



HISTORIAS DE SOBREVIVENCIA

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Young women who dreamed of a better job or a professional opportunity; adult men who dared to leave their country with a debt and the promise of returning to buy a house; mothers in a tireless search for the whereabouts of their sons and daughters.

These are all true stories of individuals and families who have lived the nightmare of human trafficking. In the first installment of "Stories of Survival" we learned the stories of Sandra and eleven women who generously shared their life stories, so that we could learn from their pain.

With this second installment, we learn nine more true stories of resilience and courage, told by Mesoamerican citizens who survived human trafficking in the form of labor exploitation.

Yamila's words:

"When I came to work as a domestic in that house I was fifteen years old. I earned a salary of seventy-five dollars a month, which I was never paid. I worked more than twenty hours a day from Monday to Sunday and never had days off. For nine years, I was repeatedly physically and verbally abused. I was sexually abused and held captive. To keep me there, my family and I were threatened with death, so I was never able to leave that job. She beat me with paddles, with wires, with her hand or with whatever she could get her hands on. I

I burned my back with water or a hot iron. I could not talk to my family because I was held captive inside the house. She cut my hair, took off my typical costume (of my ethnic group) and ordered me to wear pants and a blouse. He told me that we Indians are very dirty."

We are grateful to the IOM Development Fund for support for field research and to the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the U.S. Department of State (PRM) for publication support.

We hope that these stories will be disseminated and help to prevent new people from becoming victims of this crime and encourage more people to report it.

Luis Carlos Esquivel
Head of Office Costa Rica

HISTORIAS DE SOBREVIVENCIA

VIAM

Dog

MIAM

SB

CS

SB

SA



Yamila



When I came to work as a domestic in that house I was fifteen years old. I earned a salary of seventy-five dollars a month, which I was never paid. I worked more than twenty hours a day from Monday to Sunday and never had any days off.

For nine years, I was a victim of physical and verbal abuse on repeated occasions. I was sexually abused and held captive. To keep me there, my family and I were threatened with death, so I was never able to leave that job.

She would beat me with paddles, with wires, with her hand or with whatever she could get her hands on. She would burn my back with water or a hot iron. I could not talk to my family because I was held captive inside the house. She cut my hair, took off my traditional dress and ordered me to wear pants and a blouse. He told me that we Indians are very dirty.

I remember that she also had one of those devices - like the ones the policemen use - that give electric shocks. With that device, she sits down.

He was on top of me and then gave me electric shocks so that I wouldn't move; when he finished I was all dizzy and without strength.

When I went to the Public Prosecutor's Office they gave me a medical examination, where they told me that there were different injuries all over my body, including nineteen brain hemorrhages caused by the blows she gave me on my head. They also found nine scars from wounds and six from second and third degree burns in various parts of my body.

I was too afraid to report it and nothing else ever happened.

Joaquin



or put anything about us, don't say who we are. But know that it's not just me; there are many here who went through the same situation. We are not so young people, close to thirty, with the strength to work.

We are all men and we go all the way to school; here it is hard to go to school and without school or studies it is very difficult to get a job, there are not many opportunities. You have a family to support, you have to see what you can do and if not here, you have to look for money elsewhere. Work on the land no longer pays.

In our communities there are some men who visit the homes of people like us, people who can't find work but who have a little piece of land. They begin to convince us to go to the United States, that there is good money (and in dollars) and that there is an abundance of work there.

One's head is filled with illusions and hopes and then one takes risks. You do the impossible to be able to pay the money for the transfer to the coyotes¹, convincing a family member to sign a document to the coyote or to mortgage their property to have money. You go to the family and repeat what they tell you, that you earn well there, that you can send the money later and that you will be able to save money. You think it is an opportunity but it is not always like that, things get tangled up.

When you leave your community, you spend a night in a hotel in the capital and there you meet one of the coyotes who gives you a little money. Then, they tell you that they are going to send you to Mexico and then to the United States. We are afraid to say who they are because they threaten us. Two people died and it is believed that they were the ones who killed them, but there is no proof of anything. We are all afraid.

