

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

40 stories for the 40 Day Bible and Prayer Challenge

1. **Sonia** and **Julia** are sisters who were recently apprehended at the U.S. border. They fled their home country of Honduras after receiving death threats from an uncle. Sonia has a mental disability. Julia witnessed the sexual abuse of Sonia by a family member. Julia told her aunt about the sexual abuse. When the aunt asked her husband to leave the home, he became enraged and threatened to kill them all. Due to the lack of trust in the justice system, the aunt decided it was safest to take the girls far away. The next day, the aunt fled with the girls to the U.S. where their mother was living. The girls are currently in transitional foster care, working on reunification with their mother. They are also in the process of getting legal assessment regarding a potential special immigrant juvenile visa or asylum.
2. **Lidia** is a Guatemalan mother who worked at Tecum Uman near a border station selling food. Her niece, Elena, who helped her in the business, suddenly disappeared. Lidia was able to locate her in Chiapas and learned that Elena had been forced into a brothel by a gang. She tried to talk with her but was prevented from having any contact. She decided to report the kidnapping and trafficking to the prosecutor's office, but instead of arresting the perpetrators, they arrested Lidia and charged her with trafficking! Unable to read, she was tricked into signing a confession by the prosecutor by saying that she was signing papers for her niece's release. She was convicted on the confession and false testimony and sentenced to 13 years. After being incarcerated for five years, pressure from her community made the judge release her from prison. She has not seen nor heard from her niece.
3. **Marta**, 4, is from Guatemala and was sexually and physically abused by her father. Marta's mother was living in the U.S. as a legal resident when she heard about the abuse. She flew to Guatemala and contacted authorities to help her remove Marta from her father's home. Although she was successful in removing her daughter from this situation, the father was not incarcerated for his actions. He began threatening to kill Marta, as well as intimidating and threatening family members to learn Marta's location. Marta's mother had to return to the U.S. but didn't have any legal way to bring Marta with her. Marta's mother made the difficult decision to send her daughter on the frightening journey to the U.S. with a guide in order for them to live safely together. Marta is currently in transitional foster care working on reunification with her mother. She is also in the process of getting legal assessment on a possible special immigrant juvenile visa or asylum. If interviewed, the 4-year-old girl may not be able to express her fear about living in her home country so would be returned.

4. **Fernando** lived in Honduras in a city saturated with gang violence. His family received regular threats and extortion by gang members, with Fernando frequently being witness to gang members threatening his father with a gun. One time, Fernando decided to stand up to the gang members, and one of them shot his brother in the shoulder as a consequence. When he reached 14, Fernando was in a car with friends when they were shot at numerous times by gang members. Fernando was not hurt but had to lay in the blood of his friends, pretending to be dead, in order to escape. After this incident, his family helped make plans for Fernando to come to the U.S. Fernando received a special immigrant juvenile visa due to the trauma and violence he experienced in Honduras. He eventually went into the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement's Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program and has recently received his green card to live in the U.S.

5. **Eduardo**, at 14, the oldest child in his family, which lives in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and his father went to the U.S., both seeking work. While the journey was grueling and frightening, they made it to the U.S. border where they were separated, and **Eduardo's** father was deported to Guatemala. After six months alone in a shelter with no one who spoke his language – and he couldn't speak Spanish or English – he fell and hurt his back. All he wanted to do was go home, and he asked to be sent back. It was a long process, but after returning home, Pop Noj, an AMMPARO companion in Guatemala, helped him reintegrate into his community, get the medical attention he needed, including getting glasses, and re-enrolled in school. He has no desire to ever leave again.

6. **Carlos, Javier, and Luis**, along with their little sister, **Mariana**, journeyed to the U.S. from Honduras after being neglected and abused by their caregivers and receiving death threats from gangs. After the children's father died in a car accident in 2005, their mother left for the U.S. to provide for the children. During this separation, the children were left with caregivers who barely fed them and abused them both physically and emotionally, often taping their mouths shut during calls with their mother. Eventually, the children's mother decided to bring them to the U.S. after a gang threatened to kill them. The four of them traveled to the U.S., and after apprehension at the border, were successfully reunited with their mother after seven years of separation.

