la suerte de platicar con ellos gracias a mis amigos del grupo de apoyo al cual formo parte, para darle un poco de luz a las personas que nos necesitan.

Esos días de abril me dio mucha tranquilidad en mi corazón haber podido brindarles moral y fortaleza y decirles que estamos con ellos en su lucha por encontrar a sus hijos. La caravana Ayotzinapa estuvo recorriendo varios lugares en Chicago, buscando ni fama ni dinero, solamente saber que tiene una mano amiga que siempre estará abierta para darles fuerza y valor; y que algún día sus corazones dejen de sufrir por su pérdida de hijos. Yo por mi parte seguiré aportando mi granito de arena hasta que mis posibilidades me lo permitan.

Reflexión -- No necesitamos tener un hijo desaparecido para darnos cuenta lo que es el dolor de una madre o un padre perder a un hijo. Pongámonos un momento en sus zapatos y la respuesta será “todos somos Ayotzinapa.”

we are all ayotzinapa

The day September 26, 2014 has been a symbolically important date, which I have followed in order to respond to this chaos in Mexico. I am speaking about nothing more and nothing less than the 43 students who were disappeared from their postsecondary school in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero.

This event has filled me with anger and sadness, just thinking about the sad and desperate moments of the parents of those students, parents whose shoes no one would want to be in. But not everything is bad in this struggle, because on April 3, 4, 5, and 6, I had the pleasure of meeting three people that have been directly affected. I am speaking first of all, of the uncle of one of the disappeared students. The second person is another one of the students I will call “44” because he was able to miraculously escape from his kidnappers. The final person is the mother of one of the other disappeared students. I had the good fortune of speaking with them, thanks to friends from the support group to which I belong, to offer a little light to those persons who need us.

Those days in April gave me much tranquility in my heart, to have been able to provide them moral support and strength and tell them that we are with them in their struggle to find their children. The Ayotzinapa caravan toured various parts of Chicago, looking for neither fame nor fortune, only to know that there is a friendly hand that will always be open to give them strength and courage; and that someday their hearts will stop suffering for the loss of their children. I, for my part, will continue providing my grain of sand as long as I am able to do so.

Reflection -- We do not need to have a missing child ourselves to realize the pain of a mother or father who has lost a child. Let us put ourselves in their shoes for a moment and the answer will be, “all of us are Ayotzinapa.”
ANGELICA CORDOVA

MI JARDIN CULTIVAR

Cuando yo empecé a traer mis hijos a la escuela Whittier me di cuenta que la escuela tenía un jardín. Me envolví al jardín comunitario a sembrar y regar la banqueta porque estaba ese lugar con tierra. Se plantaba plantas y yo las regaba. Por varios tiempos mi vida era el jardín. Era mi refugio. A veces plantaba con mis hijos. En ese tiempo sólo sabia que si mis hijos plantaran, ellos sabrían cuidar una planta. Si Dios me deja vivir 90 años, sabrían cuidar con cariño las plantas. Las plantas también tienen corazón y así viven.

El tiempo me ha enseñado que cultivar es muy hermoso, al ver y hacer otras cosas que quizás no sabía que podía hacer. Pasa el momento y te das cuenta que lo hiciste. El jardín me ha enseñado cuidarme a mí misma y a las demás personas. Hoy día no me peleo con los demás. Hoy día sé dialogar y con palabras puedo.

Doy gracias a esta escuela y su jardín porque me han cultivado. Traigo mis herencias, enseñanzas, mis raíces antepasados, para no perder de donde somos, y quienes son nuestros padres, nuestros abuelos, tatarabuelos, y todos los padres de nuestros tatarabuelos. Con estas herencias cultivaremos unos hijos con cultura y amor.

CULTIVATING MY GARDEN

When I began bringing my children to Whittier school, I realized that the school had a garden. I became involved in the community garden, planting seeds and washing off the sidewalk because dirt collected there. They would plant the plants and I would water them. There were many times when my life was the garden. It was my refuge. Sometimes I would plant with my children. At that time, all I knew was that if my children planted, they would know how to care for a plant. If God allows me to live to be 90 years old, they will know how to care for plants with affection. Plants have hearts too, and that is how they live.

Time has taught me that gardening is very lovely, to see and do other things that perhaps I did not know I could do. The moment passes and you realize what you've done. The garden has taught me to take care of myself and others. Nowadays I do not fight with others. Now I know how to dialogue and I can do so with words.

I give thanks to this school and its garden, because they have allowed me to grow. I carry with me my heritage, teachings, and my ancestral roots, so we do not lose where we come from, and who are our parents, our grandparents, great-grandparents, and all the parents of our great-grandparents. With this heritage, we cultivate our children with culture and love.
A significant day for me was the time I traveled on the bus on my way from Honduras to Reynosa, Mexico, to the border with Texas. I was alone with my sisters on the bus, and I didn’t know anyone. The military stopped the bus to check everyone. They began to ask for personal identification, which I did not have. So I felt nervous because I didn’t know what to do. But a guardian angel from God and the Virgin must have come aboard because everyone had to show their identification except me. I thought they were going to take me off the bus or worse — and I had just passed through the claws of Monterrey. I was so close to reaching Reynosa, which was my destination. Imagine, after having travelled so far, having passed through two countries, only to be taken off of the bus. I was scared because it was already nighttime and the roads were empty. I was worried, and my little sisters and I prayed to God and the Virgin that they wouldn’t take us off the bus. The soldier arrived to where I was and asked me some questions. He asked me for identification, and I told him I didn’t have any. He asked some more questions and then just smiled at me and got off the bus. That is how I got to where I needed to go, to our destination.
Hola, mi nombre es Luz María y soy de México, Distrito Federal. En septiembre del año 2001 llegué con mi hija Guadalupe a Los Ángeles. Ella tenía 10 años de edad. Ibarramos con rumbo a Chicago, donde estaba ubicado mi esposo, Jaime. Yo ya tenía dos años sin verlo. Pero llegamos primero a Los Ángeles porque allí vivía mi primo Ramón. Ramón es como mi hermano, porque cuando éramos niños él me cuidaba. Me compraba pan, helados, y me llevaba a caminar a la milpa. El cortaba las cañas de la milpa para que yo pudiera comerlas, porque yo no sabía cortarlas tan fácil como él. Mi primo era especial para mí. Pero pasó el tiempo y nos dejamos de ver por más de 10 años. El se vino a Los Ángeles. Así que, cuando supe que me iba a ir a los Estados Unidos, pensé en él.

