

Mary Hernandez's Story

Mary was born November 1982 in El Salvador, about eighteen miles Northwest of the capital city San Salvador, in a town called Armenia. Mary left her young boys and home carrying a small bag of food, money, hope and memories of home. Uncertain about the intentions of the coyotes, Mary boarded a bus that would promise safe passage to America. However, the migration path would have a cliché turning point.

Fear and the uncertainty of survival has always been a way of life for Mary Hernandez. She recalls when she was a young girl, “I could hear bombs, loud explosions and gunfire just over the hill.” Armenia is only eighteen miles from San Salvador but even further from the feeling of safety. Holding back tears, she explains that war was terrifying for her she could hear the conflict day and night. Unfortunately for Mary and so many others, she was born during the Salvadoran Civil War.

When Mary Hernandez was ten-years-old a treaty was signed to stop the Civil War. Sadly, the war was the least of her concerns as a young girl. Her teen's in El Salvador, post war era was even more terrifying and poverty stricken. Much like many South American counties, the gangs control everything around San Salvador. “As a young girl you fear being kidnapped and sold into sex trades, or even worse raped and murdered,” she said. And, for boys they are forced to join gangs and participate in crimes and murder their fellow humankind.

El Salvador, like many countries have an issue with low paying factories that supply the West with goods produced in huge manufacturing plants. Mary went to work as a young adult in a factory making \$35 a week. She explained that these factories are built by China. Furthermore, the gangs control the labor and get a percentage of the wage. The gangs are even the landlords. The gangs will kill you if you do not give them money.

For Mary the desire to leave her home and children was a culmination of personal issues over many years. She said that her ten and eleven-year-old sons need to have a better chance for success. The choice was hers alone. However, she did have extended family already making a new life in America. With help from her brother on vetting coyotes. Mary set a day to head North.

On a sunny day in June of 2014. Mary kissed her children good by for the last time and boarded an old, rusty American school bus. Leaving home was very challenging for her. Mary cried as she thought about what home was to her. At this point the the message was clear, the pain in her eyes could speak for its self.

The trip from Armenia to the Mexican-American boarder was five days. The ride was not as bad as the reality that she had to cross a huge river without dying. Moreover, she had to keep the hope that she would not get caught by immigration and sent back. The arrangements that Mary made provided safe pass to the Rio Grand River. After that point it was up to Mary to get into America. Mary made the swim across the Rio Grand. But, she knew she was in trouble.

Supposedly, Immigration watched her cross the Rio Grand River and they were waiting for her. She explains, “The conditions they held me in were terrible. They made me feel like I was a criminal.” Also, the cell was about 4 x 8 square feet and reeked like sewage. Even more difficult was the limitation on outside activities. Furthermore, Mary was interrogated. Immigration officials asked questions about her intentions in America. Even making her feel like they will send her back to El Salvador.

However, Mary was fortunate because as her hope began to fade, she was saved. Her family, already living in America was able to pool together and pay \$15,000 to have her released. Before she was released they gave her a GPS tracking bracelet that she is still wearing today. In July 2014, Mary arrived in Utah.

Living undocumented in the United States comes with heavy consequence, if you're caught. Every month Mary must check-in with the United States Immigration Department. She is forced to pay for the cost of travel. But, Mary cannot get a job without a number. One of the biggest shocks for Mary is to see the people panhandling. She questions their motivation. People born with a number to work and they do nothing. From her perspective Americans should take advantage of their life.

If you are born in America you are generally issued a Social Security card at birth. However, as an undocumented immigrant you do not have the proper number to work. Mary Hernandez has a deep desire to assimilate. Since her arrival in Utah Mary has stated learning English and tries to interact with the local cultures. Furthermore, Mary is now engaged to a Salvadoran immigrant whom has documents and a great job. He wants to help her bring her boys to America.

Mary left her home with hope to be able to provide a safe place for her kids. For as long as she could remember, Mary has lacked the feeling of security. Here in America she finally feels safe. When she becomes a citizen Mary wants to bring her kids to America. “On a plane,” she said. Sadly, to get her sons the proper documents can cost \$25,000 each.

Mary was told about all the riches in America but now understands it is lots of hard work. Here in America everything costs money. If you are hungry you have to have money. Mary claims that in El Salvador if you are hungry you go for a walk and gather food. Here you have corporate greed, there murderous gangs. The reality is challenging no matter where you live.

For so many people, America is the land of hope and security. Just like Mary Hernandez, they look to be comforted and accepted by their fellow humankind. Mary is just one person of millions that are told stories that are misleading. These huddled masses come with intentions of success but instead face much of the same challenges they have left behind.

Interviewer conducted on 11/21/2015
Written by Nicholas Stout

Note:

The names are changed to protect anonymity of the individual this story is about. All information has prior release from all parties involved. All information was translated by Julio Hernandez and is subject to being lost in translation.