At this time, the four siblings are all enrolled in school, have started therapy to recover from past trauma, have pro-bono legal representation and have been identified as having legal relief. They are trying to learn English, play soccer on a community team, and are slowly recovering from their experiences in Honduras.

7. **Rosa**, 9, and **Juan**, 12, came from the same village in Honduras. They reported that a gang running in their neighborhood was known to kidnap children, kill them, and sell their organs on the black market. The gang was also known to kidnap children, cut them open, put drugs in their bodies, sew them back up and use the bodies as containers to traffic drugs. Both children said their teachers in Honduras would warn the students about this gang and instructed children to interact with nobody during their walks to and from school. Both children said they knew children from the neighborhood that had been kidnapped and never seen again. Both are now doing well in transitional foster care, have been connected to legal services, and have been found eligible for relief.

8. **Walter**, a resident of Olancho, Honduras, and his family sold everything they had and paid a coyote to bring the family of three to the U.S. In Mexico, they were robbed, and since they had no resources, when they reached the U.S. border they turned themselves in to the authorities. Walter was detained, and his mother and little brother were released. After a year in detention, he was deported and now lives alone in his town. With the help of The Lutheran World Federation World Service project for deported migrants in Honduras, he has been able to reconstruct a life, which includes working as a bricklayer's assistant, and has plans to go back to school. Despite the fact that his mother and brother are still in the U.S., he has no desire to make the migrant journey again.
9. **Andrea** was released to her mother with a referral for post-release services due to the history of abuse in her home country, exposure to community violence and other needs. Upon release, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's (LIRS) local partner began working with Andrea and her mother, with whom she was reunified. Shortly after the initial 14-day visit, the family contacted the social worker and informed her that Andrea, a minor, was pregnant.

In response, the LIRS social worker returned for an additional home visit to provide support and other assistance and community resources. During this visit, Andrea told the social worker she was raped after entering the U.S. This was not previously disclosed in the shelter prior to release.

She is now raising her child with the help of her mother and has obtained a special visa. The social worker has established a strong relationship with the family since the release and continues to work and advocate on their behalf in the face of an extremely difficult and sad situation.

10. **Maricel**, 15, was reunified with her sister in January 2014. Maricel left her home country to escape ongoing community violence. She had been kidnapped and raped by a gang. In order to find protection and safety, she traveled with her older sister to the U.S. During the journey, Maricel and her sister were kidnapped and held for three days. Her sponsor paid \$200 and Maricel was released. When she was finally reunified with her older sister in Maryland, she told her social worker that she was seven months pregnant. The social worker connected her with medical and mental health resources and got her involved in a prenatal care program. Maricel responded well to the resources and gave birth to a healthy daughter.

With the assistance of her sponsor, she has grown into a loving mother. Her sponsor is assisting with financial resources while Maricel continues her education. In addition, Maricel has a lawyer who is working on her asylum case. Her lawyer says Maricel has a strong case, and they are hopeful that soon she will find the safety and protection she has been seeking.

11. **Juan**, 11, is from El Salvador. He lived with his mother until in November 2016 she was fatally shot 15 times by a gang. Juan was playing soccer in a field nearby at the time but his 4-year-old sister, Rosa, saw the murder. He then moved in with his aunts. When Juan, **Rosa** and his sister **Lisbeth**, 19, received death threats from the gang in their community, they decided to go to the United States, but they were separated when apprehended at the border.
12. **Lara** fled Guatemala at 15 to come to the U.S. in 2016. Lara and her mother grew up being regularly beaten by her father. Lara would often put herself in front of her mother to shield her from his punches. When Lara reached 15, Lara's father decided to sell her to an older man for marriage, provided he paid her father monthly. Lara refused and fled Guatemala.

