

Who tells your story?

My name is Maria Campos. I was born on January 6th, 1967 in Michoacan. I always loved Michoacana because the natural smell of the wet dirt when it rained was my favorite. During the day, the geysers were the best view to watch. When the sunset came, the warm colors would reflect off the water and it would look so majestic. During the night I loved to hear the crickets cry because it was like music to my ears and it made me feel comforted. I have a lot of memories from when I lived in Michoacan. One of them was when my Grandpa and I would hang out outside and he had a toona tree. Toona's were my absolute favorite by the way! My grandpa would go and see which ones were perfectly ripe. He would climb up the tree and handpick them for me. We usually did this in secret because if my Grandma found out she would be so mad. My grandpa had other grandchildren, but he favored me more. That pissed my grandma off because she didn't like me as much. She liked my brother Ignacio more. I did have three other siblings. Vicky, Mago, and Meño. I am the oldest out of all of them. I was always close with my siblings because we were around the same age and had the same friend group.

Ignacio, my brother, and I always had each other's backs. When he didn't have money I would buy him dinner. And when I didn't have money he would buy me dinner. We were each other's backbone. One memory I have with him is when we would jump on the beds and we broke the springs of every bed in the house. My mom would give us a whole lecture about breaking things, but as kids, we never listened. Next, my sister Vicky and I had that usual sister bond where we let each

other borrow clothes and would tell each other everything. Then, with my sister Mago, we were not as close because she was disabled. It was hard to communicate with her and understand what she needed from me as a sister. As I grew older, I tried and tried to understand her, and with all the effort I put in I grew closer to her than ever before. Next, my youngest brother, Meno and I were like mother and son because I would always take care of him when my mom would go to work, and I would treat him as one of my own. As the oldest, I had more responsibilities and chores like



washing dishes, laundry, cooking, sweeping, and other things.

One day when I was doing chores outside, this cute guy came up to me and handed me a note. The note said, "Do you want to be my girlfriend?" I didn't reply. Then again he sent me another letter saying the same thing. I didn't respond again because if my dad found out he would kill me. The cute guy came up to me while I was outside my house and finally dared to tell me in person if I wanted to be his girlfriend. I asked my dad for permission and since I was already 16 he allowed me. He was the first boyfriend I ever had, and his name was Aristeo.

When we were 17 we got married. The wedding day was a disaster because I was waiting for him at the altar and he didn't show up. All the people were staring at me like I was stupid or something. I waited and waited. My dad got pissed and left the ceremony because he didn't want to be made a fool. Finally, Aristeo showed up. What pissed me off was that he had his mad face on. I understood that he didn't have anyone to help him and that he had to work and drop off the wine at my house that day, but still, at least he could have called me or something. We eventually got married and had our first ever daughter, Mayra. She was born May 14, 1985, in Jalisco. I was so happy to have a child because having one of my own was much different than babysitting my siblings. Three years later I got pregnant again with our first boy, Junior. He was born on January 16, 1988 January 17, 1988. My husband Aristeo was so happy because he wanted to teach him soccer and just do father and son things.

We tried to provide them with things they wanted, but life in Mexico was expensive for what my husband was making. That led us to move to California with my parents. My parents offered us

a place to stay when we got there. I brought my sister Mago and my kids. My husband was already in California so he came over to Mexico to help us cross. It was difficult for him because the whole way to California he was carrying my sister on his shoulders. We couldn't afford a wheelchair so it was the best thing we could do. We crossed the border walking. We didn't have any help so we were on our own. I didn't bring anything but a gallon of water for a three-day walk. It was tiring for me and my husband because we were getting old, so our bodies were not that strong. But thanks to God we made it to California. My dad was waiting there for us, and since we were so hungry he took us to eat at KFC. My kids were so hungry they didn't stop eating. They were like little piglets starving for food. After we ate we went on a bus that took us to where my parents lived. As soon as I moved to California I found a job where I worked at a factory making plastic bags. I wasn't making much there, so I moved to a different job. For the second job, I worked at a fabric store. I made a penny every time I sewed a shirt. It wasn't much, but it was better than in Mexico.

