

FACING LIFE AFTER HIV

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INTRODUCTION

I have thought of several ways to get started. I could do it either in a common way or trying to captivate or amaze the reader. I have decided to express myself as I am, because the main reason is to reflect my story, more difficult than others, or perhaps easier compared to others.

I want to enter the mind, the heart and the conscience of each person that reads me, I want to be known not for my physique, nor the stamp of my voice, but by my writing, and that they know about my childhood, my adolescence and the moments that marked my life, as upon receiving my diagnosis.

It means a lot to me and I write with hope that it reaches the correct hands and it leaves some teaching about the care of oneself and, in time, it can create awareness in society about the human immunodeficiency virus.

I would like to end with comments like “only the crazy ones and the homosexuals can get HIV, that is why I will never get it”; with the labels and judgements of those who feel they are in the correct side and with the power to annul other people’s future. I try to help so that society learn that HIV doesn’t distinguish sex, religion, socioeconomic status and sexual preference; that “modest” people as well as “promiscuous” people can get it; that nobody neither looks for it nor asks for it nor imagines to be in that situation.

I wish that my story helps people know a woman who, as many, has been labeled, marked and discriminated by society from the first minute in which she was diagnosed.

That is why I seek to give a face to HIV and speak on behalf of women, men, trans, lesbians, homosexuals and children. Although, in some cases the sexual preferences distinguish us, we are compatible with pain, humiliation and discrimination.

I intend to demonstrate that a fatal diagnosis does not define my life and that I decide my present and my future, even with HIV. For it I have entitled my work “Facing life after HIV”. It will be interesting to narrate what has come as to change my existence. I know that many will suspect how tragic this story will be and it delights me that you think about it and try to imagine it.

I want to thank those who motivated me to undertake this new stage in my life: family, friends, and those who, without knowing, are part of this text. In the same way I thank the accompaniment of great women in this new

adventure: Celia Margarita, Petra, Marisol, Carmen, Lupita, Paty. Above all, the one who showed me how amazing and important the writing is: Leonor Vargas. Thank you very much.

CHILDHOOD

Martin G. M. was born in the city of Puebla in 1956; he is the oldest of eleven brothers. His parents, Gabina and Claudio, were born in Tepeaca, Puebla.

Rosa L. S. was also born in Puebla, in 1960; eldest daughter of eleven brothers. Her parents, Elena and Juan, were born in Huamantla, Tlaxcala.

Martin y Rosa are my parents, who joined at the age of eighteen and fourteen years.

My mother's first pregnancy was at seventeen years old, from which my first brother was born, José Sabás, on December 5, on San Sabás Day. Unfortunately, he died fourteen days after born, of epilepsy, now known as crib death.

Three years after that loss, on August 12, my second brother was born, Martín, as my father. He would become my older brother.

On July 7, 1982, at one o'clock in the morning, three years after the birth of my brother, my mother gave me life, and it is when my story begins.

The doctor confirmed my parents that I was a girl, and although my father wished for another male, since he said that girls were very crazy, when he knew about my existence he became very happy, as he would now have the couple. From that moment I became his favorite.

My name is Beatrice, latin origin name which means "she who brings joy, blessed, favored, with natural creative talent". I could go on citing more meanings, but I will better tell you the reason of this name. My father suggested it, because he liked it and my mother liked the idea. She tells me that when she was small, since she was de oldest, at the age of five she began working in a house where she was treated very well. In exchange of her work, that family allowed her to go to school and paid for everything. Even, every morning when she was early heading to school, Mrs. Aurora, the boss, was waiting at the door with her breakfast so she could take it with her.

Also, she made her the costumes for dances and several times she asked my grandma Elena to give her to her, because she loved her as a daughter despite that she already had one, Beatrice, that loved my mother and with whom she shared her things.

For this reason, when my father suggested the name, she accepted with pleasure, because of the affection and gratitude towards the family.

This way I began to live with the name of Beatrice in a numerous family, starting with my paternal grandparents: Gabina y Claudio. As for my maternal grandparents, I met my grandma Elena, since Juan, her husband, died when my mother was ten years old. I had many uncles and aunts and, over the years, too many cousins.

I will try to tell the few memories that I cherish of when I was a child and some others that I know thanks to my mother.