In Mexico the people who are waiting for you are different; you don't know anything about the coyotes you met before. You tell them: "but look, Where is the person who was supposed to pick me up?", and they answer: "Now we are the ones to take you".

They pick you up at the airport, take you to a place you don't know. You've never traveled and you go from a place like here to a place you've never been to before.

¹ Coyotes are known in Mesoamerica as polleros or human traffickers.

immensity of a place where one is very lost; that is where the ordeal begins.

I don't know if it was a house or a warehouse, but in those facilities a group of people took our clothes, our watches and our money. That was the beginning of the ordeal. Then they blindfolded you and took you for hours and hours on a cart. You lost track of time and place; at the end they left you in places where the windows were covered with black bags or plastic. At the end you didn't know if it was night or day....

From there they took him out to work like a slave. For many days, maybe one or two months, I took care of some animals, they gave me very little food and did not pay me.

Afterwards, a group of us were transferred to other places, then we crossed the border; or so it seemed to us. Everything was done at night and we could not see anything. Where we passed through it smelled very bad; it smelled like animals or dead people. It looked like a desert, but I don't know.

They took us to other warehouses that were like a basement. We were like kidnapped. We were a large group of women and men, maybe fifty or sixty. And there they threatened us with weapons and forced us to work. I don't know what the others did, but I had to clean the toilets without gloves. They were blocked because there were few bathrooms and many people used them.

All they fed us was a hamburger and a soda a day. They kept us working under duress. It seems that those of us who were there were under kidnapping and that they charged money to free us, but not a lot of money because we are poor people, but about five hundred dollars. They are wholesale kidnappings, what counts is the quantity and not the amount.

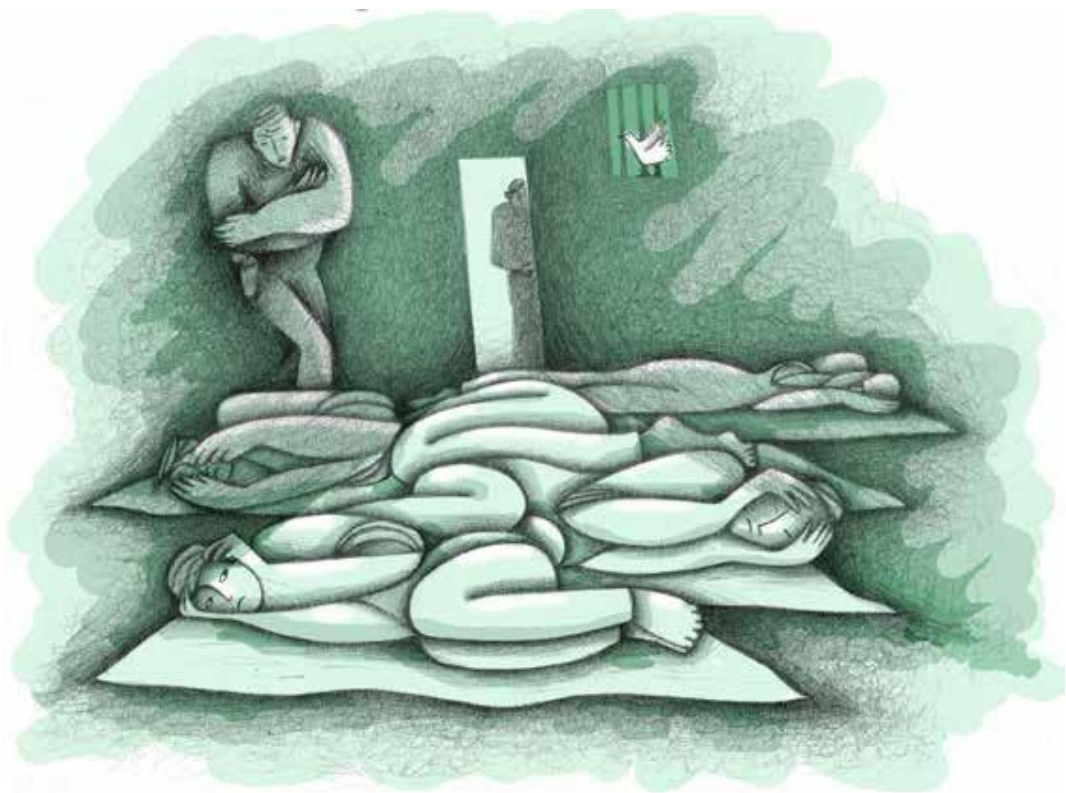
For those of us who have no one to pay for us, they put us to work. You don't know how much time you spend, they forbid you to communicate with the outside world and they keep you isolated. I was able to see groups of people arriving there, of all ages, even young people, sleeping in a small room on the floor with nothing to cover them. When sleeping in a group all the people would watch the rapes of the women. Also the coyotes offered drugs. That's why you could hardly sleep. There people are robbed of their will; no one comes to help you and you don't even try to escape; you are lost and without strength.

