

## America to an Immigrant

“Miguel, we made it!” said Mama. We are from El Salvador, and have traveled to the U.S. to escape gangs and poverty. It had worsened until we could not leave our house after dark. Papa left a few years ago. Yesterday he sent us an envelope containing money and small books for learning English. I had no idea the journey would be so hard.

After several several long days of traveling, as well as a few car breakdowns, we were almost there. However, the money we brought with us was running out. We were down to only a few dollars when we reached the Mexican-American border. When we presented our El Salvadoran passports at the border crossing, they said it did not require payment. We were so relieved! Papa was waiting in his rental car, and after a series of big hugs, we hopped in our car and followed him to Los Banos. The eight hours felt like forever to me. He says we will live in an apartment there. I will go to Miano Elementary School, and ride the bus back to the Central Valley Apartments. Papa says he works full-time at a market near the school, and that Mama could work there as well. Being a five-year-old, I did not think I would go to kindergarten. In El Salvador, kindergarten starts at age six. However, the next day I rode the bus to school. There, several boys called me names, but one named Ruben stood up for me. I knew basic English, and he knew basic Spanish, so he helped me understand the teacher. In turn, I will help him learn Spanish. School was very new to me, but Ruben was helpful and welcoming, so he made my first day of school fun.

A few months have passed, and I have found that America was much better than I thought it would be. It is nice to be in a place where gangs do not roam the streets, keeping you inside after dark, and forcing you to pay "rent" if you want to stay safe. Mama calls it “extortion.” I am also glad we have electricity, money, and running water. I enjoy school, and my friend Ruben lives near me, so we sometimes have playdates.

One day, I came home, and was surprised to see Mama and Papa home already. I asked Papa why, and he told me that Mama was sick, but he did not know how to help her. In the meantime, I was to stay as far away as possible so I did not become sick as well. Because she was not working, the friendly landlord allowed us some leeway on the rent. Still, I worried about Mama all night. Papa had said that even with TPS (temporary protection status), it would be hard to find medical care. He was trying to find a doctor that would take her, but most were too expensive. I was afraid we would never find a doctor who would look at Mama.

Finally, we located a doctor who we could afford. He examined Mama while we waited anxiously in the lobby. When they finally came out of the examination room, both were beaming. When we asked why, she said, “Miguel is going to have a sibling!” At that news, we could hardly contain our joy. Mama said that the top names were Ana and Rafael. I want even more to stay in the U.S. now that I will have a sibling. I want to learn better English so I will be able to teach them. When I grow up, I want to make it easier for immigrants to legally make it into the U.S. and stay there. Then, families like us can live without the fear of being separated by deportation. The journey here might have been hard, but it has definitely been worth it.

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