The first garments and bibs that I had were made by my grandma Gabina and some I still have them. When I look at them, I see them so small that I think I should have looked very funny with those outfits. They did my hair with ponytails, I had natural curls, which disappeared with time. I like a lot playing, although I didn't have the seasonal or fashion toys, because we were poor, but I did have the necessary ones to have fun with my little neighbors, one and two years younger than me: Arturo y Cristóbal. With them I shared many pranks.

With Arturo I played having dinner, he loved to eat all mixtures and jumbles which I cooked, something that little by little displeased me, since I hated doing it all the time. He just wanted to eat and he begged me to play. I cried many times because of him, because he did a lot of mean things to me.

With Cristobal was different, we used to play with Barbies and when I didn't want to, he borrowed them from me and played alone. Many times he slept over at my house, since his mother worked and my mom looked after him since he was a baby. That made both children adjust to us. When Cristobal stayed over, he wanted to sleep with my mother, and my brother would get angry telling him that he had his mom, so she would sleep with him. With those kids I shared many of my childhood years.

I rarely played with my brother, only when he wanted to. When it stopped raining, I asked him to make paper boats for me to throw them into the water passing through the street. Sometimes he did them for me and sometimes he did not, until I learned to make them. We also played in the edge of the sidewalk, with his carts, with nails, fingers and guts. The game consisted in pushing the carts with the fingers and the car that fell, lost. My

car was the one that always fell. With my brother there were very few times in which we didn't fight. He would get mad at me because he said that I was very gossipy, because I snitched on him with my parents. He shouldn't run or play soccer because it harmed him to make an effort. That is why, when I saw him, I would run to tell my mom, she would scold him, and my brother would get mad at me.

When my brother was eight years old, he got sick and was diagnosed with asthma. They controlled it with medication; I still remember when he was interned in the hospital. My father stayed with him and my mother took me home. That was the first time that I saw her sad and worried. After that day, she would have to care more for my brother, because although he was vaccinated and took medicine, he suffered too many crises that prevented him from breathing normally. Martin always had a little jar of sand at the side of his bed so he could spit the phlegm, without having to leave his room. I would stand at his side and hit him on the back so he could throw the phlegm and breath better. It was the way in which I tried to take care of my brother at my five years. Since then, I was proud of him. He seemed so strong because he was fighting to live, although he cried when listening to our parents fights for the money spent in his doctor every third day or daily. My mother didn't mind going to the doctor as long as my brother would improve, but my father was worried about spending. Every eight days that my father arrived, was to find out that my brother was still ill and that he had to pay. They fought. It seemed to me that he did it on purpose to leave again. He was never there on special dates. My mother always justified him and told us that we should love him in spite of everything, that this was him, that he was not bad. I came to think that he was young and had more plans. We got used to his absence. My brother told my mother that he wanted to die so they would stop fighting. Nevertheless, his desire of living was stronger. Without knowing it, he was giving me the first lesson of strength of my life.

MY ENTRANCE TO SCHOOL

My preschool stage was very tender. From the first day, my mother made me believe that she would be outside the school waiting for my exit. This way I was able to enter and be calmed, until I left. Later I discovered that it wasn't true, but it no longer affected me. I liked going to play at recess and savour a tasty ham sandwich with a juice. These are some of the few memories that still make me smile.

I finished preschool as any happy girl, believing that the longer I lived, my life would be like the ones in the fairy tales, where there is always a happy ending. I had what was necessary to make that happen: good parents, and an older brother that would always be with me, because, even though we fought and he said he didn't love me, he defended me while I was running to hide myself.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Even though I wasn't a model student in terms of intelligence, I had what it takes not to fail. When I passed to third grade, the teacher that was assigned to my class gave me what at that time, was the worst experience of my life. She had problems in her marriage and, from the beginning of the day, we all suffered from her mistreatment: screams and hitting with the ruler, until convincing us that we were mediocre and stupid. She dedicated herself to spread fear and anguish, to the point of not wanting to go to school. After many months, I told my mother what was happening. Supported by the other parents, whose children were in the same situation, she managed that the teacher be changed for a young man that had just started his practices. Our parents had to pay a salary to this teacher, but was worth it because we recover the desire to attend classes.

