

# Benito

## El Salvador

Well, that was in the 80's. The new generation maybe doesn't know, that's history for them, but I lived that history. It was part of my life at that time, the Cold War between Russia and the United States, communists and capitalists, guerrillas and all that turmoil [in the] time that we were living in the 80's. So El Salvador is a small country, but it was very important to control that area. So there was a civil war, it was a bloody war there. I was 18 years old. I was ready to go to college, but the universities were closed. The soldiers were fighting and so my life was in danger. There was a time in my life in the 70's beginning to 80's that I didn't care about politics. All that I wanted was to play baseball, because that's when I was playing baseball at that time. That was my passion. But there was a time in my life that some of my friends were involved as guerrillas. Then, the government was soldiers. So my friends said, "Hey, we need to get into this fight."

I said, "I don't care about politics. I don't want to get involved."

But then they began to think, "So why do you not want to get involved? Are you with them?"

"No, I don't [fight] with them and I don't [fight] with you. I just don't care."

Then the government would say, "Hey, we need you to become a soldier to fight the guerrillas and the communists and everything."

"And I said I don't want it."

"So you are a communist?"

So it was a moment that [in Spanish we say], "entre la espada y la pared = between the sword and the wall." My life was in danger. I say right now, if I had decided to stay at that time, I would be dead right now. That's why God took me from El Salvador to Costa Rica. So at 18 years old, with two friends of mine, we decided to move to Costa Rica.

And from Costa Rica, I met my wife there. My wife is from the States, so she moved to Costa Rica to study Spanish. We ended up married in 1988. So we stayed there in Costa Rica, we lived there for 27 years or something like that. Then, I met my father-in-law. He became like my father. I grew up without a father in my country, so he became my father. In 2010, we visited him and my father was sick, really sick. He was in a wheelchair and he was in need of somebody to care for him. There were some caregivers with him, but he was not happy. His desire was to die at home, at his house. And Patti and I began to talk about it. So we decided to move from Costa Rica to the States in 2011. But my plan was, "ok I'll go to the States with my wife, take care of my father, and then come back to my country." But this is something you don't plan on. So we ended up in Knoxville, TN. We just took care of my father-in-law for 7 years, and then I became a missionary here in Fellowship Church. Then, we decided to stay and work as missionaries and that's what I'm doing now.

I'm a Christian, so now I understand that God has a purpose for my life. Now I'm just trying to not waste my life, but to have a meaning in my life. Because there are Hispanics here in the

States, and I'm just trying to go and walk in the streets and meet people and talk with people (mostly men) and try to tell them all the sacrifices that you do to come to this "Promised Land"--because the United States is a promised land for so many--so I'm trying to tell them, don't waste your life doing wrong things. If you're here in the States, take that chance and do some good.

# Deeksha

## India

I came here for my studies. I did a master's in architecture; that was a two-year program.

In Indian culture, usually the boys are supposed to take care of their parents; but my brother chose to do marine engineering, for which he has to be on sea for most part of the year. So I thought, I'll take care of my parents. So when I came here, it was basically not my dream to come here. My dad wanted to send me to do higher studies here in America. A lot of things added up onto bringing me here. My master's (the specialization that I wanted to do) wasn't available in India, so my dad wanted me to seek other places. Then, once I told him America, he was like, "Yes! You should go!"

"I'm not too sure that I want to leave you guys."

"No, you should go. You should definitely go."

People call it "American Dream." It was probably his dream more than mine. So my dream was to complete my studies and go back to India once I was done with my studies. But then, I got settled here; I had friends here. Dreams kind of changed. So I thought, maybe I can do some time here, experience more of America after I graduated. And so I remained. But, I still hoped to go back once my parents were old enough to need my care.

So once I completed my studies, once everyone--all the internationals--when they complete their studies, the U.S. system will allow you one year of work authorization while still being on your student visa. The STEM programs, which are science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, they get a two-year extension. So during this time--whether one year or one plus two years--students usually try to get a work visa sponsored by their employer, which my employer did sponsor; but, it got rejected. Things were just not in my favor I guess. So that's why I have to go back.