En el viaje de la frontera a Los Ángeles, lo primero que vi fueron las casas. Me gustaron mucho porque tenían un jardín grande, verde, y con muchas flores de colores. Y yo pensé, “¿Algún día yo podré tener una casa igual de bonita?” A mi hija también le gustaron las casas y los parques que vimos.


Entonces, Ramón nos llevó a su casa. En el camino vimos el paisaje, las tiendas, las avenidas. Me gustaron mucho. Ese día era muy buen clima — caluroso y soleado. Cuando pasamos por una avenida principal de Los Ángeles vimos a la gente como se vestían: unas muy ligeras de ropa y otras con blusas escotadas. Volteamos a vernos mi hija y yo. Nos quedamos con “el ojo cuadrado,” o sea muy sorprendidas, y nos empezamos a reír las dos, con una sonrisa en voz bajita y burlona. Entonces mi primo Ramón nos dijo, “No te espantes, prima. Así se visten las personas aquí. ¡Ya te acostumbrarás a verlas así!”

Cuando llegamos a su casa, conoci a su esposa Alicia. Ella nos recibió con un gran abrazo y nos dio la bienvenida con una sorpresa. Nos dijo que apenas había nacido su hija Lupita, que tenía sólo dos días de nacida. Llegó también mi primo Miguel y sus dos hijos Karla y Miguelito. Eran casi de la misma edad que mi hija. Cuando los niños la invitaron a ir al parque a jugar, ella volvió a verme, como preguntando “¿Puedo ir?” Le dije, “Ve con ellos, pero con cuidado y fíjate por donde es.” Entonces nos quedamos en la casa mis primos y yo. Platicamos de cómo recordábamos la niñez, los paseos, las travesuras que hacíamos. Cuando ya llegaron los niños del parque, mi hija comentó, muy emocionada, de cómo el parque no era igual a los parques en México. Así pasamos ocho días en la casa de mi primo. Fue divertido, y me la pasé genial con ellos.

Después nos tuvimos que ir a Chicago porque allá nos esperaba mi esposo Jaime. En el camino hacia Chicago nos llevaron en carro. En el transcurso volví a ver los paisajes bonitos y las casas que son todas iguales, con la misma forma y colores. Duramos dos días viajando. El viaje era un poco estresante porque íbamos muchos en el carro e íbamos un poco apretados.

Cuando llegamos a Chicago, lo primero que noté fue el frío y el clima un poco gris. Pude sentir la diferencia entre el clima de Los Ángeles y Chicago. Llegamos a la casa de mi cuñado Javier. El y mi esposo no estaban porque habían ido a trabajar. Entonces fue Estela, la esposa de mi cuñado, la que nos recibió en su casa. Mientras llegaba mi esposo de trabajar, Estela nos llevó a comprar ropa porque nada más teníamos la ropa que llevábamos puesta y otro cambio de ropa en una bolsa. De regreso a la casa ya estaba mi esposo y mi cuñado. Yo fui a abrazar a mi esposo, con mi hija corriendo atrás de mí. Después de un buen abrazo largo, saludé a mi cuñado mientras mi hija abrazaba a su papá. Todos nos empezamos a reír de alegría, y yo con un poco de lágrimas de alegría.

Al pasar los días, me di cuenta que estaba en un país muy diferente al mío, en especial porque aquí hace bastante frío. Ya llevo viviendo aquí en Chicago 14 años. Tuve tres hijas más, pero todavía no me acostumbró al clima. La verdad no me gusta el frío; no quiero usar esas chaquetas tan pesadas que se usan para protegerse del frío. Pero algún día lo acostumbraré porque este país ya lo considero como mi nuevo hogar. Aquí está el futuro con mi familia.
Hello, my name is Luz Maria and I am from Mexico City, Mexico. In September of 2001, I arrived with my daughter Guadalupe to Los Angeles, California. She was 10 years old. We were on our way to Chicago, where my husband, Jaime lived. It had been two years since I'd seen him. But we went first to Los Angeles because my cousin, Ramón, lived there. Ramón is like my brother, because when we were children he took care of me. He bought me bread, ice cream, and he took me walking through the cornfields. He would cut the ears of corn from the cornfields so I could eat them, because I didn't know how to cut them as well as he did. My cousin was very special to me. But time passed and we hadn't seen each other for over 10 years. He had come to Los Angeles. So when I found out that I was going to the United States, I thought of him.

During the journey from the border to Los Angeles, the first thing I saw were the houses. I liked them a lot because they had large green gardens, with many colorful flowers. And I wondered, “Could I have a house as nice as that one day?” My daughter also liked the houses and parks that we saw.

Entering the city, we arrived at the bus station. My cousin had not yet arrived, so I spoke with the gentlemen who had brought us. We chatted about various things, especially about meeting up with my cousin. Since it had been so many years since I had seen him, they asked me if I was going to recognize him. I told them, “Well yes. Even though I haven't seen him, I imagine he’s the same, that his face hasn't changed.” Then they said, “Are you sure?” But I didn’t answer them. About eight cars passed by, but he didn’t arrive. Finally, he arrived. When I saw him, I jumped with joy and yelled, “He’s here! He’s here!” The gentlemen asked, “Is it him?” I told them, “Yes, it’s him.” They said, “Are you sure?” I got out of the car. I hugged him tightly and he hugged me, very happy. Then the gentlemen got out of the car and greeted my cousin. They said, “Okay, bye.” When they had left, my daughter also hugged Ramón, even though she didn’t know him.

So then Ramón took us to his house. Along the way we saw the scenery, the stores, the avenues. I liked them a lot. That day the weather was nice -- warm and sunny. When we passed through one of the main streets of Los Angeles, we saw how the people were dressed: some with very light clothing and others low-cut blouses. We turned around to look, my daughter and I. We were wide-eyed — very surprised, that is — and we both started laughing smiling and quietly making fun of them. Then my cousin Ramón told us, “Don’t be so shocked, cousin. That’s how people dress here. You’ll get used to seeing them that way!”