Years passed without major problems, although with some difficulties with homework because I was always very messy, quite the opposite of my brother. However, none of that affected me because I took life very lightly and didn't worry about the expenses that my mother had. I asked for what I wanted without thinking if there was money or not, while my brother, tried to save as much as he could and only asked for what was necessary. Although my father was hardly home, he always bought us all new at the beginning of school year and it was then when, according to me, I had to take advantage. My life was very comfortable like that.

It was in sixth grade when I had, for the first time, the horrible sensation of hands touching me in a perverse manner, with evil. We were formed by groups in the school courtyard, which had two floors. In the second floor were the fifths and sixth graders. Upon hearing the order to go to our classrooms, we advanced in two rows. When arriving to the stairs, we coincided with several groups. It was at that point when I felt a hand that entered in the middle of my legs touching me from the front part to my butt, as if pinching me. It happened so fast that, when I turned around to see who did it, I just saw the other kids looking at me mockingly. As much as I asked them if they had seen who was it, no one told me a thing. I felt very bad, ashamed. As if I had done something very bad. Many days had to pass so that the sensation of those hands in my body would go away. It seemed as if they were still there, touching me, and my schoolmates kept reminding me. I was so embarrassed, that I didn't want anyone else to know about it, not even my mother. Now it became clearer to me, the more I grew up, the fairy tale was disappearing.

HIGH SCHOOL

In high school everything was very different: emotions and new experiences. The school was further away from home and had to take the bus. It was in a small town called San Miguel Canoa, on one side of the Malintzin. In that school my brother finished high school and there I went too.

It was difficult at first because the majority of the children in that place speak nahuatl and I didn't understand what they talked about; I noticed that they laughed and that bothered me a lot. I had to stand the smell of cattle, since most of the schoolmates milked cows before going to school and, for a city girl, that was deadly. I thought I wouldn't bear it, and when I commented it to my mother, she laughed, she said that I would get use to it. She was quite right, as always.

I made friends with my schoolmates and also with some teachers. Of course, there were those who didn't tolerate me and talked about me in their language so that I couldn't understand. Like that was born the need to create a sort of nahuatl dictionary, with which I was supported by some friends who did speak nahuatl. Although it was limited, with those few words

I could understand. When I answered them, even in my language, they were surprised. That helped me a lot.

At school they talked to us about sexuality and we saw the reproductive organs in many books. It was neither morbid nor sinful, as many adults think. They think that by teaching us that topic they will arouse our curiosity, but it seemed to me something normal that someday would happen to me and that I would have a sexual experience with someone who I loved. I was sure that it wasn't that moment yet and that it would be some years before I met the right person. I thought that maybe I would be surprised to see a naked man, but then, by imagining it, I would laugh.

Everyday my mother came with me to take the bus to go to school. On one occasion, when I got in, I noticed that there were several men in the front seats, next to the operator. I decided to go to the back where there was another door. That way, according to me, just in case anything happened, from back there I could get down quickly.

The bus had few passengers. It didn't even take ten minutes when a man headed back. I felt his heavy glance and I could see him grinning at me as he stopped at the door. He didn't ring the bell and continued watching me. As I felt his gaze, I turned my head to see him and I realized that he was masturbating causing him satisfaction to see my face in horror.

I knew that someday I would see a man's sexual organ, but definitely not that way and, much less one that did not look like the ones in the books, because I could tell that it was a sick man, his penis had a very dark color, almost purple, with lots of pimples and very swollen. Today I can assure that he had something similar to the human papilloma virus, although I saw it just a few seconds because I turned around to see no more. He rang the buzzer and got out mocking.

It was so surprising that, even though I tried not to think about that, I couldn't. I spent all day crying at school. My friends and schoolmates asked me what was happening to me, but I felt so ashamed that I didn't want to tell anyone. The teachers also asked me and I did tell them. I found out that I wasn't the only victim, in several occasions the same guy had scared other female students. The school had already alerted the town's authorities and the school parents.

The experience was so traumatic that it took me longer than in elementary school to recover from it. I managed to convince myself that it would only be a bitter experience. I would take better care of myself, because I didn't want it to happen again. Little by little I got through it and I

could talk about it with my schoolmates without crying. I also told my mother. She embraced me and told me to try not to think about it. I continued having some fears and my mother, more than ever, accompanied me to the bus stop.