One day, I don't know why, they let us go. I returned to my town but the reality is pure smoke and pure illusions. When you come back you feel bad, traumatized, frustrated and poorer than when you left. There is no one to understand or help you; you have no face to face your family and the people who repossessed your house or land for you; there is nowhere to look for help.

The loan cannot be repaid and when we return with no money, waste and frustration, they start charging you, extorting you and threatening you with violence. Since you can't pay, they foreclose.

Now I feel alone, worse than a street dog. When I remember, I don't know if what I experienced is true or not; it's like a nightmare. I have spent several months without sleep, depressed, and when I fall asleep I dream about the situation and relive everything. One needs a psychologist but there is no money for that.

There is still a legal dispute so as not to lose the family farm. I went back to what I used to do before, to work for wages on farms. If I could tell people something about the experience, it is that they should not leave, although people are insistent and out of necessity they take risks. There are always people going, some of them live there as drug addicts and they can't come back because they lost everything.



Mauricio



The money I earned from planting trees in the United States was just enough to pay off my debt.

It was really hard for us to fight to enter the United States legally and then not make any money. We were told that we had to give up our deeds to get the job. We had to sign our name on a blank piece of paper and sign over the deeds. They said that if we did not sign this paper they would not take us to the United States to work.

When we were hired we took out loans, mortgaged our homes and it went badly because we could not pay that debt.

I spent a week with a high fever and it was raining. I asked them to please

have mercy on us and leave me in the building. They told us that we had come to work and that we had to work. I asked for pity and they laughed at me and told me that my visa was not for tourism to do what I wanted to do, but for work, and that I should do what they told me to do.



Diego



He first told us it was to work in a basic grains agency. He asked me if I was working and when I said no he promised to pay me two hundred and fifty dollars a month.

The tremendous thing started when we arrived at the place that said bar. I asked, "where is the store?" In my mind I wondered many things but I did not speak. I went into the room and when I came out I saw that the women were entering with men. At the door there were armed men.

He approached me and said: "Look, it's not what you think. Here you are going to do what I say because I am the one in charge here and if you don't want to obey I know where your family lives and it will be bad for them." I answered: "That's not what you promised me! I replied, "That's not what you promised me!" He answered that he had not promised me anything while holding a gun in his hand. Then he said, "Don't ask me any more questions. One more question and I'll break your mouth."

I began to work as a slave. He took me to weed a big cornfield he had. I had big sores and wounds on top of them, I had never done that, I had been studying. It was a big farm and all around there were armed men, I could not escape. Whoever tried to escape was killed and buried right there. I asked myself, "What am I going to do?"

Once some policemen came to take out a girl who had had a child because she had been offered a job as a nanny on the farm but she got pregnant. When the police arrived the child was 9 months old and the men were talking about selling the child, because the children were cut open and the drugs were put into them and they went unnoticed.

Another day, a woman was being beaten just because she had misbehaved. And so they kicked her to death. When I saw that they were really killers, not only in my mouth, I had to hold on because I saw that they were really killing people.