When we got to Ramon’s house, I met his wife Alicia. She greeted us with a big hug and welcomed us with a surprise. She told us that her daughter, Lupita, had just been born, that she was just two days old. My cousin Miguel also arrived with his two children, Karla and Miguelito. They were almost the same age as my daughter. When the kids invited her to the park to play she turned to me, asking, “Can I go?” I told her, “Go with them, but be careful and pay attention to where it is.” My cousins and I stayed at the house. We talked about how we remembered our childhood, family trips, the mischief that we made. And that’s how we passed the day. When the kids had arrived from the park, my daughter commented excitedly about how the park was different from the parks in Mexico. So that’s how we spent eight days at my cousin's house. It was a lot of fun, and I had a lovely time with them.

Then we had to go to Chicago because my husband, Jaime, was waiting for us there. They took us to Chicago by car. On the way there I saw the pretty landscapes again and the houses that are all the same, the same shape and the same colors. It took us two days of travelling to get there. The trip was a bit stressful because there were a lot of us in the car and we were squeezed together a bit.

When we got to Chicago, the first thing I noticed was the cold and gray weather. I could feel the difference between the weather in Los Angeles and Chicago. We arrived at my brother-in-law Javier’s house. He and my husband were not there because they had gone to work. So Estela, my brother-in-law’s wife, welcomed us into her home. While my husband was returning from work, Estela took us shopping to buy clothes because we only had the clothes we wore and a change of clothes in a bag. When we got back to the house, my husband and brother-in-law were already there. I went to hug my husband, with my daughter running after me. After a good, long hug, I greeted my brother-in-law while my daughter hugged her father. We all started laughing, me with a few tears, all for joy.

And so the days passed. I realized that I was in a very different country from my own, especially because it gets so cold here. I have been living here in Chicago for 14 years. I have three more daughters, but I still haven’t gotten used to the weather. The truth is that I don’t like the cold weather anywhere, because I don’t like to wear those heavy jackets that are used for protection from the cold. But one day I will get used to it because I now consider this country my new home. The future with my family is here.
Mi primer día en los Estados Unidos fue cuando pasé por Laredo, Texas. Fue en el mes de enero. Ya no recuerdo de qué año. Crucé el puente de Laredo México a Laredo Texas como a las 4:30 pm. Como se oscurecía pronto por el tiempo de invierno me empezó a dar miedo. Yo venía sola rumbo a Chicago y nadie me esperaba allí. Yo venía para Chicago porque me dijeron que había mucho trabajo.

Yo venía caminando, buscando un hotel con nada más que 60 dólares en mi bolsa, cuando un señor de un carro me habló y me dijo, “María, ¿qué andas haciendo por aquí?” Y yo le contesté, “Está equivocado. Yo no soy María.” El me contestó, “Es que te parece con mi alumna. ¿Y a dónde vas?” me preguntó. “Busco un hotel para pasar la noche porque voy para Chicago.” Y me dijo, “Andas lejos. Yo te llevo.” Y me llevó. Pagó el hotel y me dijo, “Mañana vengo por ti a las 8:00 a.m.” Pero ya no regresó. Yo creo que fue mi ángel de la guarda.

MI ANGEL DE LA GUARDIA

SUYAPA LELLO

MY GUARDIAN ANGEL

My first day in the United States was when I passed through Laredo, Texas. It was in January. I don't remember what year it was. I crossed the bridge from Laredo, México to Laredo, Texas around 4:30pm. Since it got dark early because it was winter time, I started to get scared. I was on my way to Chicago by myself and nobody was waiting for me there. I was headed to Chicago because they told me that there was a lot of work.

I was on my way walking, looking for a hotel with only $60 in my purse, when a man called to me from his car saying, “Maria, what are you doing around here?” I answered him, “You must be mistaken. I am not Maria.” He answered, “You look like my student. Where are you going?” he asked me. “I'm looking for a hotel to stay the night because I'm headed to Chicago.” And he told me, “You're far. I'll take you.” And he took me. He paid for the hotel and told me, “Tomorrow I'll come for you at 8:00am.” But he didn't return. I believe he was my guardian angel.

THE TICKET
I am going to tell you a bit about the first person who helped me when I came to Chicago. This gentleman’s name is Nicolas. He is Mexican. He was the first person I met when they left me here in Chicago. I went to a coffee shop to buy a coffee and he was shopping. Since he had dark hair I thought, “This person speaks Spanish,” and I said, “Excuse me, I just arrived here and I am looking for work.” He responded, “You should go to 26th Street. That is the Hispanic neighborhood. But if you want, wait for me. In half an hour I get off work and I will take you there.” “That’s fine,” I answered. And he took me with two of his friends. He paid two months’ rent for me and said, “When you start working you can pay me back.” But later when I was working he didn’t want me to pay him back. He said, “It’s not necessary. The same day I met you I bought a [lottery] ticket and won 1,000 dollars.”
PARTE 2

Escritos del grupo “Madres Compartiendo Historias”
Writings from the “Mothers Sharing Stories” Group

Alessandro Volta Elementary School
LAS ESCRITORAS / THE WRITERS

Elizabeth Barraza
Crescencia Delgado
Bertha Feraz
Gris Gutierrez
Maria D. Gutierrez
Mariela Martinez
MA. Merced Alday Palomares
Angelica Reyes
A una edad muy joven yo fui madre soltera. Tuve dos niños a los que amo y adoro. Para sacarlos adelante tuve que dejar mis estudios y ponerme a trabajar, porque se me venía una responsabilidad muy difícil en mi vida. Difícil pero no imposible, como darles sus alimentos del día, calzarlos, vestirlos.

Bueno pues, me puse a buscar trabajo y conseguí un trabajo en una escuela primaria particular. Mi trabajo era de hacer la limpieza. Para asegurar el trabajo, tuve que demostrar al director que yo era competente. Y sí me lo dio. Conseguir ese trabajo significó algo importante porque los trabajos eran escasos. Yo sabía que mis hijos y yo ya no íbamos a sufrir de hambre ni de algunas cosas materiales. Así fue como me lo propuse trabajar, y trabajar para sacarlos adelante.