Almost at the end of third grade, while waiting for the bus, a taxi driver offered my mother to take me to school without charging. He was very insistent, and my mother always rejected him. Already annoyed, she had to do it in a rude way so he would go away. This was almost everyday and we were already scared. When I commented it to my father, he decided that he would go with us to the bus stop and be at a distance to observe the taxi driver and confront him so he would stop harassing us. I don't know if the taxi driver suspected or if, by coincidence, those times the taxi driver didn't show up. I don't remember how long we were like that.

One morning, my mom went out for bread for breakfast and came back frightened because she had seen the taxi man near the house. She hid herself so he wouldn't know where we lived. We stopped seeing him for a while.

ADJUSTMENT

Problems increased with relatives who rented us the house where we lived. I finished high school and my mom and I went to Tepeaca. In that place, my great-grandfather had left an inheritance to my father and we had a few rooms. There he stayed when it was late and couldn't get home.

We went for a few days, but the environment was so different that we didn't get used to it. I got sick, I had vomiting and fever, and my mother decided to return to Puebla. She mentioned that we would not return because in Tepeaca the house was very sad.

In Puebla, the problems continued, we had the electricity cut off and other details that were no longer tolerated. After more than twenty-two years, my father said that we would move to Tepeaca. This time it was not going to be on vacation, but to live indefinitely. My brother didn't like the idea and convinced my parents to let him stay with our paternal grandparents.

Distance made the relationship change between my brother and I, we no longer fought and we missed each other. Although I never told him, it hurt me that he stayed with the grandparents, since I would be in a place where I would need him.

It was difficult to adapt, and more because I did not want to continue studying. Although my uncles and cousins lived with us, I got bored a lot. It saddened me to hear the singing of the roosters that my uncle bred for fights. Everybody had their chores and I helped at home. Little by little I got used to it.

My brother visited us from time to time and we tried to go visit him every eight days. He worked with my uncles, in the smithy, for a while. Then he entered the Volkswagen School thanks to an acquaintance of one of my cousins. There he studied a year and started to work, it urged him to earn money to help us. He had promised my mother to build her a house. He bought things for himself but I never imagined that he would think of me. He would bring my mom and me clothes and stuff. He bought a living room and a modular for her.

My father would turn sad, he said that he didn't deserve anything for leaving us alone as children. It was not true, my mother taught us to love and respect him. My brother wanted to improve our quality of life.

It was then when Martin persuaded me to study and I chose Beauty Maker. He would pay for tuition and all supplies needed, and agreed with my father to give me money for transportation, since the school was in Puebla.

In a year and a half, I finished the career. My brother suggested me to keep on preparing myself in another school, more advanced. I didn't accept because I had realized that I did not like it, although in that moment it had seemed the best option.

My brother got married and my nephew was already on his way. It gave us much joy, but also sadness, because we thought that, surely, it would change so he would now see for his family. That did not happen. Despite he had more expenses, Martin always thought of us.

In June, a few days before Father's Day, Aunt Maria died, wife of one of my father's brothers. She was seven months pregnant when she had a stroke due to the preeclampsia that she suffered. The doctors couldn't save her, but they did save the baby. He was so small that he fit into a shoebox. They had to make him his first clothes, because nothing fitted him. When his mother died, one of my father's sisters, took care of the baby and registered him as

her son with the child's father's consent. He was baptized as Angel Gabriel and his godparents were my parents.

I do not remember how old Angel was when my Aunt Lupe, who was responsible for the child, suggested me to go to her house in Agua Santa to take care of him. In return, she would pay me. I thought it was a good idea, since I was not studying nor had a job. She had been working in a factory for several years and did not want to leave it. I told my brother. He did not like much the idea because he wanted me to overcome myself and not lock myself in, but he respected my decision.

I used to go to Puebla on Mondays to take care of Angel and would return home on Saturdays. Despite I had no experience with babies, I fed him, changed him and bathed him in the shower. Although he was very small, it was fine. I also did the house cleaning. I often got bored being locked up. A few months passed with the same routine: Saturday, at night, or early Sunday, I would go to Tepeaca.

THE UNEXPECTED

One Sunday, at nine o'clock in the morning, I went downtown Puebla to buy some things. On the 10 West, I felt again that heavy glance that, without knowing of whom it was, provoked me panic. I looked around to find out from where it was coming and saw a taxi parked on the other side of the street. In it was a man watching me. When I uncovered him, he smiled while he waved his hand, as greeting. It scared me so much that I walked towards the opposite side. I was trembling. At that moment the combi was arriving and I made the stop. Quickly, I got up trying not to be seen by the guy. Once I was inside, I said to myself: "Thank you, God!"

