

Voices: Memoir of an undocumented immigrant

October 31, 2018

Life in my beautiful Nicaragua was difficult. After 50 years of war that ended in July 1979, followed by five years of relative peace, another war broke out.

The 1990s began with social, political and economic instability. The threat of another civil war was in the air. I became so concerned for my family that I decided to migrate, searching for a place where my children could live in a peaceful environment, get an education, and have the opportunity of a better life.

In April 1994, I embarked on a journey to the United States. I left behind my wife, my two children, my large extended family and the town where I was born.

I was able to obtain permits to transit through Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, but I had to enter Mexico undocumented. It took me three weeks of risks, fears, hunger and suffering to get to Brownsville, Texas, where I entered the United States, still undocumented.

I made it to Miami, Fla., in May 1994. After eight months working in construction, landscaping, a chicken plant and any other decent job I could find in Miami and Alabama, I went back to Nicaragua, only to return to the United States with my wife in 1995.

We took the same painful route through Central America and Mexico, but this time, we were detained with excessive force by U.S. Border Patrol and jailed in the Port Isabel Immigration Detention Center at Los Fresnos, Texas.

After three months filled with frustration, desperation and uncertainty about our future, we applied for asylum. We were advised there was no way to get approved for asylum but that by doing so we could get out of jail with a bond and be free until the court date. We paid the bond, were released and moved to Georgia while still undocumented.

Life without my children was simply impossible. They were the main reason I migrated to the United States. Therefore, in November 1995, I went back to Nicaragua to bring my children to the United States. Luis was 7, and Yessy was 5.

I still remember every single mile I traveled through Mexico and the United States while undocumented. I had nightmares for many, many years about those undocumented, dangerous trips.

Immigrants looking for and finding refuge

In my search for a safe place to live and raise my children, I found salvation. In 1996, my family and I found the Lord. We became Christians and started serving the Lord.

An undocumented life is very hard. We did not have any access to the benefits for which we had to pay. We paid taxes on every thing we bought and every hour we worked.

In 1997, we received great news. Congress and the Clinton administration approved NACARA—The Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act—and in 2006, my family and I became U.S. citizens.

I believe my family and I have contributed to our U.S. society in many ways. We have worked very hard making a good contribution to this economy and have served our community in various ways through our ministry. We are

very grateful for the opportunity to be accepted in this country. Because of that hospitality, we met our Savior, achieved higher education, and helped many people grow in their life.

Immigrants in the Bible

The immigration issue is delicate but is not a strange topic in the Bible. Lot took his family and fled Sodom (Genesis 19). Abraham was a stranger and an alien in the land of Canaan (Genesis 23). Jacob moved his family to Egypt to escape the famine and reunite with Joseph (Genesis 46:1-7). The Israelites were driven out of Egypt and were wandered more than 40 years until they settled in Canaan (Exodus 12:37-39). Jesus and his parents fled to Egypt because their life was in danger (Matthew 2:13-18).

People migrate to the United States for the same reasons as the Patriarchs, the people of Israel and Jesus and his family. They are running away for their life.

Immigrants in our own day

A lot of memories come to my mind when I look at the news of people from Central America, who are running away from their own homes and looking for a safe place to live and raise their families. I don't know what the solution to this situation may be. I only know they are not criminals, and they are not trying to hurt anyone. On the contrary, they want to have the opportunity to bless and be blessed.

While I don't know the answer to this situation, I do know that as Christians, we need to respond with grace, love and mercy—not fear and hate.

I read these words of our Lord in Matthew 25:35: “For I was hungry and

you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,” and I ask myself, “How can we practice Jesus’ words in our present circumstances?”

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