Mis padres formaron una gran parte de ayuda en nuestras vidas. Gracias a ellos nosotros salimos adelante. Nos dieron un techo donde vivir, comida, y sobre todo una unión familiar. Mis niños desde muy pequeños les decían “papá” y “mamá” porque son parte fundamental en la vida de mis hijos. Les dieron un estudio hasta donde ellos quisieron. A mi niña le dieron una carrera universitaria. Gracias a su bondad, ella estudió socorrista paramédico. Mi niño no cursó ninguna carrera, porque él vino conmigo a los Estados Unidos. Pero aun así mis hijos están muy agradecidos con mis padres por habernos ayudado cuando más los necesitábamos. Por todo lo que mis padres me ayudaron estaremos eternamente agradecidos con ellos.

Los amo y los quiero por siempre.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MY PARENTS
IN THE LIVES OF MY CHILDREN

At a very young age, I became a single mother. I had two children whom I love and adore. In order to get ahead, I had to leave my studies and get a job, because I had acquired a very difficult responsibility in my life. Difficult but not impossible, how to feed them each day, make sure they had shoes and clothes.

Well, I set about looking for work and found a job at a private elementary school. My job was to do the cleaning. In order to secure the job, I had to demonstrate to the principal that I was competent. And he gave it to me. Getting that job meant something very important because jobs were scarce. I knew that my children and I would no longer suffer from hunger or other material things. That’s how I decided to work, and work in order to get ahead.

My parents were a big help in our lives. Thanks to them, we were able to get ahead. They gave us a roof over our heads, food, and most of all, a family bond. Since they were very little, my children would call them “papá” and “mamá” because they are a fundamental part of my children’s lives. They gave them an education as far as they wanted to go. They paid my daughter’s way through college. Thanks to their generosity, she studied to be a paramedic technician. My son did not study a career, because he came with me to the United States. But even so, my children are very grateful to my parents for having helped us when we most needed it. For everything that my parents helped us with, we are eternally grateful to them.

I will love and care about them forever.
Cuando yo cursaba el quinto grado de primaria en mi ciudad, Morelia Michoacán, en las escuelas de nuestro estado nos tocaba a los estudiantes dirigir en el juramento a la bandera. Éramos muy pocas las elegidas porque las maestras nos elegían por calificaciones y yo tenía un grado normal. Pero yo tenía un problema que eran mis zapatos. Estaban rotos. Los tenía rotos porque en ese entonces mis padres eran muy pobres. Como éramos cinco hermanos pues mis padres no tenían dinero para calzarnos a todos. Así que teníamos que usar lo que tuviéramos --lo que ellos nos podían dar.

Entonces uno de esos zapatos que yo usaba tenía un agujero muy grande en la parte de enfrente. Como nos ponían en el centro del patio de la escuela, todos los niños dirigían la mirada hacia donde estaba yo. Para que no se mirara mi zapato dañado, yo tuve que poner un pie encima del otro. Y así fue como solucioné mi problema. Al terminar mi participación, todos los niños de los grados anteriores me aplaudieron y yo me sentí muy contenta.

Afortunadamente no pasó mucho tiempo que mi mamá encontró un trabajo en una escuela primaria. Cuando le pagaron su primer cheque nos compró zapatos a todos. Y así fue como superamos la situación.

ANGELICA REYES

MI LUCHA CON MIS ZAPATOS

When I was in fifth grade of elementary school in my city, Morelia Michoacán, in our state’s schools the students had to lead the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Only a few of us were chosen because the teachers would choose us based on grades, and I had pretty good grades. But I had a problem, which was my shoes. They were torn. The reason they were torn was because at that time my parents were very poor. Since we were five children, my parents did not have enough money to buy new shoes for us all. So we had to use what we had already – what they could give us.

So one of the shoes that I used had a very big hole in the front part. Since they put us in the center of the school courtyard, all the students would be directing their gaze toward where I would be. In order for them not to see my damaged shoe, I had to put one foot on top of the other. And that’s how I solved my problem. After I was done participating, all of the children from the earlier grades applauded me, and I felt very happy.

Fortunately, not much time passed and my mom found a job at an elementary school. When she received her first paycheck she bought us all shoes. And that is how we overcame the situation.

MY STRUGGLE WITH MY SHOES

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Fortunately, not much time passed and my mom found a job at an elementary school. When she received her first paycheck she bought us all shoes. And that is how we overcame the situation.
CUANDO LLEGA LA PRIMAVERA

Parte I: Guerrero  Yo me acuerdo cuando era pequeña y viví en mi pueblo, que se llama Santa Cruz Unión, Guerrero. Cuando llegó la primavera yo salía a traer agua a los pozitos. Tenía que cruzar un río. Yo correteaba las mariposas de varios colores. Cuando ya me cansaba me sentaba en una piedra para verlas volar de un lado a otro como si estaban contentas contigo. El agua del río corría por muchos lados. Las personas abrían brechas para que el agua corriera para las huertas, donde había sembradíos de cilantro, ríbanos, cebollas, lechugas. También habían árboles de frutos tales como zapotes, bonetes, mamey. Oler la tierra mojada, aire puro, eso es ¡vida!

Parte II: Chicago  Cuando llega la primavera yo salgo de mi casa para caminar y ver el sol, los árboles, el pasto verde como retoñan las flores en la tierra, los pájaros cuando cantan. Yo creo que ellos se comunican algo importante porque están desesperados, gritando entre ellos. Empiezo a respirar, levanto las manos y la cabeza al cielo. Me doy vueltas y vueltas y me siento con más fuerzas, como una águila. Digo como una águila porque ellas viven y vuelan por siete años. Después buscan la montaña más alta. Allí se les caen las plumas, el pico, sus garras. Cuando ya tienen todo de nuevo, empiezan a volar otra vez, y luego se oye cuando ellas están felices.

Así me siento yo cuando llega la primavera — como una águila nueva.

WHEN SPRING ARRIVES

Part I: Guerrero  I remember when I was little and lived in my town, which is Santa Cruz Unión, Guerrero. When spring came, I would go out to carry water to the little wells. I had to cross a river. I would chase the butterflies, which were of all different colors. When I got tired, I would sit on a rock to watch them fly from one place to another, as if they were happy with me. The water from the river ran to many places. People would breach the river so that the water would run through the orchards where they had planted cilantro, radishes, onions, lettuce. There were also fruit trees, including sapodilla, bonnet fruit, and mamey apples. To smell the wet earth, pure air, that is life!

