

Topic: My grandmother's challenges and hardships and emigrating to the United States from El Salvador have

Abstract: This is the story of my grandmother who came to the United States illegally from El Salvador to make a better life for herself, her husband, and her children. Although she passed away at the age of 79, she taught me many life lessons. If it wasn't for my grandmother's strength and perseverance, I wouldn't have the life I do today here in the United States.

Key Words: El Salvador, Immigration, Challenges, Hardships and Journeys, Strength, Life Lessons Grandmother

My grandmother was born April 18, 1930 in a small town in El Salvador called Arcatao. To this day, I still remember the incredible stories she told me growing up of her many challenges that she faced, immigrating to the United States. She was an amazing mother of ten, grandmother, sister, and aunt. Although she was not my biological mother, she definitely raised me and everyone else as her own. Her hardships and journeys have influenced me to be the person I am today.

When I was little, my grandmother would describe in such detail the beauty of El Salvador. She would often talk about the glorious mountains, clear skies, and the beautiful land that seemed to never wither. She was very proud to be of El Salvadorian descent. Whenever she came across someone else that was Salvadorian she would always be so thrilled and spend hours talking to them and reminiscing about her childhood memories. Although she was very much in love with the land, the United States became to be what she called home.

As a child she was very defiant but thrived on adventure. She would often escape class and go to the river for long hours and swim. Swimming was her favorite activity. She must've been a fish in a previous life time because that is all she truly enjoyed. Growing up in the 1930's was difficult enough especially if one was female, and especially in El Salvador. Some would say she was a feminist because she believed that nothing could stop her, including gender role.

She had a very strong character and amazing personality. She was so spirited and never in one spot. Helping others was second nature for her. When she set her mind to something she went all the way through with it, and never backed down. She had always been a hard worker and always on the move. She sold produce, sewed clothes, and even washed people's clothing for money. She did anything she could in order to earn money to invest.

At the age of 18, she met my grandfather and soon after they were arranged for marriage. My grandfather at the time had recently left the seminary because of his changed beliefs and decided he wanted to get married. Together they moved periodically around the country or even to bordering countries such as Honduras and also Costa Rica. They were very poor and the economy was very weak at the time as well. Their efforts to find work anywhere were endless. Two years later, my grandmother delivered her first child, a baby girl.

My grandfather later became a professor at the local university after leaving the seminary path. He was a brilliant man with a doctorate in Philosophy who was fluent in several languages including English, French, Latin, and of course Spanish. However, money was becoming an issue now that they had children to care for. My grandma believed that the best option would be crossing to the United States to ensure a better lifestyle for her family. She arrived illegally to the United States alone and immediately went on search for any work that was available. She had many jobs simultaneously that included; maid service, child care taker, and even house keeper. These jobs offered live-ins therefore she had a temporary shelter. She worked extremely hard for her money, even when the home owners were arrogant upper class people. After receiving her check, she would instantly send it through the mail to El Salvador where her children and husband awaited.

As she worked vigorously to make enough money to bring all her children to the United States, most had already grown up to their teenage years. She often returned to El Salvador to see her growing children and care for them and find a way to take them with her to the United States. She brought her first two who were now around the age of twenty. She sought help from close friends and family for money, even requesting a large loan from the government.

Now late 1970's, an outbreak of the civil war plagued violence and conflict between social classes. Having been a professor and so close proximity to the students, my grandfather was an influential member of the working class. He encouraged his students to not be oppressed nor give in to a corrupt government. Because of his political views and association with Archbishop Oscar Romero, he was sought after by the death squads of El Salvador. The violence and poverty increased due to overpopulation and my grandmother knew her children's lives were at stake. Her eight sons would soon be drafted to be a part of this devastating war between the military government and those who supported economic and social reform. The only solution was transporting them all to the United States.

About 3 years before leaving El Salvador permanently, she gave birth to my mother at the age of 43. My mother is the tenth child and she spent her entire childhood in the United States where as the others grew to adults in El Salvador. My grandmother purchased a small but descent sized house in East Side San Jose and has owned it ever since. Her next goal was to make enough money for my grandfather to come to the United States. He was very reluctant to leave his home country. He simply loved the land despite all the chaos that had erupted. He was also very much in love with his job as a professor at the local university. It took him years to finally come even after my grandmother had worked night and day to make enough for him to cross.

She was an amazing cook. She always made the best Salvadorian dishes, particularly, Pupusas. I would always come at the perfect time to help her make tortillas and other foods with her. She taught me how to make tortillas using Masa and how to *tortear*. I learned so much from her, not only about cooking food, but life in general. She taught me lessons that I would need to learn in life. She always reminded me that life is never easy and that one must work hard to achieve something. She taught me that you must always be strong and remember that even when you're all alone in a new place, you are always there for a reason.

One of her many remarkable qualities, was her sense of humor. Like any typical grandmother she would constantly gossip and enjoyed long conversations. There were times when nobody else could get a word in. She had amazing comebacks and was hilarious. She was full of so much knowledge and wisdom, and of course, she was never wrong about anything. One would assume that a person that has been through so much and seen it all would be so jaded, but instead she was indulged by life and light. At the age of 79 she passed away due to a stroke and left everybody devastated. No one was prepared for a shattering event such as this. Every day I am grateful to have had her so close in my life and to bring with me everything that she has taught me since I was very little.

Because of her, our family has been able to live a more peaceful and safer life. We are away from violence, poverty, and fear. If it were not for her, we would all still be there in El Salvador, or maybe not have survived at all. I probably wouldn't even be here today if my grandmother had not fought so hard to get everyone to safety. Her actions have affected each one of our lives for the better in so many ways.

There are no words that come close enough to describe this woman's strength. She is the strongest and most intelligent person I have ever come across. Her perseverance, courage,

outstanding work ethic have all made me realize that if she could accomplish all that, then anything is possible.

She always put her children and others before herself. If she saw somebody in need of help, she always gave them her hand, even if it was not deserved. Her life was to raise her kids and be a mother to all. She practically raised me, her grand-daughter, and various other grandchildren and nephews as her own. She is often referred to as a legend in our family because of everything she has accomplished. If anyone out of all the 7 billion people on this planet deserved a statue to symbolize their triumphs, it should be her.

I believe that the obstacles she overcame took a tremendous amount of courage and strength. She came illegally to the United States without knowing a single word of English and only a few dollars in her pocket. She worked 24 hours and seven days a week for a better life for her children. She sacrificed a great deal of her life to raise all ten children and to start a new chapter in another country. Her struggles and determinations have inspired me to be just like her in regards to her never fading strength. After she passed away, it was very difficult for me to accept it and to stay proactive with my life. I faced many challenges and at times I felt hopeless and unable to succeed. It took me time to realize that even without her, she still is a great part of my life and that I can accomplish anything if I truly believe in myself. She will always be the voice in my head that motivates me to keep going and to never doubt my capabilities. I have learned to set goals for myself and never give up despite how difficult or impossible it seems to be. You can do anything if you put the effort in it.