I didn't have anyone to look to, to tell me how to do things here. So I had to pretty much do it all by myself. And probably that's the reason why in my first semester, I got really sick for about two months, that it was even hard to get up from my bed. I kept on seeing the doctor and she couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. In two months, I kind of figured out that it's probably stress, that my mental health is affecting my physical health. That was a very hard time, my first semester. Also, all the friends (all the people who came from India), they were all from the South, and I'm from the North. So they spoke different languages, they had a totally different culture, so I didn't feel like I had anyone who would understand me.

And then I got acquainted with some Christians who helped me with buying a car, which was also such a big trouble when I couldn't even get up from my bed. It was such a blessing to get that car (to buy that car). All the people that I found at Bridges, they were very helpful. It was

just so nice. And that's when I started feeling that I am loved. That totally changed my perspective of Americans. So that was the biggest and nicest experience.

# Eddy

## Kenya

Back in the 2000's, there were ads running in the newspaper in Kenya for people who wanted to come to the United States. I think they were looking at professionals, looking to fill spots for baby boomers as they retire out. So it was actually an ad. So my parents decided that, "This is risky. We have very good jobs here. Our children go to great schools; they're doing well in school. But, from the way we see our government going, they may not have the opportunities that people have in America. So we're going to take this risk. We'll move our family there, if they allow us to get in. It's not the easiest process. It's a lottery system. They go through absolutely everything about your life. They basically try to pick the best out of the best. I'm very grateful that my parents were very gifted professionals in their field. My mom was a banker, and my dad was an accountant. My mom actually ended up getting the citizenship, or the green card, to be able to come here.

First thing when we moved here, all my mom's qualifications--she'd done well in school, she had worked hard, and she had a lot of experience--were absolutely out the window, because you're working a completely different system. She had to go work minimum wage jobs. She'd always be taking pills here and there. Later on, I found out these pills were [for] ulcers. She's telling me that it's stress related, because she's worried about how she's going to take care of these kids. There were three of us: me, my little brother, and my sister. I would see her praying every single day before she'd go to work. She'd be praying and praying and singing out loud, like in the living room. To me, it put an effect on me.

It was a double whammy that happened: Katrina happened. That caused a lot of people to move to Houston, the city that we moved into. And then obviously, with my dad not having any American experience, it made it very difficult for him to find work. At this time, we were making the most out of school lunches. Other Kenyans over here were helping us make rent. It's not like my parents were not trying to find work. My mom was working her minimum wage job. She'd come home late at night. My dad was busy trying to look for work. Eventually he found something in Tennessee and moved us to Tennessee. That's how I ended up out here.

I just became a teenager. So obviously, I needed things like deodorant. My mom, she couldn't buy deodorant, because she had to focus on buying food. That was really embarrassing for me. And I wanted to go and participate in soccer, because I loved soccer. And I couldn't do that, because no one would be able to pick me up and no one would buy me shoes. It was a very difficult year, so I felt it; but I was really grateful for where I was. We had so many things that we didn't have back in Kenya. But then again, there were times I just really hated this place. I hated being different. I hated being told that I have an accent. There were incidents where my brother acted out in school, because of being frustrated. I don't know if it was the same frustrations.

So my mom, she never went back to banking. But my dad ended up in accounting. He actually ended up as the general manager of his firm. But my mom has ended up doing something that she's ok with. You can tell she's still bitter about how things turned out, but I really appreciate her for doing what she did.

There's things that I'm doing here that my counterparts in Kenya just absolutely cannot do. The amount of training I can get in my field, options I can get to advance myself. I feel like if I don't succeed, it's because I just didn't put in the work. There's just so much for me to be appreciative of. I seriously don't know what my mom would have done to feed us if we didn't have a free lunch in middle school and in parts of high school. Like I really don't know what my mom would have done to feed us. So I try to be involved as much as I can with my community here; because now that I'm an adult, I realize somebody decided they wanted things better. That's what I want to do too for my community. I want my community to be better. So, I want to be involved here and I want to be involved back there, to empower other kids who are coming up like I did.