Part II: Chicago  When spring arrives I leave my house to walk and look at the sun, the trees, the green grass, how the flowers shoot from the earth, the birds when they sing. I think they are communicating something important because they are desperate, shouting at each other. I begin to breathe, I lift my hands and head to the sky. I twirl around and around and I feel stronger, like an eagle. I say like an eagle because they live and fly for seven years. Afterward, they look for the highest mountain. There, their feathers, their beak, and their claws fall out. Then, when they have everything new, they begin to fly once again, and then you can hear when they are happy.

That’s how I feel when spring arrives – like a new eagle.
One day when I was walking with my daughter to school, she asked me, “Mom, what are you going to do today?” “I’m going to stay at school to speak with a writer.” “And what are you going to talk about?” “I don’t know. Later, I’ll tell you.” “Okay, Mom.”

In the afternoon when we arrived home, my daughter asked me again, “So, what did you do end up doing at school?” “A group of moms met in the cafeteria. We all wrote, and then we told our stories. We were able to talk about our problems, and we got things off our chest, sharing with the teacher. We drank coffee with cookies, fruit, and we all feel very relieved.”

Since then it has been several months that we have been sharing important topics each week that we get together. There are days that I feel tired, exhausted. But when one talks to friends, one forgets the problems of the home. When I am listening to the other women’s stories, I say, “Oh! So I’m not the only one who has problems.” I get home, put on some music, and begin to sing. I feel very happy, and I cook more quickly.
Hoy les quiero contar de la mujer que me dio la vida, mi mamá. Es una persona amable, noble, estricta y muy trabajadora. Siempre nos dice que el mejor regalo de la vida que podemos dar a nuestros hijos es el ejemplo que uno le da. Un ejemplo que yo tuve de ella que, a pesar de que nosotros vivíamos en rancho, hay que trabajar.

Mi papá con frecuencia estaba ausente. A falta de mi papá mi mamá tenía que trabajar haciendo los quehaceres de la casa, alimentando los animales. Ella traía leña para cocinar, ordeñaba las vacas, traía agua para la casa, se iba a lavar al arroyo, y hacía muchas cosas más.

Un día mi papá decidió mudarnos al pueblo para que pudiéramos estudiar. También allí en el pueblo mi mamá tuvo la necesidad de trabajar, pero de manera diferente. Digo diferente porque en el pueblo trabajaba para ganar dinero y así ayudar con los gastos de la casa. Hacía pan para vender, y limpiaba una casa ajena. También participó en un cooperativa de la escuela. Allí vendía tortas, tacos, sodas, y muchas golosinas que a los niños les gustan. Además hacía los quehaceres de la casa: cocinaba, lavaba, limpiaba, nos ayudaba con la tarea, y estaba al pendiente de todos.

Por eso doy gracias a Dios por la mamá que me dio. Siempre voy a estar agradecida por el esfuerzo y sacrificio que hizo para sacarnos adelante. Gracias a ella todos sus hijos que somos seis, somos personas responsables, nobles, estrictas, y trabajadores. La amo con todo mi corazón.

Yo desde que me vine aquí a los Estados Unidos hace 15 años hablo con mi mamá como reloj, cada semana, y siempre duro hablando mucho con ella. Quisiera poder estar más cerca de ella.

**MY MOTHER, AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW**

Today I would like to tell you about the woman that gave me life, my mom. She is a nice person, noble, strict and very hardworking. She always tells us that the best gift in life that we can give to our children is the example that one sets. One example I got from her, even though we lived on a ranch, was to work. My dad was frequently absent. In the absence of my dad, my mom had to work doing the household chores, feeding the animals. She brought in wood to cook, milked the cows, brought in water for the house, go washing to the stream, and she did much more.

One day, my dad decided we would move to town so that we could go to school. There in the town also my mom had to work, but in a different way. I say different because in the town she worked to make money and that way, helped with the household costs. She baked bread to sell, and she cleaned someone else’s house. She also participated in a cooperative at the school. There she sold sandwiches, tacos, sodas, and many sweets that children like. She also did the household chores: she cooked, washed, cleaned, helped us with our homework, and looked out for all of us.

That’s why I give thanks to God for the mother he gave me. I will always be grateful for the effort and sacrifice she made to get us ahead. Thanks to her, all of her six children are responsible people, noble, strict, and hardworking. I love her with all my heart.

Ever since I came here to the United States 15 years ago, I call my mom every week like clockwork, and I always talk to her for a long time. I wish I could be closer to her.
Yo me crié en un rancho. A la edad de cinco años mi papá nos llevó a la ciudad para que estudiáramos. Siete años después regresamos. Cuando se me terminaron mis zapatos que llevaba, subió mi papá al pueblo y me compró unos huaraches de hule. Como me quemaron la piel los corté con unas tijeras y le dije a mi papá que estaban rotos, con la esperanza que me comprara otros, pero que no fueron de hule. Pero cuál fue mi sorpresa. Me compró otros igual.

Llovió mucho y eché un huarache para que se lo llevara el arroyo. Unos días después fue mi papá a visitar a una hermana. Allí encontró el huarache y me lo trajo. No me quedó más remedio que usarlos hasta que mi piel se acostumbrara a mis huaraches de hule.

I was raised in a little village. When I was five my dad took us to the city to go to school. Seven years later, we returned. When my shoes that I had wore out, my dad came to town and bought me some plastic sandals. Since they blistered my skin, I cut them with some scissors. I told my dad they were broken in hopes that he would buy me another pair, but that weren’t made of plastic. But to my surprise, he bought me another pair that was exactly the same.

It rained a lot and I threw one of the sandals out so that the stream would carry it away. A few days later my dad went to visit my sister. He found the sandal and brought it back to me. I had no other choice but to use them until my skin got used to my plastic sandals.
CRESCECIA DELGADO

APRENDIENDO A SER LIBRE

Mi historia comienza así. Yo tenía 22 años cuando llegué a este país, donde yo tenía muchas ganas de superarme. Yo estaba acostumbrada a ser independiente, a valerme por mí misma. Pero conoci a una persona (mi esposo) y comenzamos una relación que ha durado 20 años.