I had to work twice as hard because I got pregnant and I needed more money to provide for my family. At the time I was so excited to have another child, because I always wanted a big family. Unfortunately, after three months I had an ectopic miscarriage, the one word that can break any expecting mother's heart. An ectopic miscarriage is where the eggs get stuck in the ovary tubes. I was devastated because I wanted to have another child. They did surgery on me because the egg was stuck inside the ovary tubes and that didn't give it a chance to grow, so they

had to take it out. But this didn't stop me from believing in miracles.

Shortly after this, my husband and I were struggling financially. His cousins offered him a job in Denver, and he accepted. I stayed back because I was waiting for my husband to make enough money to provide for our family. After a couple of months, he asked if I wanted to go to Denver. I looked at my children and said of course because they deserve much better than what they had. He booked us a flight and we left. Once we got to Denver we rented a home and got straight to work. I had faith in God that he was going to help us.



When we had enough money to provide for our family, we tried again for another baby. Luckily,

God blessed us with twins! I was so excited because I prayed to God for one more and he sent us two! I remember looking at pictures of how I could dress fraternal twins. But all the excitement came to an end when I went for an ultrasound and the doctor looked at me with a distraught expression. I knew what had happened as soon as I turned to see him. I lost the twins. The doctor told us why this happened. Ectopic miscarriage again. They were both stuck in one of the ovaries. That day I cried and cried because I was hoping for this pregnancy to work out. I started losing hope. But what I didn't lose was my faith. I believed that God and Our Lady of Guadalupe were going to help me. I went on with life, working, cooking, and cleaning. Our lives were getting better financially. Once God started giving me hope, we tried again. This time I tried taking care of myself more than ever, but sometimes it isn't enough. I lost the baby at two months. All hope was lost. I would think to myself, why me? Why do I have to be the one to lose my children? The doctor then told me the reason why I lost it. The fetus was outside the womb. How can this happen? I was still devastated. A couple of years later, my husband and I talked about trying to have one more baby. We had a bit of an argument, but we decided that God will be our miracle. And luckily he was! We had our final child, Lupita. She was born on February 20th, 1999 in Denver, Colorado. I always thought of her as our miracle baby. What shocked me was that nothing was wrong with her health. It shocked me because after so many miscarriages I thought she was going to be sick. But thanks to God and our Lady of Guadalupe, they helped me and my husband through this experience. Shortly after we had our daughter we moved back to Mexico when she was 1 year old. The reason why we moved back

was that my husband wanted to see his parents again. Once we got there it felt different because a lot of things had changed in six years. My kids were already used to living in Denver, so it was a change for them.

Sadly, poverty hit again. We weren't making enough so we had to risk it again. We walked from Mexico to Denver. My parents helped us cross because they hired a coyote. We came walking with other groups and only water to survive for two days. We were at risk of getting captured by ICE and getting sent back. There were a lot of obstacles along the way. We had to run and walk through mud, rivers, and dirt. We even had to throw ourselves to the floor because the coyote



would say “ICE is coming, drop down to the floor! Drop down!” Even if there was water and mud we had to. If not you had to face the consequence of getting captured. I was traumatized, and it was even worse for my kids because they didn't know how dangerous these people can be. Since they were young it might have been hard for them to remember what was going on. Through the power of God, we made it safely. It was a relief to know that my kids were safe.

As my family grew older we had our tough times, but we eventually got through them. I am so proud of how my kids grew up to be. They didn't take the wrong path of gangs, drugs, and violence. They chose the right path. So I am thankful for my beautiful family because they have stood by me through thick and thin. Now I am blessed with six beautiful grandchildren who have brought light into my world. All thanks to my kids who were there for me when I got very sick. I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for my kids. And for anyone who is struggling with life, I have a very important lesson. If God gives you life, use it to your full potential, because most of us don't get opportunities like these. Also, never forget where you come from because it's a part of who you are.

story told by: Ashley Martinez