# Edy

## Mexico

I was 14 years old when my parents decided to come to the United States. I moved straight to Knoxville from Mexico, especially because I had an aunt here. She really said that this was a wonderful place--very clean, very safe, not a lot of traffic. It was just a perfect place to start. My parents got a job offer, so I started as a sophomore here. I didn't know any English. Basically, I knew a few words, I knew how to say hi. Basically when people tell you, "I speak a little Spanish, un poquito." They know three words. Well, that was me with English. I basically knew three words and that was it. So the first year here, it was a little rough. I barely understood anything. It took me a little time to get used to it. I remember I felt like I didn't really fit here, I just wanted to go back. But, after a year, year and a half, I started to learn English a little bit. I started to be able to have conversations with other people, and I just started to get more comfortable with the community and the language and just everything in general.

The lifestyle in Mexico and the United States is very different. You still do the same things--you still go to work, go to school--but I always felt like in the U.S., the lifestyle is more fast-paced. I think the hard thing is just [to] feel like you belong here. There are some people that really don't think that you belong here. So, do I really belong here? Can I call this home? Can I not call it home? That's the hard part. But at the same time, there are so many good people that just help you all the time for whatever you need. I remember there was this lady that my parents met at a garage sale. And then suddenly, she was teaching me English. In the afternoon after school, I would go every Tuesday and Thursday to her house. She would just talk to me, and that just helped me a lot. [Because of] people like that, I was able to grow as a person and also just grow in the community here.

# Marcia

## Brazil

When I was in Brazil, UT went to my university back there to talk about what they had here, the programs and stuff. So then I got the card of my advisor. Some friends had come here to do their internships and stuff, and they talked about [Knoxville]. I thought “ok, that’s fun.” So then I sent an email to this advisor and asked if she had any opportunities for master’s. A few months later, she said, “hey, I have an open spot.” Oh that’s cool! So that’s when I did the GRE, the stuff that I had to do, the tests, the application. It took a while, and then I passed. And that’s why I came.

I used to work with animals only, a little bit of the forages in the pastures. When I came here, it was straight to the pastures and forages. I had to learn more of the agronomy part. For me, it was hard. I was in another country, I was alone, I had to do my research, and I had to do all this stuff, and I still didn’t know much about [the classes]. It was hard. And I work with forages--which is the plant that the animals consume--but I always worked in grazing systems where the animal eats the plant. So I had the plant part, I wasn’t in the department of that, but I always had the animal part.

I felt so different when I came here to the south. I know it’s weird, I didn’t expect that, but it was different. I like it, but it was a different situation, because I had a position in the university I had to meet and I had to study all over again, and the accent was so totally different. So it was hard actually. I don’t know if I had an expectation, but it was for sure harder than I thought. I don’t know if it was because of how I came, in a different situation, so when I was in O’hare, I wanted to party and go out. I was in Chicago, so I would go out and I would have fun. I felt super good. I felt different, because I’m the Latina here, I’m different. I really liked it. It was so good, and it was the same in Oregon. But then when I came here, it was like “you’re not from here, you shouldn’t be here” kind of a situation. I actually heard a few people, two people when I catch the bus or something. I couldn’t really tell them that I got a position here. I usually tell them I just came on my own, because if I tell them that I got a position here, they would say something. So I think people saying that I shouldn’t be here, I heard [them saying] “you will go back, right?”... It was hard.



# Patti

## United States, Ireland

There are different times when my family came to the United States. We do know that some of our relatives were living in Pittsburgh in the 1700s, because they were involved in the "Whiskey Rebellion." They owned a whiskey distillery, so they were enemies of George Washington at the time. But the story I grew up hearing the most was that my great grandfather, Lawrence Hamilton, was 16 years old when he came over by himself from Northern Ireland to the United States. He didn't have very good opportunities where he was living, and there was a lot of unrest in Northern Ireland at the time. So it was just difficult with finding work and then the political unrest, because there was a lot of conflict between Ireland and England at the time. Did Ireland fall under English rule, or would they be independent? So it was just to get out of a tough climate that he came over on the HMS Caledonia. He came over with absolutely nothing and started working in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as a printer, just an assistant printer. Eventually, he went off and worked on the Canadian railroads and fell in love with a Canadian woman named Myrtle. They moved back to Pittsburgh and started their family. That's my maternal grandmother's father and mother. So, my grandmother grew up the daughter of Irish immigrants.