13. **Miguel**, 14, fled Honduras in the fall of 2016. Growing up, he daily encountered violence. One day on his way back from school a gang stopped him and recruited him to help carry out murders and smuggle drugs. When Miguel refused, he was told, “Think carefully about this offer or we’ll kill you.” Miguel decided to flee Honduras, leaving his mother and siblings behind. In Mexico, Miguel was robbed at gun point and had all his possessions, including his documents, stolen.
14. **Rosa**, 17, is from Honduras. In Honduras, she lived with her sister and two cousins because her father had been murdered 12 years before and her mother had abandoned her shortly after. She fled Honduras in the summer of 2016 after watching gang members kill her 16-year-old brother, **David**. David had fled to the U.S. to escape gang violence but was apprehended at the border and signed up for voluntary deportation. He was killed 22 days after returning to Honduras. During the journey through Mexico, Rosa was raped. She sought to live with a cousin in the U.S.
15. **Antonio**, 17, fled Honduras with his 6- and 8-year-old nephews, **Jesus** and **Albert**. Antonio was pressured to join a gang and ultimately joined to keep himself safe, although he refused to participate in violence. Antonio fled with his nephews to live with another relative in Honduras after both their fathers were murdered when they refused to give up their homes. Antonio and his nephews lived with another relative until gangs again threatened to murder their relative and Antonio’s 8-year-old nephew. It was then that Antonio decided to flee with his nephews to the U.S.
16. **Melissa**, 17, was raped in her native Guatemala. She was severely traumatized and afraid all the time. Melissa was eventually granted refugee status. She has reunited with her lawful permanent resident parent in the U.S., where she is now receiving services to address her trauma.
17. **Maria**, originally from El Salvador, has been lawfully living in the U.S. She applied to bring her teenage son, **Marco**, to the U.S. because of the death threats he was receiving after he refused to join a gang. After almost three months in the process, Marco was murdered while seeking refugee status. Marco’s death demonstrates the impossible position of so many parents who are in the U.S.
18. **Sara**, 17, fled Honduras with her 1-year-old son, **Alex**, and her partner, **Ronald**, due to community violence and to seek medical care for Alex. After placement with the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, Sara and her son were eventually released to a grandparent. However, in 2016, Sara grew fearful after watching a news report in Spanish that anyone who was Hispanic would be deported. This led to Sara running away with her infant because she feared living in her grandmother’s state. Sara’s case worker eventually was able to calm her fears to the point she was willing to attend school again.
19. **Abigail**’s mother had migrated to the U.S. seven years ago and was concerned about her, so she paid a coyote to bring Abigail and a small group of other people to the U.S. They faced the scorching heat of the desert, and Abigail’s lips were chapped and cracked and began to scab. A woman fainted from the heat and was revived using cucumbers because there was no water. Abigail was frightened, dehydrated and hungry when she was captured by border agents. Her mother paid a new coyote to get Abigail out of the shelter she was in and bring her home. The new coyote took Abigail, and her mother lost contact with her for two weeks. Her mother couldn’t eat or sleep wondering where Abigail was. Finally, the coyote called and said it would cost \$2,000

more to bring Abigail home. He said that Abigail was hysterical, wouldn't eat and that many coyotes would have already abused a girl like her. Abigail's mother agreed to pay the money, and a week later Abigail came home.

20. **Sandra**, a 14-year-old from Guatemala, was raped and threatened by a 24-year-old man and became pregnant. Fearful that the rapist would come after her again and knowing the authorities wouldn't protect her, she left for the U.S. However, she was captured by a gang in Mexico that demanded a ransom for her release. After a month in custody, her parents paid the ransom, and she was released in the desert near the U.S.-Mexico border. She was placed in a shelter when she attempted to cross the border and has now been united with her mother, who lives in Los Angeles. Her mother found a pro-bono attorney who is helping her receive asylum in the U.S.