Todo era muy bonito cuando empezamos porque yo era independiente. Yo siempre he sido una persona alegre pero muy tranquila, y responsable de lo que hago. Yo en ese entonces trabajaba en un restaurante coreano. Cuando trabajábamos mi esposo y yo, todo estuvo bien. Éramos muy felices. Pero todo cambió cuando nació mi primer niño y yo dejé de trabajar para cuidar el niño. Todo seguía bien, supuestamente. Digo “supuestamente” porque mi esposo nunca llegaba temprano a casa. Allí me empecé a dar cuenta que él no era responsable de nada. Pero como yo estaba muy enamorada de él, pues no le ponía mucha atención en las cosas que él hacía. Pensé que eso cambiaría por amor a su hijo.

Pero no fue así. Fue peor. El salía con los amigos y no se hacía cargo de nosotros. Yo empecé a encerrarme en mí misma. Sólo hacia las rutinas de la casa. Yo me sentía vieja con los 32 años que tenía. Mi vestidura siempre eran pants de gente mayor, blusas igual. Después de tres años nació mi segundo hijo, pero mi esposo seguía en las mismas. Nos dejaba solos yo con mis dos niños chiquitos. Se me hacía muy difícil, y me dio depresión posparto. Yo estaba super mal, con ganas de morirme. Así duré 14 años de mi vida.

Pero hace dos años decidí empezar a vivir de nuevo y hacerme libre otra vez. Hoy en día soy una persona diferente. Ya me arreglo mucho mejor: me visto con jeans y blusas de mi edad, que van bien conmigo; me pinto un poco y me arreglo más o menos bien. Después de 14 años de encierro, por fin estoy empezando a haber la libertad que tanto me alegra y por la cual he luchado. Esta toma muchas formas. Por ejemplo, no pienso dejar que nadie me humille ni que me falte al respeto, porque ya me valoro a mí misma y sé lo que valgo como persona. Estoy aprendiendo a ser libre de nuevo, porque quiero un futuro diferente para mis hijos y para mí.

LEARNING TO BE FREE

My story begins like this. I was 22 years old when I arrived to this country, where I had a strong desire to better myself. I was used to being independent, to take care of myself. But I met someone (my husband) and began a relationship that has lasted 20 years.

Everything was beautiful when we began because I was independent. I have always been a happy but calm person and responsible for what I do. At that time, I worked in a Korean restaurant. When my husband and I were both working, everything went well. We were very happy. But it all changed when my first child was born. I stopped working to take care of my child. Everything was going well, supposedly. I say “supposedly” because my husband would never get home early. That was how I began to realize that he was not responsible for anything. But since I was very much in love with him, well, I didn’t pay too much attention to the things he did. I thought things would change because of his love for his son.

But it didn’t turn out that way. It got worse. He would go out with his friends and wouldn’t take care of us. I began to close myself off and turn inward. All I did was take care of the household routines. I felt old at the age of 32. All I wore day in and day out were pants for elderly people and the same old blouses. After three years, my second child was born, but my husband continued to be the same. He would leave me alone with my two little ones. Things became very difficult, and I developed postpartum depression. I was in a very bad way, wanting to die. I spent 14 years of my life like that.

But two years ago, I decided to start living anew and become free again. Today I am a different person. I dress much better: I wear jeans and blouses that are for my age, that look good on me; I wear a little make-up, and I fix myself up pretty well. After 14 years of confinement, I am finally beginning to have the liberty that makes me so happy and for which I have struggled. This takes many forms. For example, I don’t plan on letting anyone humiliate me or show a lack of respect, because I value myself and I know how much I am worth as a person. I am learning to be free once again, because I want a different future for my children and for myself.
It was a Monday, four years ago. My son and I were seated in a chair in the living room when we had a very important conversation. His name is Alexander. He is a very smart and very good young man. We began to talk about the importance of education in his life and in his future. Because he has a developmental delay. Nevertheless, he can become a professional in whatever he sets out to be in his life. For example, he likes everything having to do with trains and buses. So I tell him that to work in that field he needs to study and be focused. That way he can achieve it, because nothing will stand in his way.

This year my son will graduate from elementary school and enroll in a good high school. So I tell him, “Isn’t it true, son, that it has been worth it to study? I think that we are on the right path.” And I tell him to give it all he’s got, to behave and do the best he can, because he has all the potential to accomplish what he wants. And he responds, “Yes, Mom, I will give all I’ve got to my studies because I want to be a professional.” That will help him in his future. As his mom, I will never tire of talking with him and giving him all the support he needs.
MI HERMANO, MI PADRE

Mi papá no estuvo conmigo cuando yo era pequeña. El siempre trabajó fuera de la ciudad. Recuerdo que cuando yo era adolescente él venía a casa a dejarle un poco de dinero a mi mamá cada tres o cuatro semanas. Pero nada más estaba con nosotros uno o por lo mucho dos días y se regresaba a su trabajo. Afortunadamente mi hermano mayor tomó el papel de padre para todos mis hermanos. Como yo soy la más chica, creo que fue más para mí.

Mi mamá me decía que cuando yo era pequeña mi hermano siempre que llegaba a la casa de trabajar me cargaba y jugaba conmigo. Yo recuerdo cómo él estuvo presente en mi vida, preocupado y trabajando desde muy chico para darnos lo que nos hacía falta, principalmente el alimento. También era muy celoso con mis hermanos y conmigo. Cuando nos veía con algún "amigo" se enojaba mucho y nos regañaba. Pero ahora sé que era así porque nos quería y deseaba lo mejor para nosotras. Es por eso y por muchas otras cosas que fue y siempre será mi padre. Gracias, hermano.

MY BROTHER, MY FATHER

My father was not with me when I was little. He always worked outside of the city. I remember that when I was an adolescent he would come home and leave a little money with my mom every three or four weeks. But he was only with us one or at most two days and then he would return to his job. Fortunately, my older brother took on the role of father for all of us siblings. Since I am the youngest, I believe he was even more so for me.

My mom told me that when I was little, when my brother would get home from work he would always carry me around and play with me. I remember how he was present in my life, concerned and working from a young age to give us what we needed, mostly food. He was also very protective with my siblings and with me. When he would see us with a “friend,” he would get very angry and scold us. But now I know that he was that way because he loved us and wanted the best for us. It is for that reason and many others that he was and always will be my father. Thank you, brother.
About 15 years ago, my city was very safe and lovely. It continues to be lovely, but not as safe as we experienced it a long time ago. There weren’t as many bad people as there are today. Everyone worked, some people doing simple but honest things. We could go walking outside late at night without fear of something bad happening to us.

