

## The Blessing of a Second Chance

By Samah

Hi! My name is Sophia Maria Rosa and this is my story. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico. My parents had three boys named Emilio Lucas, Isaac Santino and Julian Alejandro before my sister Alicia Amalia Joy was born. Last but definitely not least, I came along. Life was amazing for me, with a beautiful home I lived a life of luxury. Our family was greatly respected in our village. Then when I was 17 I met my fiancé Alfonso, we instantly clicked and I couldn't wait to grow old with him by my side. At that point my life was so perfect, I had never gone to bed hungry, in danger, or scared. Then, one summer things took a turn for the worse as tension and battle broke out. For months the battles were raging. I never thought they would get near our home, they always seemed so distant. Yet, the attacks were becoming a frequent and normal part of life. I learned to rock myself to sleep to the distant sounds of gunfire. One spring night things were different, it was the first night in months that I heard no gunshots ringing in the night. But, at 2:00 in the morning I was awakened to the sounds of screaming and piercing gunfire. I jumped up, pulled on my shawl, and ran straight into a body in the hall. I screamed startled and frightened. I heard Alfonso say "Sophia it's Alfonso, please, keep your voice low, there is an attack at the front of the property." The news that came to me was like a bullet, knocking me down. I lost my breath and felt my legs collapse underneath me. I quickly regained my composure, and we walked side by side. The walk out to the perimeter of our property felt like an eternity. I couldn't get my eyes to focus on anything, it was pitch dark outside, all I could hear was screaming. Then, I saw my family hidden in the bushes. I walked as quietly as I could but, I stepped without watching and a twig snapped underneath my foot. I grimaced, I had given us away. "STOP!" yelled a voice, I felt the shell of a gun drawn to my head. Before I could do anything I heard the man say "Give us your property and money or we shoot,". "DON'T YOU DARE!" yelled Alfonso as he leaped towards them, knocking the gun to the floor. I grabbed his arm and steadied myself "Alfonso PLEASE they can kill.." but before I could finish my sentence I heard the click of a barrel and the piercing sound of a gunshot. I turned and there he was, a jumbled heap on the floor. Suddenly I felt my mama grab me and pull me away, "Sophia he's gone. We must run while they are distracted..come mijita, we need to get out of here before it's too late." I wanted to yell a million things, I wanted to scream and fight but, I couldn't say a word, nothing was registering in my brain. My mind was in denial. I looked back at Alfonso's lifeless body laying on the cold pavement, that was the last time I saw him. We walked for miles in the darkness, I couldn't help but think, " I just killed my fiancé, he is dead because of me," And for the first time in hours I spoke, I yelled "HE'S DEAD, HE'S GONE!" I couldn't hold it in anymore, I sobbed for hours, uncontrollably crying. They say crying helps you heal but, the more I cried the more I ached. This went on for 7 weeks, endless walking, mindless sobbing. I seemed to block all my thoughts out, I didn't care where we were going, I ignored the pain of hunger gnawing at my stomach, and I blocked out the image of Alfonso's lifeless body on the concrete. Finally, we arrived illegally into America in early August. My father and brothers worked labor jobs to bring in an income. I went from living on a five acre property to living in a small shack with one room. My new life changed me, I became a new person, lifeless, quiet and closed off. I wasn't myself

and couldn't move on from my past. One day everything changed, I was washing our family's clothes in the river when I looked up and saw a mother holding a lifeless newborn in her arms. She quietly said, "My child you passed before I could tell you I love you, before I could hold you in my arms. I will never forget you my love but, life must go on." I sat there confused and shocked, how could this mother move on like that? How is that possible? I thought about it for hours, all night the thought lingered in my mind. That next morning I woke up a new person. I opened up my mind and learned to move on. I started to observe my love for children and decided to certify myself in teaching. I was done grieving I had work to do.

6 Years Later

A few years ago I thought my life was over, that everything within me was gone. But, my journey has taught me it is NEVER too late to pick up the pieces of your life and start over. I now have a caring husband and three daughters (Elizabeth Elena, Mia Natalia and Elicia Luna) who have showed me a new kind of love that I never knew existed. This new life wouldn't have been possible without America. This country gave me a chance to start over fresh. I used to live in constant fear in Puerto Rico yet sadly, I still live in fear today that one day I will be deported and separated from my children. Yes, I am an illegal immigrant but, I have grown to love this country more than anyone could ever imagine.