21. **Israel** fled El Salvador because the gangs threatened to kill him and his son. He was divorced, and his ex-wife lived separately with his younger child. He raised his son as a single father. In early 2015, his son began to get harassed by the 18 St. gang. The son tried to ignore them, but the gang members got angry. They told him that if he didn't join the gang, they would kill him and his father. Israel was forced to take his son out of school because the threats were getting so bad and gang members were beating him up at school and on his way home. Unfortunately, the gangs had followed his son home and knew who his father was and where they lived. Israel used to work as a handyman and had a truck he would drive around with his tools and equipment. After his son stopped going to school, the gang members came to their home. They said they knew Israel earned decent money and that he would have to pay them every month or they would kill them both for refusing to join them. They held guns to Israel's head until he agreed to pay them \$200, which was almost everything he had. He had no choice but to give them the money. After that, the gang members would show up at the house every week or every other week asking for money and threatening to kill them. They did this for about six months. One day, the gang members asked for \$5,000 in the morning and said that they would be back at night. They said if Israel couldn't pay they were going to kill them. That was more than what he could earn in a year, so he felt that he had no choice but to report the threats to the police. However, the police said they couldn't do anything to help, so he didn't go back home that night. The gang returned that night and saw that he was not there. They destroyed his work truck and shot up the home, leaving the walls full of bullet holes. Israel left the next day with his son and came to the U.S. border asking for protection. Israel didn't even get to say goodbye to his other child because he didn't want the gangs to hurt her or his ex-wife. Thankfully, they have a family friend in the United States who has let them stay in his home, but Israel can't afford a lawyer to represent him in court. He is terrified that he won't be able to win their case on his own, and that his son and he will be killed if they are deported.

22. **Jesus**, 20, is from La Ceiba, Honduras, and first fled gang violence when he was 14. In Honduras, he lived on the border between two gang territories. Fleeing death threats and gang recruitment, he became an internally displaced person in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in 2010. In 2012, the gangs in San Pedro Sula threatened him and almost killed him. He fled through Mexico to the United States, where he was granted a temporary visa. He returned to Honduras, where gangs again beat him and burned his arms. He again fled to Mexico, where he saw a woman, who had been raped, killed. He was interdicted and detained in Mexico, where he was forced to live near gang members. Officials never explained his rights to him, and he was consequently prevented from applying for protection. Mexico deported him to Honduras, returning him to grave danger. Fleeing once again to Mexico, Zetas cartel members kidnapped and physically and sexually abused him. Eventually, he escaped,

but Mexico arrested and deported him yet again. He fled again, this time reaching the United States, which deported him to Mexico, where he now stays at a migrant shelter in Veracruz.

23. The girl is dead. She's 15 and her name is **Marcela**. Witnesses say she was executed by a gang member. We can't see her face. All we can see is her plaid pants and gray T-shirt. Her family is across the street in a pickup truck. We can't tell you their names because it would put them in danger. Marcela's mother is too upset to talk. So, we talk to her grandmother. She says Marcela left the house that morning with her sister. The two worked in downtown San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, making tortillas. The grandmother tells us that Marcela's boyfriend was a bus driver in a gang-controlled neighborhood. First, he got threats. "Help the gang or we'll kill you." Then he disappeared. Then Marcela started getting threats. And now this: Marcela's body, lying on the ground, while people drive to work. We find the police investigator on the case. He says Marcela was attacked from behind and shot twice in the head. He says Marcela's sister witnessed the killing. She's now in police protection. We ask him why a gang member would kill a 15-year-old girl. He speculates that it's because she didn't want to be someone's girlfriend or didn't want to do something for that gang. Is this normal, we ask? Does it happen to young women a lot? It happens every day, he says. The police later release Marcela's sister from their protection, even though local reporters tell us the gangs will probably go after her now. The family tells us their only option is to leave the country, ideally for the United States. But they have only about \$200. It's not nearly enough to pay a smuggler.
24. **Lucas** was describing his reasons for wanting to stay in the United States as opposed to returning to Guatemala. His uncle had been killed by a gang, and his brother had been beat up a year after that by the same gang. After his brother was beat up, Lucas left for the United States. One day Lucas, who was still in Guatemala, was walking to church and the same gang approached him, beat him up, cut off his finger tips and told him this was the last time they would beat him. The next time they would kill him. He left for the United States shortly after that. He has four brothers, and one had just been detained at the Texas border. His lawyer, in cross examination, asked him if he would stop going to church if he went back. He said he would never stop going to church because his love for God was too great. The judge has asked for more evidence.
25. **Jasmine**, 17, is from Guatemala. She is an unaccompanied minor who is under the care of her aunt, whom she met when she arrived in the United States. Jasmine appeared in court for the second time without a lawyer. The judge gave her an extension, so she could look for an attorney. During her court session, the judge decided to go off the record and have a conversation with her. During this conversation we learned a bit about her current living situation. Jasmine has a boyfriend who is much older than her. Because of tensions in her aunt's home, she decided to move out of her aunt's house and go live with him. For this reason, there are some organizations that are unable to help her since she is no longer under her legal guardian's protection. She is pregnant and no longer attends school. Like many other kids, Jasmine doesn't seem to understand what she is facing.