Even when I was far from the place, my fear wouldn't go away; I knew I would be calmer arriving home. When I got down the combi, the bus going to Tepeaca was just arriving to the stop, but no matter how hard I ran to reach it, I didn't succeed. In that moment some hands embraced me. I felt a huge chill. There was something like a knife on my back and I heard them saying to me: "if you scream, I'll kill you and then your family". The one who threatened me put me into the taxi that I had seen, driven by another driver. I tried to shout, made signs and, although there were people around, a

salesman in particular, nobody did anything. I guess that the man didn't react fast or, simply, didn't want problems.

While the taxi was going forward, I didn't stop moving, I wanted to escape. I screamed desperately trying to defend myself. Suddenly, they covered my mouth with a rag containing something. I started to have a headache and every minute the pain was worse. The man forced me to bend down so they would not see me from the street. I heard their voices farther and farther away. The driver told the other that with that favor the account was settled, but to promise that he wouldn't kill me, since the damage was already too much and he wouldn't help him anymore. The other replied that yes, to be quite. I felt too tired and didn't scream anymore. I could not move; I could feel my tears dripping. I knew that something bad would happen to me and I was asking God to help me, that the cab would crash and I don't remember what else.

This was at eleven o'clock in the morning. When I woke up, I found myself in a sort of warehouse where construction material was kept, lying on the ground on a piece of an old brown carpet. I tried to get up fast but I could not. Everything hurt. It was a horrible impression to see myself naked in that place. Immediately I knew that I had been raped. I couldn't even cry; I was very scared. I wanted to escape, although nothing would ever be the same.

I started dressing trying not to make noise. I was alone and I feared they would return. I got up and started walking with much effort, I was very sore. Upon arriving to the door, I felt the same shiver again. My assailant was coming. I grabbed a piece of pipe that was in the room and tried to attack him. I couldn't even touch him, quickly, he snatched it from me while he slapped me. I fell on the ground, he told me not to do stupid things, that if I wanted him to kill me. "No, let me go". He grabbed me from my pony tail and covered my head with a black t-shirt while he got me up the floor. He took me out of the room and I noticed that I was in a big construction where there was only dirt.

The man opened a gate and got me back into the taxi. He said that if I dared to denounce him or if I tried to see the place where we were he would send me someone to kill me. I replied that I wouldn't say anything, but to let me go, that nothing else I wanted.

The man closed the taxi door and told the driver to throw me somewhere and to forget about his debt, that he didn't owe him anything. I was very afraid, I would go with the driver, and if one had raped me, what could I expect from the other?

The taxi began to go forward and within minutes the driver told me: "Calm down. It's all over. I'll take you to the place where we found you, if you promise not to scream nor see my face". I agreed with the head. "Lie down on the seat. I will let you know when we arrive." It was the longest trip I ever made. I felt it burdensome and I wanted to get off already. "we are almost there. Take off the shirt from the head, don't get up and don't turn. Fix your hair a little and, when I tell you, you get off. Don't look at the taxi, do not make me regret it. Get off. Take your things." Without turning, I went to the bus stop and sat down. There still was the same man that saw me when they took me. He was selling sweets and, when he saw me, he approached and asked me if I was okay, if I needed help. "Now for what? I needed it a while ago." I got up and started walking. I didn't know where to go. I remembered a friend who lived near there and I thought to search for her, but what was I going to tell her? If I talked about what had happened to me, it would cause my family much pain. I kept walking aimlessly as I thought what to say. I was clear that I would keep silent to avoid them the sorrow and to me the shame. So I felt, ashamed, with weakness all over the body and soul. Deceived, hurt, humiliated. In few words, finished.

I walked for hours, until I decided what I would do. They had already harmed me so much that I wouldn't allow it to affect me any more. I would try to forget that terrible experience. I felt I was strong and I could overcome that. My love for my family was bigger than what I was feeling and wouldn't cause them the pain of knowing what had happened to me. With a cooler mind, I began to see around me. I had walked for hours and it seemed that the world was a desert. I didn't distinguish people nor noises. I do not understand how they didn't run over me. I crossed many streets without seeing. Finally, I was able to locate myself and realized that, I had inadvertently arrived at the house of one of my paternal aunts. I would say that I had been mugged and thus would justify my mood. They would think I was scared. I dropped my backpack, I removed my earrings and fixed myself a little. I went to my aunt's business. I needed help to get home.