Once he told me: "Look, you, you have to behave yourself". I gave him a bad answer. He said to me: "What do you mean? Call me the guy. And a tattooed guy arrived and ordered him to teach me to respect him. I responded to the blows, but then he sent me to another one. All beaten up, they threw me in the bar. I couldn't even move in bed. And that's how they brought me back to take me to work. I thought I was going to stay there, that I was not going to be able to leave.

I didn't know how to escape, the walls were big and they kept watch at night. The day I escaped it was because they needed water. And they said: "Send him, but don't send him alone. Let them watch him through the door."

I was walking along when I looked back and saw a boy. I looked at him and asked him: "Look, are you...? He looked at me strangely and said: "Oh, I know you, but I don't know you, but you don't know me. By the look on your face there's something wrong with you, isn't there? Do they have you by force?"

I didn't want to say yes or no because I didn't know him. I didn't know if he could help me or sink me deeper. But I told him I needed help. "Ca- miná," he replied. Then he reached out to me further down the road. "I'm going to get you out of there, they're kind of scared of me."

I went into the bar like it was nothing. I took out a few things and made a run for it.



Maria and Edwin



María--- My older son worked in a bank and my younger son was studying. My brother-in-law promised both of them better opportunities: he told the one who worked at the bank that he would be paid more and he promised the one who was studying that he would be paid more and the one who was studying that he would be paid more.

could study there. He took one of them first and then went back for Edwin. I wanted to go and see where my children were but he wouldn't let me. Later he came looking for me and told me that my children sent me to tell me to go because they were happy.

When we passed through Immigration, he wouldn't let me lower the windows. Immigration was allied with him, they even let him pass minors. The corruption started at the border, he had everyone bought, he gave them money and passed.

When I arrived at the place I was surprised and asked him what was going on. He told me to walk and not to ask anything. Then I saw a woman, who was the one forcing others to use drugs. I saw women

I was surprised and asked him why he had deceived me. He told me not to look again, to keep walking and not to ask him anything. You are going to leave here until I decide, he told me. Why are you doing this to us, I replied. You don't know how much it has cost me to raise my children.

Their father was mean, he took me when I was 14 years old and said that if I didn't go he would kill me. When I ran away he came to bring me and told me he was going to kill my family. My brother-in-law also threatened me, he told me that my children had to be bad like their father. He threatened to hurt my mother who had stayed at home. I kept asking him about my other son and he would only answer that he was in the cornfield.

At first I took care of the little girl, then I was put in charge of cooking for all the staff. The first night in the early morning I heard how he was almost kicking a woman to death. As he jumped on her, he held her head and slammed her to the floor. I asked him to let her go and as I noticed he told her that he would not kill her that day. Another day, when I went out to hang out the clothes, I saw the same woman lying bloody on the floor, unable to move. That's how they killed people...

Edwin--- He was about six feet tall, fat and tremendous. With that weight, he stood on the woman's head and once he even fell down. The woman screamed and screamed...like all the women to whom we

he would do it to him. When he got tired he would have someone else do it and if he refused, he would send him to kill him just like that, as if he were a bird.

María--- He told me that I had to do what he said, otherwise on the front page of the newspaper the headline would read "Woman found dead in barracks", although I could also bury her in the cornfield where her son is. I love it when on the front page of the newspaper they talk about some woman I have killed," the man said.

I told him, do you know what? I put my family on alert, that I had friends in the prosecutor's office. And that they already knew and asked me how I had communicated with them.

He left the prettiest women at the bar and the rest he took to the milpa and when they came back they had to prostitute themselves. Once a man came and said he would give two hundred dollars for me. He told me he would give me half, but I told him I had to die first. He turned to me and said, "If I want to go inside with him now, you go inside with him. First kill me, I told him.

They called him and told him that they were looking for a woman with my characteristics and that if he had her, he should hide her; the police had bought her. Every Friday or Saturday there were operations and there he would pass them the bundle of bills. One afternoon, one of the cooks told me softly: please help me escape.

She had four

years of being there. They are going to kill me, they say I am no longer of use to them and he gave me an address to ask for help. They kill people here, that's why they throw dirt there," she kept telling me. She kept telling me: "please, look for my family" while she cried and cried in secret so they wouldn't hit her. When the man returned me home, I went to look for her family but I never found them.