26. **Jose's** story: I am 17 years old and am from El Salvador. A year ago, I was a student at the National University studying electrical engineering. However, the gangs in my neighborhood began threatening me and my family. They wanted me to join their gang, but I resisted. Finally, they told me that if I did not join, they would kill me, or my family, or both. My parents put me on the journey to the United States, where I have two uncles. I spent two months traveling across Guatemala and Mexico, many times hiding from the police or from Mexican gangs. I finally reached the United States, where I was detained for a month in the "Refrigerator" at a detention center in Texas. The temperature was a constant 60 degrees, and I had only a blanket and my underwear. No shoes and socks; no shirt or pants. It was miserably cold. We only got one meal a day, usually a white-bread sandwich with a piece of baloney in between—dry. Finally, I was allowed to travel to Los Angeles where I am now staying with my uncles and going to high school—mainly to learn English. My court date has not been set. I fear being returned to El Salvador, as I'm sure I will be killed as soon as I arrive.
27. **Ana's** story: I left Guatemala after both of my parents were murdered by gang members. My father was a farmer who was gunned down while he was working in the fields. No one knows why he was targeted. A few years later, I was home with my mother and my four siblings when a masked man holding a shotgun broke into our home. The man demanded all the money we had in the house, but we didn't have enough for him, so he shot and killed my mother in front of us. That was the hardest thing in my life, seeing my mother killed. I have a sister who is close to my age, but our other three siblings are very young. My sister and I didn't know how we were going to take care of them. After our mom was killed, my sister and I decided to move to another part of Guatemala. We knew that gang members often break into houses where young women are staying alone and rape them, and we didn't want to stay in the place where we had seen our mother killed. We tried to make ends meet in another part of Guatemala, but we couldn't make enough to take care of our little brother and sisters. All of us were affected by our parents' death but we weren't able to afford any kind of therapy; we could barely afford enough to eat. We never felt safe wherever we went. So, we decided to come to the United States so that our younger siblings could feel safe, get an education, and have a better life than what my sister and I could offer them after our parents were taken away from us.
28. **Meylin's** story: I cannot return to El Salvador because the MS-13 gang will kidnap my daughter and kill me. I come from a humble background and worked hard to open a small store to support my family. MS-13 started taking over my neighborhood, and everyone lived in fear of the gang. The gang members would come into my store and take things without paying. They would also ask for money almost daily and would keep raising the amount they demanded. They were demanding more than I could give, so I was forced to close my store. The MS-13 gang was very angry that I closed the store and demanded \$7,000 or they would kidnap my 8-year-old daughter. They said she was very pretty and they could do a lot of things with her. They also said that if I went to the police, they would kill me and my other children. I would not have gone to the police anyway because they are connected with the gangs and often tell the gang members when victims report crimes. The gangs have killed many people who have tried to cooperate with the police. I know I can't go anywhere else in El Salvador because MS-13 is everywhere, and others who have tried to flee to other parts of the country following similar threats have been found and killed. After the gangs threatened to kidnap my daughter, I could not send her to school anymore. We fled to the United

States and asked for protection at the border. We were detained in freezing cold rooms and given very little food to eat. The gangs have now started targeting my mother, and I am afraid that she will be hurt or killed because I left.

