

# A Journey HOME



I took my time deciding to take the long trip to get to a land where I thought I might find a better life. Better for me and for my fiancé Miguel. Miguel was waiting for me in Michigan. He had worked long hours and saved enough money to make sure my journey would be a safe one. I would be able to travel to the border by truck and not by foot like so many others I knew.

It took me a long time to make my decision because I would dearly miss the family I'd be leaving behind in my home country—my supportive parents, and my little sisters, Julianna and Maria. I also had a decent life—even owned my own business at one time—but dreams of marrying Miguel and starting a new life in a new land had consumed me. After teary goodbyes, I set out early on a crisp November morning to “journey home.”

I knew the passage was risky. I had heard the horror stories. But, I knew I wouldn't be alone. Traveling with me were Sarah, her young daughter Cynthia, several men returning to the States to “wives” they'd left behind months, even years ago, and a driver. Each offered comfort in their own unique way as I settled in for the long trip.

As the truck sped down the rough roadway, I prayed, “God, please allow me to make it through safely without harm.” I believe in a God who answers prayers, and I felt confident my prayers would be heard.

Sooner than expected, the truck brakes screeched, the jostling stopped, and the loud motor that roared non-stop throughout the trip, came to a shuddering halt. Are we there, I thought? Will the second truck we were to meet be waiting for us? We made it to Mexico, yes. But the next truck to take us to Louisiana—our final destination—was not there. Confused and alarmed, the group began speaking over top of one another trying

to create a plan and seek reassurance from each other. The reassurance—and the second truck—never arrived. My life was about to change drastically.

Minutes into what was to be a long trek to the US border, road bandits in a rusty red pickup truck came along side us shouting. I didn't know what they were saying, really, but instinct told me it wasn't good. The men in our group were trying to shield me, Sarah, and by now a frantic Cynthia from the now too obvious danger. Overtaken by the bandits, the men were beaten, tied up and helplessly forced to watch what unfolded.

Looking for more than just material things, these less-than-human beings made the next few minutes of my life indescribable—and changed it forever. Those minutes seemed like an eternity, and I hoped I'd live to make it to that better life I had dreamed about.

The bandits demanded cooperation or death. Sarah, like me, was being brutally assaulted. Her little girl was taken to the back of the truck by some of the men. I fought tears just imagining her horror. Tossed to the hard ground, I was repeatedly assaulted by each man in a manner in which no one should ever have to encounter. For fear of losing my life, I shut my eyes and kept silent as I was ordered to do, just wanting the nightmare to end. I was literally stripped of my virginity and dignity.

Bruised and bleeding, the pugnacity ended after the bandits grabbed what little personal possessions we had and left us alone in the night of the still steaming desert. The silence was deafening. In pain, I freed the men from their

ropes. With tears in their eyes, they found a safe area as we hoped for a passerby to transport us to safety. At least we were all alive, I thought. But, it didn't take long for a sense of shame to overtake me. Why did I think I would be able to arrive safely? My friends reminded me of the potential for harm. Why didn't I listen?

**T**wo weeks later, still trying to block out memories of that awful day, I was safe in Louisiana busying myself by working odd jobs to save enough money to make it to Michigan. After about a month, I began feeling differently, sometimes nauseous or uncharacteristically hungry. It was then that I realized that my new life was shaping up to be something totally different than what I'd planned and hoped. I was pregnant!

Feeling scared, alone, and desperate I attempted an abortion, but the "at home" remedy I chose did not succeed. Now what? I thought. Even more frightened, I knew I had to do something, but I wasn't sure what that something was.

Burdened by the fact that I hid my devastating experience from everyone—including Miguel, I decided to confide in him, hoping and praying that he'd still want to marry me and raise the child I was carrying. My hope for a better life for Miguel, me, and for my child was growing stronger with each passing day—even if the baby was created out of an unspeakable act.

I began each morning choosing to believe that maybe my journey home would turn out to be much *more* than I ever dreamed or imagined. I tried to hold onto those happier thoughts as I turned out the lights each night before crawling into bed.

Miguel did not take the news well. He refused to believe any part of my story... the story I so wished was not true. "Drama," he said, conjured up to hide my unfaithfulness.

I had not known him to be physically or verbally abusive in any way. But I now saw another side of the man I was planning to marry. The beating I received—the rage and accusations—were worse than what I had suffered from the bandits in Mexico. Because of my love for Miguel this

realization hurt even more now feeling betrayed by even him.

Alone, afraid, and with nowhere to go, I was now... homeless! "When will this nightmare I'm living end?", I asked myself. It now became clear to me that abortion was my only option. Keeping the baby would be impossible.

But, nothing is impossible with God. And my journey was about to take yet another turn. A neighbor offered to help me travel to Maryland. I found a job that paid enough for room and board. The money gave me the opportunity to pay for the abortion I decided to undergo.

As it turned out, the woman I worked for, Helen, was familiar with Gabriel Network. She suggested, and even helped me to call Gabriel Network. It was then and there that I found the help I desperately hoped I would find.

**M**aggie, my assigned "Angel Friend," was part of a network of people who came together to provide the practical, emotional and spiritual support I needed. Maggie's care and concern was evident from her very first phone call and I knew I was finally in a safe place. She was with me when I went for my very first prenatal appointment, and she was there to drive me and Philip home after he was born. She accompanies us annually to Philip's well-care doctor visits. She has truly been present throughout my pregnancy and beyond. Maggie and I are friends; Philip is a healthy 7 year old boy who just started second grade. I am proud and blessed to be his Mom and never doubt the decision I made to choose life.

I am amazed at the quality of service provided by Gabriel Network—all the ways the staff offers the reassurance that women facing unplanned pregnancies need. I will never regret having made the choice to carry my baby to term—no matter the circumstances of how he came to be. I am certain that other mothers served by Gabriel Network feel the same about their precious children.

I've finally completed my journey "home."