

IMELDA—Transcript

During El Salvador's twelve year civil war, at the young age of five years, old I witnessed the murders of my parents and two older sisters. Deep sigh. I can see the house; it is surrounded with lush green trees, corn stalks, mango trees, banana trees, bean bushes, chickens and pigs. A two room house made of mud, sticks and a tin roof with a dirt floor and a patio; this is what was once home to me. There is a rocky dirt road in front of my house; we've walked up and down it many times. The house sits on the side of a picturesque mountain called Las Lomas de Santiago overlooking the rest of the valley. On this mountain was where all my family lived. Along with my other siblings this is where I was born.

I am the second youngest of seven, two boys and five girls. I come from a simple background; my father a farmer had a medium build, muscular with dark curly hair. His dark, serious eyes told the story of his struggles. My mother was a home maker. She was tall with long black hair. She too was a serious woman but she was the glue which held the family together. We lived off the land my father cultivated with his hands. Everyday he would bring us fresh corn, beans and fruit. My mother, Antonia, and my older sister, Maria, would cook and bake in the oven located on the side of the house. As a child I remember climbing trees, picking the fruit from it and eating it. I didn't have shoes but I didn't care, it was common among everyone. My sister Cecilia who was four years older looked after me. We would walk to the nearby stream to bathe. She would dress me and comb my hair. I felt safe with her. I was loved and cared for, this was my home. I was surrounded by my family, family was very important. It was the foundation which held us together.

At 11:30p.m. on a stormy July night in 1980, it all came to a tragic end. We had no electricity in Las Lomas. Everything was dark, especially on this night. My father and Rosa, my oldest sister, then eighteen years old, were not home. In support of Archbishop Oscar Romero they walked the countryside to preach Liberation Theology. For them this night was not different than any other night. The storm would not stop them from what they believed in. The rest of us huddled together on the dirt floor waiting for the storm to pass; a couple of candles lit the room. I can still hear the crackling of the thunder; the loud bang of the rain falling on the tin roof. The wind gusts were so vicious the trees were swaying from side to side; some were broken in half by the powerful winds. Mother Nature was commanding this night. Suddenly, just as the wind picked up speed the door flew open, my father and Rosa entered. They were soaking wet and panting from walking up the mountain. My father ordered us into the next room and told us not to say a word. Only the adults were allowed to stay, Rosa and Maria were included. We

did as we were told immediately and ran into the room. What I remember next is something I have lived with all my life, always thinking about that horrible night. I can still feel my brother's hand pressed tightly against my mouth. We heard gunshots, for every one fired my brother squeezed a little harder so I couldn't scream. My brother, Salvador, the oldest boy, whose hand was covering my mouth, had no idea I saw it all happen. I remember the bravery in my father's eyes, the fear in my mother's and as she fell to the floor she glanced at the room and reached out her hand. I knew she was dead. I wanted to run to her, to touch her, to save her. Each time I think about it I feel so close her. It is still so real. I wonder what she could have been thinking at that moment.

There we laid on the dirt floor of the two room home my father built with his own two hands. When he was confident the men were gone, Salvador ran out to get help but no one came. The five of us spent the night together, holding each other, alone and scared. We didn't move for we were afraid the men would come back. We waited for what seemed to me like days until the sun came up over the mountain I once called home. Where I once climbed its trees and ate from its fruits, where I picked and ate the corn from the fields my father cultured with his bear hands. We became orphans in an instant that night. The next morning we were woken up by the sound of the rooster's crow. We walked out of the closet-sized room only to find my parents and sisters lying in their own blood on the floor. Outside, people were gathering mourning the loss of half my family...cousins, aunts, uncles, friends, neighbors, people who looked up to my father. It was a beautiful morning; the sun peaking over the neighboring mountains illuminated the sky. The ground was still moist from the rain, the leaves were heavy with drops of rain and as they fell to the floor they looked like tears falling to the ground. What a sad morning it was, I was well aware of the changes about to take place. I felt so empty inside. Gone was everything familiar to me, my home, my family. What would happen now? Where would I live? Who would take care of me? Of us?

The next day was the funeral. Unlike the day before, it was a gray, gloomy day; the clouds hovered above us and hung low. There was a slight breeze in the air. Everyone came together to bury my family. I was not allowed to attend because I was too young. I remember people walking down the road carrying my family in caskets, leaving me behind, I ran after them. "I want to go with my mom and dad!" I screamed out loud, but nobody heard my cry. I watched as they disappeared around the corner. I remember sitting on the ground in the middle of the road, my legs stretched out, my head hanging low. I cried and cried. I felt so heavy...so alone.

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