29. **Felicita's** story: I cannot return to Honduras because I will be killed, either by my ex-partner or gang members. Several years ago, gang members murdered my husband. They mistook him for someone else and shot him in the street. I was left with three children to raise on my own. The gangs were angry because I spoke to the police when my husband was murdered, and I was so afraid that they would hurt me or my children. The police didn't do much in investigating my husband's murder anyway. Eventually, I got together with my ex-partner, Diego. I thought he could help me support my children and be a father figure to them, but once he moved in with us, he became extremely abusive. He would beat me often, and one time, he beat me so badly that he broke my hand. He was very controlling and wouldn't let me get any medical treatment, so the bones healed poorly and are painful and twisted to this day. Diego's presence also did nothing to protect us from the gangs. Gang members constantly harassed my teenage son to join them, and when he refused, they shot him, too. I didn't think I could take his death after losing his father, but thankfully he survived. After he was shot, my son stopped going to school and stayed at home to avoid any further problems. We were too poor to move to another part of Honduras, and Diego wouldn't have let me leave even if I had been able to. Once my son stopped leaving the house, the gangs started harassing my daughter, demanding that she join the gang. She was only 14. When she refused, they threatened to rape and kill her. She came home terrified, and even though the police didn't help much when my husband was killed, I reported the threats to them hoping that they could help protect my daughter. The gang members found out that I had reported the threats; I think someone at the police station told them. The gang members came to our house later that night and were very angry. They said they would rape me and my daughter, torture and kill us if we did anything else to defy them. My daughter stopped going to school after that, and I decided to risk leaving the country. Two of my children were too scared to go to school, and I knew it was just a matter of time before the gang members killed one of them. However, Diego didn't want to let us leave and told me he would tell the gang members if I tried to get away. I was terrified, but I knew I had to save my children's lives. One night, when Diego was out, we fled, taking almost nothing with us. Diego followed us and caught up with us in Guatemala, but he was caught by the Guatemalan authorities and sent back to Honduras. My three children and I continued our journey and finally made it to the United States. We asked for protection at the border and were detained for a short time before being released to a family friend in Los Angeles. The friend did not let us stay for very long because I wasn't able to find a job; it was very hard for me to find work without a work permit. My children and I were homeless and slept in a friend's car and even in a park before we were able to find a place to live. It was very frightening to stay in the park; I stayed awake all night to make sure no one hurt my children. Eventually, another friend took us in and let us stay. I am doing what I can to make money, but I barely make enough to feed my children. I can't afford a lawyer, and I can't get a work permit until after I submit my asylum application. The court says I can't fill out the form in Spanish, and I can't afford to pay anyone to help me. Even though it has been hard since we arrived, I am grateful that my children are safe, but I fear what will happen if we are deported. I am scared that we won't win our case because I will have to represent myself and my children in court.

30. **Deysi's** story: I can't go back to Honduras because the gangs told me I had to leave, or they would kill me. About 10 years ago, gang members were running from the police and hid in my brother's house. My brother gave the police permission to enter the home and they arrested the gang members. After they were sent to prison, my brother was extorted by the gangs because he let the police in. The gangs said that if he didn't pay, they would kill him. He went to another part of Honduras for a while so that the rest of our family would be safe. A few years later, the majority of the gang members were burned in a prison fire. After the prison fire, my brother returned home, but other gang members kept bothering him. I think they blamed him for their friends' deaths, since they wouldn't have been killed in the fire had they not been arrested and sent to prison. My brother decided to flee to the United States. He tried to ask the U.S. government for protection, but he couldn't afford to hire a lawyer to help him. He lost his asylum case and was deported to Honduras in 2011. Around the same time, the surviving gang members got out of prison and saw that my brother had not been killed by the other members of their gang. The gang members came to our house and killed him less than a year after he was deported. By then, the gang was stronger than before and killing a lot of people in the neighborhood. Many families abandoned their homes. After they killed my brother, the gang left notes saying the rest of our family couldn't live there anymore. We moved to our distant family's village, but the gangs found us there and continued threatening us. While all of this was going on, I got married, but my husband became extremely abusive. He raped me and beat me all the time, but I did not want to go to the police because of what had happened to my brother. Eventually, I couldn't take the abuse anymore, and it seemed like the gangs were going to find me no matter where I tried to live in Honduras. I finally escaped one night and brought my three children with me to the U.S. border to ask for protection.
31. **Noemi's** story: I had to flee Honduras because I was targeted and threatened by the gangs. I was a nurse in my country and a mother of three children. I had a home, car and a good career, and because of that, I was seen as well-off. I had my children in bilingual school and one of my children was in medical school. Because of my lifestyle, I had to pay or be killed. I knew the gangs were serious because my daughters and I saw them shoot and kill our neighbor. The gangs knew we had seen the murder and told us we would die if we cooperated with the police as witnesses. When the hospital where I worked found out that I was receiving threats and being forced to pay extortion money, they transferred me to an island in order to protect us. Other doctors have been kidnapped and one of them was shot because she didn't pay the gangs. The gangs are all over the country and well-connected, so it didn't take them long to find me. I was forced to continue to pay extortion money. They told me that if I didn't pay they would kill me and my children. For the past four years, I have been transferred to four cities, but the gangs always find me. Sometimes I would receive messages taped to my car telling me that they were watching me. Another time, gang members came into a bus and put a gun to my husband's head because he hadn't paid a ransom for me. The gangs would threaten to rape me and my daughters and threatened to kill my son. The gangs could also listen in on my phone calls no matter how many times I changed my number. Another time, gang members broke into my house and held a gun to my head in front of my children until I paid them. The same men who broke into my house held me up a few days later as I was coming out of the bank and took the money I had withdrawn. After many threats and hold-ups, I went to a higher police authority in my country, and they assigned me an agent, supposedly to protect me. The agent would text me and ask where I was in order to protect me, but I soon realized that they were giving the information to the gangs. I think that is how the gangs were able to find us, no matter how many times we moved. In the end, I had to pay because the police could not do anything to

