

When I came to the United States from Mexico with my husband and my daughter, I was so excited. I believed, and still do, that this country offers amazing opportunities. I love this country. Over the course of several years, I had three more children; two girls and one boy. My happiness about being in this country quickly became clouded with pain and fear. My husband was very abusive and I lost myself. I had no self-esteem and no confidence that I had the strength to leave and build a new life. I was embarrassed to be a victim of domestic violence. I didn't even tell my family what was happening. I just kept it all to myself.

One day, my husband hit me so hard that I passed out. I must have been out for a couple of hours because it was dark when I woke up. I was in a closet with my oldest daughter next to me. She told me that she thought I was dead. This broke my heart. I didn't know what to do. I thought about giving my children to my brother. I figured that if my husband didn't kill me, I might as well kill myself. My death felt inevitable. But then something rose up in me. I didn't have the courage to call the police but I did call a social worker and she called them for me.

My children and I went to an emergency shelter and family crisis center. At first, I was very afraid but then I got to know the director and started to engage in some of the classes and activities. They helped me but the director knew that my family and I needed more than they had to offer us. She recommended we transfer to Good Shepherd Shelter. I admit that I did not want to go at first. I was comfortable where we were and I was so afraid of making a change. But, the director insisted that Good Shepherd Shelter would be very good for us so she convinced me to go for an interview. That day changed our lives.

It was a rainy day when we interviewed with the sisters. And my children were not on their best behavior, quite the opposite. I thought they would turn us away but they didn't. When I walked out into the yard, I just cried and cried. It was so beautiful. When I saw the chapel I thought to myself, "We are in paradise." Then, I ran into the unit the sisters offered to me and my children and I opened every cabinet, I opened every drawer. I saw that there was nothing missing. Every single thing that my children and I needed was already there. There were appliances, dishes, towels, beautiful furniture, anything and everything that we had left behind was right in front of us.

Although I felt so happy and so blessed to be at Good Shepherd Shelter, my journey was not without fear, doubts, and struggle. I often went into the yard or the chapel to pray and to cry. But even with all of the pain, not a day went by that my children and I did not feel loved. The sisters and the staff showered us with love and kindness and they helped us in more ways than I can even describe. My children went to the school at the shelter and they loved it. To this day, they each have a deep and profound love of learning that began at Good Shepherd Shelter. I began taking a variety of classes and had therapy sessions with the sisters. I also developed friendships with the other moms and I am still very close with them all these years later. One of the most comforting things for me was going to mass every Sunday thanks to invitations from the sisters.

My healing took time. For so long, I was afraid to receive love, I was afraid of the differences that were happening inside of me. I was even afraid to wear colorful clothing. It seems so simple but I was stuck in a place filled with humiliation, pain and trauma. One of the sisters brought me a bag of nothing but colorful clothing and asked me to try to wear some of the pieces. I didn't at first but then, over time, I began to put a few pieces on but was afraid to look at myself in the mirror. It was as if I was afraid to witness my own transformation because, with every change in me, I felt fear of the unknown. By

witnessing the transformation, I would also have to accept my experiences of domestic violence and leave the shame and embarrassment behind. It didn't happen overnight, but I did finally accept what happened to me and healed.

After I arrived at the shelter, the sisters helped me get a U-Visa and a work permit. Then, after six months, I got a residence card. The sisters also encouraged me to apply for U.S. Citizenship. I thought this was too far out of reach and too complicated but the sisters promised to help me with the paperwork and they did. After we left the shelter, I got a job and my children enrolled in schools they loved. I cannot express how grateful we all are for our time at Good Shepherd Shelter. For the first time, I felt empowered and fulfilled.

Now, many years later, I have an excellent sales job that I love and one that sustains our family. All three of my daughters have received competitive scholarships at their schools. These scholarships were previously designated for girls only however, just this past year, my oldest daughter advocated for my son, and beginning next year, the scholarship applications will be open to boys as well and my son intends to apply. The love of education that my children received at the shelter has not diminished one bit, it has grown. We often talk about our time at the shelter with deep and immense fondness. Our family is bonded and united in a way that stems from our time there. I credit the teachers at the shelter for instilling in my children the lessons that taught them that they need to help one another. And they do.

Good Shepherd Shelter offered so much to me and my children. So much healing, so much growth, so much opportunity. With all my heart, I believe that the root of possibility is in the shelter. I know for certain that I wouldn't be who I am now if I wasn't at Good Shepherd Shelter. I now have regained my self-esteem and I am able to give and receive love without fear. I am in a happy and loving relationship with bright plans for the future. And just a few months ago, I became a U.S. Citizen. I cannot begin to explain what that means to me. To be a citizen of a country that I love so much. And my oldest daughter now has an application in process to become a citizen as well. I know that none of this would have happened without the sisters and the shelter. We feel so incredibly blessed and will be forever grateful to Good Shepherd Shelter.