But six years ago, the city changed. People do not go out freely anymore. It scares them now. As soon as night falls, they don’t leave their houses for fear of criminals and insecurity that there is in the street. Also a lot of businesses and stores have closed, such as ice cream shops or restaurants, because they had to pay a tax. If they didn’t pay it, they would be robbed and beaten, and sometimes the criminals also threatened them with guns.

Fortunately, in more recent times it looks like it’s getting a little better. People say that they are done with the extra tax. They don’t ask for more money. We hope that little by little everything bad will go away and it will go back to how it was before.
GRIS GUTIERREZ

UNA GRAN PASION POR MIS HIJOS

Yo tengo dos hijos, Stephanie y Jorge. Ellos se llevan diez años de diferencia pero eso no los separa. Al contrario, son muy unidos. Tienen diferentes pasiones pero sólo una en común, la música.

Mi hija Stephanie es mi princesa. Ella tiene ocho años. Es estudiante en la escuela Alessandro Volta y cursa el segundo grado. Es una niña pequeña, delgada, muy sensible, inteligente, cariñosa y alegre. Tiene un pelo muy largo que para ella es su orgullo. Ella es muy responsable en la escuela. Le gusta ser independiente haciendo sus cosas. Mi princesa tiene muchas pasiones. Le gusta cantar, bailar, hacer obras de teatro para su familia. Le encantaría estudiar una de esas carreras para el futuro. También dice que quiere ser dentista aunque en estos momentos sólo le apasiona ser la número uno en su escuela. Me hace muy feliz al saber que ella hace todo lo posible por lograr lo que quiere.


Me encanta ver a mis hijos hacer lo que les gusta porque son felices haciendo lo que más quieren. Mi esposo y yo estamos muy orgullosos con los hijos tan maravillosos que Dios nos dio.

A GREAT PASSION FOR MY CHILDREN

I have two children, Stephanie and Jorge. They are ten years apart but that doesn’t separate them. On the contrary, they are very close. They have different passions, but just one in common, music.

My daughter Stephanie is my princess. She is eight years old. She is a student at Alessandro Volta School and is in the second grade. She is a small girl, thin, very sensitive, intelligent, caring, and joyful. She has very long hair of which she is very proud. She is very responsible at school. She likes to be independent doing her things. My princess has many passions. She likes to sing, dance, perform plays for her family. She would love to study one of these as a career for the future. She also says she wants to be a dentist, although at the moment the only thing she cares about is being number one in her school. It makes me very happy to know that she does everything possible to achieve what she wants.

My son Jorge is 18 years old. He is tall, strong, intelligent, shy, and a little reserved. He is in high school. He likes to cook, and he would love to be a professional chef in the future. Jorge loves to play video games and the truth is he’s very good in that area. He also loves to play the guitar. Every time he practices, he gets better. I love watching my son play guitar while my princess sings. It thrills me to see the two of them be so close.

I love watching my children do what they enjoy because they are happy doing what they like most. My husband and I are very proud of the wonderful children that God gave us.
When I was six years old I lived with my parents and sisters in a little town in the state of Guerrero. My parents separated when my dad decided to go to the United States. The relationship between them ended there.

My mother had to leave us in Olinala, Guerrero with my grandparents because she had to go work in Mexico, Distrito Federal to support us. My grandparents took care of us, and that's how they became the most important people in our lives. Ellos tomaron el lugar de mis padres.

My great dad, as my grandfather liked to be called, was tall, thin, light-skinned, intelligent, caring, understanding. He had hair as white as snow and a big heart. He worked in agriculture. He grew beans, peppers, tomatoes, corn, watermelon, all types of plants and vegetables. He taught us to love the earth, to give thanks for what we have. In particular, I loved to watch the planting. I felt like the most important person seeing what nature does for us.

My great dad always looked out for us. He taught us to love each other, respect each other, to share in our joys and our sorrows. He taught us that marriage is like a little plant – the more that you water it and show it affection, the more beautiful it becomes. Marriage is similar to family. He would say that whenever there was a problem, first talk it through, that one should never go to bed or to work angry with each other, to give thanks to God for giving us another day.

When my grandfather passed away, my world fell apart. But I remember him every day of my life and I give thanks to God for giving me the opportunity of having had with us the father that we always wanted and that I will never forget. Wherever I am, the teachings he gave us will always be in my heart.
Yo nací y crecí en Michoacán México, en un pueblo llamado San Matías. Eramos cinco hijos. Unos fueron a la escuela y los otros nos pusimos a trabajar para poder mantener a la familia y tener algo para comer. Cuando yo era pequeña en vez de ir a la escuela me pusieron a trabajar haciendo las masetas y el barro para las masetas.

Un día mi hermano el mayor se fue para los Estados Unidos. Yo tenía 20 años cuando nos llamó y nos dijo que nos iba a llevar para allá. Luego él trabajó mucho para juntar dinero para que a uno por uno nos llevara para Estados Unidos. Cuando él me habló que mi hermano ya estaba con él, yo le dije, “Qué bueno que ya te llevaste a mi hermano allá contigo. ¿Cuándo me vas a llevar a mi también para allá?” Luego él me dijo, “Vamos a trabajar duro para pagarle al señor para que te pasa para acá.” Dos meses pasaron y por fin mi hermano me volvió a hablar, diciéndome que si ya estaba lista, porque ya iban a pasar los señores por mi a la casa para que me llevaran ellos allá con mis hermanos.

Y así dentro de dos meses yo estaba ubicada en Chicago con mis hermanos.

Cuando ya por fin me acostumbré estar acá con mis hermanos, después de un año encontré un trabajo con una señora cuidando a sus hijos y llevándolos a la escuela. Esa señora se llamaba Hortensia. Allí trabajé con ella por cinco años y entre esos cinco años mi primera hija nació. Un día yo le dije que ya no iba a trabajar con ella porque me quería dedicar a mi hija. Ella me contestó, “Ya nos vamos a mudar de casa a vivir al oeste de Chicago. Quería ver si quería ir con nosotros para que me siga cuidando a mis hijos.” Yo le contesté, “Gracias, pero no puedo porque yo tengo a mi familia aquí y mejor así la dejamos.” Le dije que fue un placer para mí trabajar para ella y su familia.