protect us. They are part of the gangs in my country. After I reported the threats to the police, the gangs tried to kidnap my two daughters. The gangs said they would take my daughters and force them to be prostitutes. A few months ago, the gangs caught up to us again and tried to kidnap one of my daughters, but she was able to resist. The gangs then called me and told me my daughter had escaped, but they would continue to come after us until they had both of my daughters. We fled Honduras shortly after. My biggest problem now is that my brother is being threatened with death because we escaped. Thankfully, we were able to obtain tourist visas to come to the United States, and we are now applying for asylum. Life here has been really hard. My husband, three children and I are living in one room, and we are all very traumatized from what we have been through. My children are depressed, and I have terrible nightmares from the stress. I can't work in this country because I don't have a work permit, and I don't have money to obtain a nursing license here. We don't have the money to pay an attorney to help us. We gave almost all of our savings to the gangs trying to save ourselves, but in the end, we had to escape to save our lives.

32. **Maya** is from Jalisco, Mexico, and dated a boy who was hired by members of a powerful cartel to draw tattoos. Because of her relationship with him, she was labeled a snitch and was pursued and persecuted by the cartel. She fled Mexico and crossed the border into the United States, where she was apprehended and returned to Mexico. She spent a few months at a shelter in Mexico until family members picked her up. When she was brought home, the persecution continued, and, in fear for her life, she again fled and escaped to the United States. This time she was transferred to a refugee shelter in Arizona where she had a miscarriage. While at the Arizona shelter, a legal service provider identified her as eligible for asylum and filed an asylum application. She was released to a caregiver in Chicago.

33. **Mary**, 16, is from the state of Tamaulipas in Mexico. Her parents would spend most of the day away from home working more than 12 hours a day to make enough money to make ends meet. During the time her parents were away, cartel hitmen would break-in to the house intermittently to use her home as a hideout. Although they never harmed Mary, they held her hostage during these home invasions and said they would kill her if she told anyone, including her parents, about being in her home. The break-ins continued for about three months without Mary's parents knowing anything. When Mary's parents became aware of the break-ins and the threats, they decided to send her to the United States to live with an aunt. Mary was turned away at the border instead of being interviewed about why she feared returning home. On her trip back home, Mary was drugged and raped by three men. When Mary crossed again, she was asked if she feared returning and was transferred to Office of Refugee Resettlement custody to undergo further screening.

34. **Roxana** fled her country after several of her relatives were murdered by a gang. In fact, Roxana witnessed the gang murder someone, which caused the gang to target her with threats so that she would not testify. Roxana fled to the United States to seek protection from the threats against her. She was taken into the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement where she was able to speak with a legal team about why she was afraid to return to her country. They helped her file an application for asylum. Fortunately, the law permits unaccompanied children, like Roxana, to present their asylum claims to an asylum officer trained to interview children and victims of trauma, rather than in an adversarial court proceeding. This protection is critical for a girl like Roxana who will have to discuss the murders of her family, the violent murder she witnessed, and the threats that she faced in order to establish her claim.

