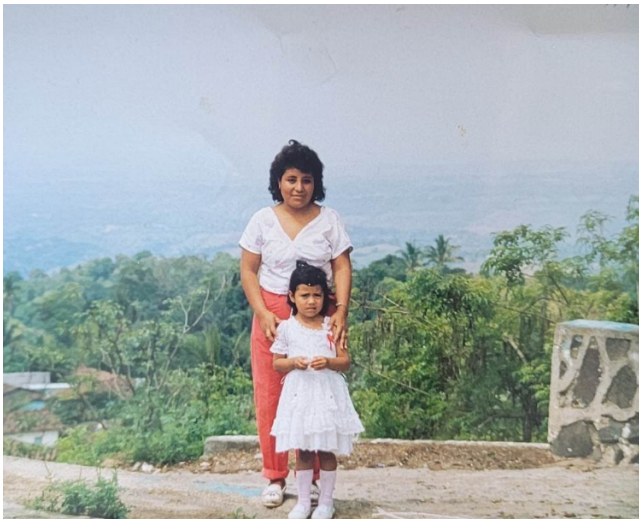


# Who tells your story?

I was born in La Paz, El Salvador in Central America, about an hour from the capital San Salvador. I was 3 when I left my own country, and migrated to LA. My parents told me they left El Salvador because there were these soldiers called “*Guerrilla*” who would kill civilians during the war. It was a war between the law and communists. Every single night my parents and I would hear gunshots in the streets. There was a certain time where people weren’t supposed to go out because there were killings and bodies on the streets.



My parents and I would be terrified at night because I thought narcs would break into our home and take our things. I was young when this happened, but my parents have told me stories. As a family we then decided that it was necessary to leave our country due to all the violence going on. As I remember, it was really hard escaping because we didn’t have the money to travel in a car. We had to walk on foot to leave our country and travel with other groups of families when escaping. We also didn’t have the proper documentation to travel anywhere we wanted. I knew we had to leave as early as possible so that we wouldn’t get caught or mixed up in the war going on at that time. Usually we had to be inside our homes around 7-8 pm because that’s when we’d be more exposed to the *Guerrilla*. Luckily we made it out safe and sound. My parents were so thankful nothing happened because we were so scared. As a family we knew where to head to in Los Angeles because we had family members who lived there. We had

some roadblocks on the way to Los Angeles. For example, when we were traveling in Mexico there were times we had to hide out because we were illegally entering their country. There were gangs and civilians in Mexico who took our things like money, jewelry and clothing. My dad wanted to do something to stop them but he knew it would put him at risk of being killed, so we let them take the things that we had, and my parents begged them to leave us alone. They let us go, but they took half of the things that my mom had with her. We kept going because we knew that returning to our lovely country *El Salvador* was not an option.

We were so tired of traveling. I know my parents’ feet were hurting and were swollen at times. Before arriving at our destination, our group was separated by women and children and men only. I remember we made it to the US, but my father did not arrive with us. He unfortunately was detained by immigration forces. It took us about 30 days to arrive at our destination. I don’t remember if my parents struggled as much finding a place to live or finding jobs. I know we had a family that was waiting for us.

They took us right in. My aunt and uncle had two children younger than me. I remember it was a struggle for my parents to find a job because they didn’t know the area much. Not many people were hiring, and transportation was an issue. Luckily my Mom and Dad found a job at that time because it was a busy state. My mom had to clean hotels and houses, and at times would work overnight so she didn’t have to spend much money on a babysitter. My dad worked in a restaurant with my uncle. Sometimes my family would take care of me for a while as I waited for my parents to come home. I would see my parents being very stressed about their jobs, because the pay was not that much.

As we adjusted to a new life, I started kindergarten in Los Angeles. I would wake up in the mornings and have my parents rotate dropping me off at school. Everyday I would hear lots of traffic, the birds chirping, cars honking, and children walking to school. When my family came to the U.S. we didn’t know English, so it was hard for my family and me to come to a new place where a lot of

people spoke English. Adapting to school was not too hard for me in California because 90% of kids did not speak English. Our classes were in Spanish.

They used to offer English classes, but to qualify for the class you had to sign up. I was able to finish 3rd grade in California and half of 4th grade. We moved to Colorado in December of 1995 when I was 9 years old. My little brother at the time was only 6 months old. We packed our things, rented a Uhaul and drove through the snowy mountains. My parents, my aunt and uncle moved with us because we were told by family members in Colorado that there were plenty of jobs available.

My parents worked so hard to have a better life and to provide everything they could for me and my brother. When I arrived in Aurora, I struggled with the English language because I had just started to take English classes in California. I remember that between watching English movies, shows, school and my cousins I'd practice my English. As I got older I started to rebel against my parents, and decided to start a family at a young age. I was in high school when I had my first child. It was one of the scariest moments in my life. I didn't think I was ready to be a mom. I was young, and I didn't have anybody to support me. I was in my last semester of high school by the time I had my second child. I dropped out of school and attained my GED. I then decided to go to college at the age of 20 years old. I went for my Associates Certificate of Medical Assistant and Limited Scope. That course was about 14 months long. Upon finishing college I got pregnant with my third child. I've been so thankful that I decided to have a vocational degree. I remember having to work full time and going to school part time in the afternoons. My parents were and are such a blessing to me. They've always been there for me and my daughters.

I've worked in the medical field since 2007. I've worked in the emergency room, outpatient setting, and Urgent Cares. Recently I had a change of career. I am now a Licensed Realtor in the State of Colorado. **I believe that you have to work hard for what you want and that nothing comes easy to you. I've had my share of struggles, but I've also had my share of blessings.**



My family to me is everything. In 2016 I met my current husband, and he has been an amazing support personally, emotionally, financially and spiritually. We help each other grow and accomplish all of our goals. We have dreams that we plan on turning into goals. We are a blended family. We have a total of six kids. At times it gets rough, being able to assist their activities, but we try to be there for them as much as we can.

I am so thankful for the decision my parents made in 1989 to come to the United States. If it wasn't for them migrating to the U.S. I would not be where I am today, nor have what I have today. I currently still have family in El Salvador, and I see the struggles they face on a daily basis. I believe we can live the American Dream as we have so many opportunities to become successful.

Overall, I am blessed to have an amazing husband, great kids, my parents who live close by and siblings who are there for me when I need them. I love that we have the opportunity to be anything we want to be!

story told by: Ethan Padilla