Al pasar los años ya tenía a mis tres hijos pequeños. Entonces yo los quería meter a la escuela Volta, donde iban los hijos de Doña Hortensia. Yo inscribí a mis hijos allí y poco a poco me acerqué a la escuela. Primero yo me metía a ayudarles a las señoras del lonche a limpiar las mesas del lonche. Luego cuando mi hija entró al kinder decidí ayudarle a la maestra a poner papeles y tarea en los folders, a recortar papeles, y llevar a los niños al baño también.

Desde entonces sigo ayudando a los maestros en la escuela de muchas formas. También les ayudo a las loncheras a poner el desayuno en bolsas de papel para que los niños coman en la clase en las mañanas. Ayudando en la escuela es una gran experiencia para mí. Aprendo de los maestros y otras personas que son voluntarias como yo. Mi experiencia es que aunque uno sea inmigrante, puede salir adelante de muchas formas, ya sea trabajando o de voluntarios, para tener una comunidad más segura y aprender diferentes cosas de otras personas en la comunidad que compartimos.
I was born and grew up in Michoacán Mexico, in a town called San Matias. We were five children. Some went to school and the rest of us were put to work to be able to maintain the family and have something to eat. When I was little instead of going to school they put me to work making the flowerpots and the clay for the pots.

One day my oldest brother went to the United States. I was 20 years old when he called and told us that he was going to bring us there. Then he worked a lot in order to save money so that he could bring us to the United States, one by one. When he told me that my brother was already there with him, I said, “That’s great that you have already brought my brother there with you. When are you going to bring me there too?” So he told me, “We are going to work hard to pay the man so that he will bring you here.” Two months went by and finally my brother called me again, asking me if I was ready yet, because the men were going to come to the house for me so that they could bring me there with my brothers. And so two months later I was settled in Chicago with my brothers.

When I finally got used to being here with my brothers, after a year I found work with a woman taking care of her children and taking them to school. That woman’s name was Hortensia. I worked for her for five years and during those five years my first daughter was born. One day I told her that I wasn’t going to work for her anymore because I wanted to devote myself to my daughter. She answered, “We are going to move to a new house to the west of Chicago. I wanted to know if you want to go with us so that you can continue to take care of my children.” I told her, “Thank you, but I can’t because I already have my family here and it is better if we leave it as it is.” I told her that it had been a pleasure for me to work for her and her family.

The years passed and by then I had three little children. So I wanted to sent them to Volta school, where Mrs. Hortensia’s children had gone. I enrolled my children there and little by little I got more involved in the school. I began by helping the women in the lunchroom clean the lunch tables. Later when my daughter started kindergarten I decided to help the teacher to put papers and homework in the folders, to cut out papers, and also to take the children to the bathroom.

Since that time I have continued to help the teachers at school in many ways. I also help the lunchroom staff to put the breakfasts in paper bags so that the children can eat in class in the morning. Helping at the school is a great experience for me. I learn from the teachers and from other people who are volunteers like me. My experience is that although one is an immigrant, one can move forward in many ways, whether by working or as a volunteer, in order to have a more secure community and learning different things from other people in the community we share.
BERNHA FERAZ

CUANDO SE QUIERE, SE PUEDE

Durante muchos años me quedé en la casa con mis tres hijos. Ya cuando la más chiquita tenía un año de edad, dije que quería ir a trabajar. Una amiga me llevó a trabajar con ella en un McDonald’s. Duré siete días, pero no me gustó. Pensé que ese trabajo no era para mí. Le pregunté a otra amiga y ella me recomendó en una fábrica de costura donde trabajaba ella. Me gustó la idea porque ese trabajo siempre me llamaba la atención desde niña, aunque nunca tuve la oportunidad de aprender a cocer ropa, por razones personales. Entonces, cuando empecé a trabajar en esa fábrica de costura tuve que mentir que sabía coser para poder empezar.

Me llamaron a la entrevista un viernes. Me puse muy nerviosa cuando me dijeron que tenía que hacer la prueba de coser. La encargada de la línea se dio cuenta que no sabía coser, pero cuando nos regresamos a la oficina el boss me dijo que me iba a dar tres días para las prácticas con la máquina. Si no podía después de tres días, él me descansaría. Al tener esta oportunidad, yo ni sé cómo salí de la oficina. Salí tan llena de alegría y felicidad que cuando regresé a la casa pensaba que él no era el boss, sino era Dios.

En esa fábrica me encontré con gente muy buena. Habían dos mecánicos de máquinas. Uno me enseñó cómo cargar el hilo a la máquina, porque él se dio cuenta que yo no sabía nada. El disimulaba que arreglaba la máquina mientras me enseñaba. En voz baja me motivaba a aprender cómo coser.

Duré como cinco años en esa fábrica, pero se quebró. Hoy en día hago mis propias bolsas, de las cuales me siento muy orgullosa. Yo pienso que nunca es tarde para aprender hacer lo que uno quiera. Todo es confiar en Dios y en uno mismo.

WHEN YOU WANT TO, YOU CAN DO IT

For many years, I stayed at home with my three children. When the youngest was a year old I said I wanted to go to work. A friend took me to work with her at a McDonald’s. I lasted seven days, but I didn’t like it. I thought that job wasn’t for me. I asked another friend, and she recommended me at a sewing factory where she worked. I liked the idea because I had been interested in that work since I was a girl, although for personal reasons I never had the opportunity to learn how to sew clothes. So, when I started to work in the sewing factory, I had to lie and say I knew how to sew in order to start.

They called me for an interview on a Friday. I got very nervous when they told me that I had to do the sewing test. The woman in charge of the line noticed that I didn’t know how to sew, but when we returned to the office, the boss told me that he would give me three days to practice with the machine. If I couldn’t do it after three days, he would let me go. Having been given that opportunity, I don’t even know how I left the office. I left filled with so much joy and happiness that when I returned home, I thought that he wasn’t the boss, but that he was God.

I met very good people in that factory. There were two machine mechanics. One taught me how to thread the machine, because he noticed that I didn’t know anything. He pretended that he was fixing the machine while he was teaching me. In a low voice, he encouraged me to learn how to sew.

I spent about five years in that factory, but it went out of business. Today I make my own bags, which I am very proud of. I think that it is never too late to learn how to do something you want. One must have faith in God and in oneself.
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