35. **Fatima** suffered from relentless persecution by the gangs in Guatemala. They harassed her, attempted to kidnap her and sexually assaulted her. After Fatima's cousin reported this abuse to the police, the gangs learned of the report and killed Fatima's cousin. Unable to protect herself in Guatemala, Fatima fled to the United States where she was taken into the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. There she was able to speak with a legal team about why she was afraid to return to her country, and they helped her file an application for asylum.
36. **Gilberto**, 15, is from Mexico and grew up in a good home and went to a good school. One day he was walking with a friend to his girlfriend's house when a group of men approached them. They threatened Gilberto and his friend with guns, taped their hands together, blindfolded them, and took them away in a car. After a few minutes, they threw Gilberto's friend out of the car – it was Gilberto they wanted. The men knew that Gilberto had a border crossing card, and they threatened to kill his family if he did not carry drugs into the United States. That same day, they forced him to cross the border with drugs taped to his arms and legs. Gilberto shook with terror. The authorities at the border immediately took him into an interrogation room, where he was held for hours. Fortunately, instead of being sent back to Mexico, he was recognized as a potential trafficking victim and was sent to live in a shelter for unaccompanied children in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Gilberto now lives in Tucson, Ariz., with extended family; he is afraid that if he is forced to return to Mexico, the men who forced him to cross the border will find him. Thanks to the protections afforded to him as an unaccompanied child, he has been able to receive mental health services, a lawyer, educational services and other social services.
37. **Lisa** is a Guatemalan girl who survived severe exploitation, forced servitude and abuse. When Lisa was 14, she was kidnapped from her home in rural Guatemala. The kidnapper forced her to serve him as a domestic partner and a servant. Lisa's mother reported the kidnapping to the regional authorities but received no police assistance. Repeatedly raped during her captivity, Lisa gave birth to a child who eventually died because of neglect at the hands of the kidnapper. Eventually, Lisa escaped, fled to a home of a relative and sought refuge in the United States. Lisa lived for several months in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. After a home study by a social worker, she was reunited with her U.S. permanent-resident father. Her lawyer has helped her file for asylum, a claim that is pending. Her father is filing a family-based visa petition on her behalf.
38. **Risa** is of the Garifuna ethnic minority in Honduras, and twice she was brutally gang raped by non-Garifuna on account of her ethnicity. She fled to the United States to escape the ongoing threats from gangs. When Risa arrived in the United States, she was not able to communicate clearly and articulate her story. She was deeply traumatized by the gang rapes and did not feel comfortable disclosing such sensitive information. She began receiving psychological treatment to address the sexual violence that she experienced in Honduras, which enabled her to open up to her attorney and disclose what had happened to her. With this new information, Risa's attorney submitted an asylum application on her behalf, albeit more than a year after Risa arrived in the United States. Fortunately, this delay was not fatal to her eligibility for relief, and this extra time allowed her to prepare a more thorough application and provide better testimony during her asylum interview.

39. **Paola** came to the United States with her 2-year-old son, Brayan, when she was 16. Because her father abandoned her at birth, her mother was forced to look for work in the United States when she was very young. She was left with her erratic grandmother, who would beat her with sticks or belts. At 15, Paola moved in with her boyfriend. After she gave birth to Brayan, her boyfriend became increasingly controlling and violent. Ultimately, he cut her with a knife and threatened to kill all three of them, which caused Paola to flee to the United States with Brayan. The Office of Refugee Replacement appointed an independent child advocate for Paola. The child advocate assisted Paola and her mother through a complicated adjustment period while connecting the family with local services. Both Paola and Brayan now have Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and are awaiting their court dates.
40. **Jose** is from El Salvador. His father abandoned him when he was very young. Struggling to support Jose, his mother came to the United States when he was a child. Jose remained in El Salvador in the care of his grandparents. When Jose became a teenager, the MS-13 gang began to harass him and make threats against his life. Jose fled to the United States to reunite with his mother. When Jose first arrived in the United States, he was timid and did not speak any English. While fighting his immigration removal proceedings with the help of a free, non-profit attorney, Jose went to school where he devoted himself to his studies. Jose eventually obtained Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, his removal proceedings were granted, and he won his residency. Jose is now a senior in high school and is earning As and Bs. Jose took the SAT and applied to college. He is waiting to hear back about his applications.