

THE SUFFERING OF MY LIFE

My name is Walter Alexander Sorto. I am 39 years old. I was born in El Salvador, son of Maria Noemi Sorto and Juan Antonio Diaz. My Mother was only 14 years old when she became pregnant with me, she lived with my Grandma Maria and two brothers and two sisters. She was the third of the five children. So when she became pregnant with me no one knew, just a friend of hers named Magdalena, the same age as my mother.

My mother kept her pregnancy a secret for the entire nine months until the day I WAS born, that fine day of August 10th at 8pm, which was the hour when I was born. When she gave birth to her son, petrified with fear she abandoned me in a trough where they put the food for pigs, which was behind my grandmother's kitchen...

At this time a storm was coming and my grandma Maria went out from the kitchen to get some pieces of wood to be able to cook the next day, because she always got on to prepare food for my grandpa Jose and my two uncles, while she was picking on the wood she heard that behind the house a small child was crying, but she wasn't sure if that was what she heard, because there was a lot of wind in that moment, and besides it was very dark because we didn't have electricity, only gaslight at the place where the baby's cries were coming from.

When she looked, I was out of the trough in the middle of all the mud and the pigs, which were only three weeks old, were pulling at my umbilical cord, as it had blood since I had just been born, she yelled to the others to come outside and at that moment, my uncle Manuel, who was the oldest, got into the pig's pen, scared off the pigs, and picked me up, completely covered in mud. Then my grandma, without knowing what had happened, took me into the kitchen, washed me in hot water, cut my umbilical cord, wound a cloth around my stomach, and fed me. As there was no milk, she only put sugar in the bottle and that was how she fed me all that night.

The next day she asked among the neighbors who lived in the same property as my grandpa, but no one knew what had happened, only Magdalena. My grandma didn't know what to do, hearing that her youngest daughter was already a mother of a baby boy. She couldn't imagine how she was the mother since no one had seen her pregnant, that was what ran through the mind of my grandma Maria.

My aunt Rosa Lilian Sorto, whom I call mother up to this day, along with my uncle Manuel and my grandma, were the ones who took care of me, but then something happened that changed their lives because it happened that because my mother had put me in the pig trough, all my skin fell off from the neck down to the bottom of my feet, and all my back side was raw flesh. This kept me bedridden for three years, my body was very thin, I had no flesh, just pure bones, more dead than alive. I was in such bad health that my grandma took me every day to the doctors in the Hospital of San Pedro, Usulután, her city.

Right at that time is when the war began in my Country, (1980). And I was three years old with that illness when they told my grandma Maria to take me home, they were tired of helping her with me and they didn't know what was wrong with me because they had already used all the methods of modern medicine without results, and there was no improvement in my health. At that time I didn't

even move, I was almost dead, I didn't eat, I had no strength to do it, I couldn't even sleep because I couldn't stand the pain because they couldn't dress me as I had no skin. If they put clothes on me they would stick to my flesh and when that happened in order to get them off they would wash me in warm water with lemon leaves, but I bled a lot. So that it was very difficult for me to wear clothing. My uncle Manuel would cut tender banana leaves and they would wrap me up in the green leaves, as if were a tamale.

One day my grandma was sad after her last visit to the hospital. When she tried to enter the hospital, Miss Campos stood in her way, and told her that the doctors had ordered that she not come into the hospital anymore. At that moment it was 7pm and there were no more buses to go back home, which was about an hour away, so outside the hospital there was a small park with about 10 benches and she settled down with me in her arms and spent the night outside in a hail of bullets, as there was a curfew and the military and the guerrilla were fighting. They had burned several buses and cars and even houses and she only prayed that nothing would happen to her, that a stray bullet would not take her life before she could know what would happen to her grandson, whom she loved with all her heart...

So that day she safely returned with tears in her eyes from what had happened in the hospital, and my uncle Manuel said to her, "Mama, I'm going to the docks and when I come back I'll bring some Matial-leaves". (Matial is a plant with a thin stem and its leaves are small and thick, and they have a gel like the Nopal or prickly pear, and it's very very cold.) And so when my uncle Manuel returned with the leaves my grandma Maria grounded the leaves up like a paste and then put it all over my back from the neck down to my feet. In about 4 hours the paste from the leaves was completely burned to a yellow color, then she put it on me a second time and this time she left it on for about 8 hours with the same results, the leaves had burned the paste dry. But she looked and the flesh was firming up, it was getting better, so the third time she left it on until the next day, and there was a lot of improvement. She only used the leaves four times, and my skin began to grow back, and that's how I was cured of that terrible sickness which had kept me bedridden for three years...

On July 17, 1981, was when I began to walk, and at first I crawled along the ground because I didn't have strength in my legs, and so I dragged myself along. After 3 years I was 7 years old, and my aunt Rosa whom I call Mother had a son, Ramon, and a daughter, Marlene, and as we lived near the sea, all the time we worked in the ocean fishing and finding shell, doing whatever we could. So it was that I learned quickly how to make a living, and we used to go in a boat fishing for three days on the ocean until we would return with the fish, and would sell it so that we could buy more things to eat like corn, beans, rice, oil, and clothes, the barest necessities. At home when we couldn't fish then I would go to the bus station, I'd clean them and wash them and they wouldn't give me very much money for that but that was a way of making a living from my childhood on up. In my Country that's normal because people live in tremendous poverty.

Later when I was more grown and was 9 or 10, I worked getting coconuts and mangos down from trees, that is, every type of fruit that there was on a farm, then I began working on buses as an assistant for a few years. After that I was very badly treated by my uncle Jose Rolando, who beat me, he would hit me in the face and with a piece of wet rope, which drew blood on my back very quickly because my skin was very delicate. They didn't understand how severe the mistreatment was. They would tie me to a Tamarindo tree and hit me with a wet rope, which caused a strong and tremendous pain, and I couldn't sit down and for sure couldn't lie down, because my back hurt I would sleep standing, just

leaning on the wall of the house. Then the next day they would make me get water FOR the cattle that my uncle was paid to take care of, but they didn't pay me. I had nothing to do with the cattle and it wasn't of any benefit to me as he just took advantage of me.

My uncle Manuel, who Loved me very much, he died from stomach pain on December 23, 1985. I was only 8 years old when he died, and I wanted to die with him too, because I was afraid of the others. I knew that when he wasn't there they would do me a lot of harm, so even my cousin Ramon would hit me with bamboo rods, very strong rods that caused me a lot of pain. So all the blows, kicks, punches and pokes, with rocks and bamboo rods that is, all these types of abuse, in me a learning disorder at school, where I went 6 time to the first grade and never passed to second grade. I spent six years in first grade, I think from all the beatings, that I never learned anything.

Everything I now know I learned in my cell, because when I came to prison I only knew how to write my name, that was all. Today I can write a little better.

After I was grown at the age of 17 I immigrated to the Unites States, like all youths with a lot of dreams stuffed into my suitcase, and I had two things in mind, one to build a house for my grandma Maria, and secondly to come back and marry the girl I loved. The first thing I accomplished but not the second. After the passage of years I married the mother of my three younger daughters. (I have an older daughter who is 19, and the youngest from the three daughters of the same mother is 18, 17, 16 years old, right.)

That is just a part of my life story, it's very difficult to understand how life can change for us in a moment, today here I'm on Death Row. Condemned to death for a crime I had nothing to do with, but here I'm because I was accused as the accomplice of a criminal, but it is not true, I never helped that person for anything he did as he wanted, no one helped him with what he did.

This is all. God bless you always. I hope you like my little Story. Take good care of yourself.
Sincerely,
Walter A. Sorto