María--- We were victims, now I want to fight so that women no longer fall into this. Many people are getting rich. Now we are in great danger.

Sofia



My life on the farm seemed never ending, I spent fourteen to fifteen years without leaving. There were people from all sides, more people came and went according to what they wanted and needed.

I saw many newborns, a pregnant twelve year old girl and very painful situations that, when I remember, make me have nightmares and wake up sweating at night.

When I left, I never imagined what awaited me. I was offered twenty-eight dollars a week to work in a banana factory, supposedly with good working conditions. But nothing was true.

They never gave me a salary and I always worked under pressure. They told us they were going to pay us but they didn't give us anything. We had to work more than twelve hours a day and they gave us one meal every twenty-four hours. We were physically abused and the conditions were very bad. We slept crowded in a cellar, on the floor, and we couldn't do anything they didn't want us to do. I felt like a slave.

One day, some soldiers and agents freed us in an operation, they told me that they had been investigating that farm and the bosses for a few months. I never heard from the people I met there again, there were hundreds of them. They told me that some stayed in this country, like me, and others went back to their homes and families.

Cesar



We were deceived with false promises, they said we were going to improve our income and with that we would be able to send money to our families. They deceived us with false promises, saying that we were going to improve our income and with that we would be able to send money to our families. Before leaving, we signed.

We were offered a stable job with the right to housing, telephone, an initial payment for three months of three hundred dollars and then a monthly salary of seven hundred dollars.

But when we got off the plane and went through immigration, they took our passports to hold them forcibly. They took us to a distant place, the reality was different; there we were forced to work long hours and in bad conditions.

I was working in a factory, without pay. Like my fellow workers, I was required to pay four thousand dollars to be able to return to our country and to reimburse travel expenses. One day, some colleagues from the factory contacted some people through e-mails and calls, thanks to which I was able to return to my country. Not everyone was able to

return because it was not

sure, then some went to neighboring countries to look for a better life opportunity.



Samuel



We came from different parts of Asia and we all went to the same place. We found ourselves on a boat one day, living the worst nightmare of our lives.

In my country, I started looking for a job because I needed to help around the house. A company recruited me in my neighborhood and told me it was for fishing but I thought it was close to home. A friend from school told me that he had gotten work like that and it went well. So I packed my few belongings and contacted the recruiter.

They offered me a three-year contract with a salary of two hundred and fifty dollars a month. They promised to give me part of the salary and the rest would be deposited with my relatives back home. I had to go into debt to pay for the plane ticket and to continue paying the salary while working at sea. When I arrived, my passport was taken away as well as the group of companions I traveled with.

When we arrived at the site they locked us in and we couldn't leave because

of.

that there was always somebody watching us. Then they made us do something illegal, I think, because they wouldn't let us talk to anybody about shark finning, which is what we were doing.

We slept in very bad conditions. The schedules were long and tiring, we had no rest hours or days off, and some of us were verbally and physically abused. In order to eat, we had to earn our food, on the condition that we did certain jobs or followed certain instructions. The comrades who suffered accidents or health problems were not taken care of.

It was very frustrating to be so far away from my family, so isolated and not allowed to do anything. I didn't know the language or culture, and I didn't know what country I was in at all. Sometimes I even had trouble understanding what my own classmates were saying.

On one of the few days we were allowed to leave, a man saw six of us walking. The man worked in some government institution so he became suspicious and reported what was going on. After several interviews, I was sent back to my country. They say that the lady who owned the boat said that it was not hers and that she had only given us space to park there.



Alicia



My sister and I left the country in search of employment four years ago. We had been told that the park offered work, so we left immediately. A cab driver saw us and offered us a ride to a restaurant, with the deception that he was going to take us to a restaurant.

that we would find work there. But that was not the case. Once in the store, the owner locked us in and threatened us.

I was twenty-two and my sister was sixteen. My sister was forced to hang out with men and I had to clean all the dirty things in the bar. We were there for about a week and a half, until there was a raid and we were rescued.

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