I guess my appearance was not so bad, because when seeing me she smiled and asked, "What a miracle?" "You see, I need something. Could you lend me money to go home? I was mugged." She smiled and told me, seriously, what was going on. I started crying. In that moment she believed me. She hugged me and told me not to worry, that the scare had already passed, she would take me home or with my brother. I thought that it was better to go with my brother. Next day I would be calmer to tell my mom,

more coldly, about the assault. That way she would believe me, since my mother knows me so well that she knows when I lie. I would have to be more careful so she wouldn't find out about the truth.

We headed to the corner and my aunt made the stop to a taxi. I felt a lot of fear. It could be the rapist's taxi. When he asked where we were going, I calmed down: the tone of his voice wasn't the one of my aggressors.

Arriving near my brother's house, I saw him walking on the sidewalk with his wife. I went to him and again started to cry. He hugged me and asked me what had happened. I could not speak. My aunt paid the taxi driver and caught up with us. It was she who told him that they had snatched my things and my money. My brother thanked her and we took a combi to the shopping mall to where my brother and sister in law were going before we met.

My brother tried to cheer me up and was asking me all the time if I craved something. He repeated that everything was okay, that it was just the shock. "Because it was only a scare, right?" I replied yes. He phoned my mother so she wouldn't worry because I was not coming. He told her that I would stay that night with them and that later I would tell her.

After a while we returned to his house, it was already night and they asked me if I wanted to bathe. I answered yes. I went to bed, but my head kept thinking about what had happened. I saw the roof of the house, and my brother told me to try to rest. That night I didn't sleep, I spent it crying silently.

The next day I went home, already calmer and sure of what I was going to say. They believed me and told me that, luckily, nothing worse had happened to me. "Yes, that is the good thing", I replied.

That second night, I felt calmer. In my room I cried more relieved and extracted all the anger that I had.

After the events, I discarded the idea of returning to take care of Angel. For no reason I would expose myself. I had too much fear and insecurities. My mother and brother agreed.

RESUME MY LIFE

My aunt Lupe didn't react very well when I told her that I wouldn't go anymore because of the assault. Although she didn't tell me much, I noticed that it bothered her that I was leaving the child. I didn't change my mind. She was sharp with me for many months, sometimes, even rude. She ignored me. It hurt a lot; however, I tried not to pay attention to that. I thought that if she knew what had happened to me, she would understand.

The one who sensed that something bad happened to me was my grandfather, with whom I had a good relationship; we both loved each other very much. Although I never told him, in those days he came home and asked me how I was doing with the scare. I think that he was sure that something else had happened to me, something worse. Although I answered him that I was better, he began telling me his story as a child. He told me what he had suffered and, additionally, what he had enjoyed in life. He told me that the day when he dies, not to cry for him, because he had enjoyed many things, good and bad; that he was already tired but satisfied. He took me to the courtyard and told me that it didn't matter the tests that life gives us, that they wouldn't affect us if we had good roots. He told me that each one decides the type of tree that wants to be, that any wind can pull up the small trees because they are weak and with short roots. He pointed to a tree that I still have; it is of big trunk and very high, a pirul that has been years in that place. He told me that I should be like that pirul tree that no wind nor storm should ever throw me down, since my roots were of strong people and well planted. He insisted me to never forget that I could have the branches and my trunk cut, but never my roots.

I did not quite understand what my grandfather wanted to tell me. He was a man that went through many illnesses and difficult situations and always emerged victorious. I suppose that his roots were strong. I kept his words in my mind. Perhaps someday I would understand them.

The time passed. I tried to forget what had happened and continue with my life. I started working in an aesthetic where I would learn more about styling though I did not like it. The job would be a door to get out of the bad routine of being locked at home. I was in charge of applying dyes, discolorations and bases. After a while, it began to affect my eyesight and caused me a facial paralysis, due to contact with so many chemicals. I hadn't

noticed that I didn't close the right eye anymore when sleeping and the doctor told me that if I didn't want to lose it, I had to find another job.

The rehabilitation was slow and the treatment was expensive. The doctor said that my paralysis had also been due to an herpes in the ear which had affected a nerve. My ear was so black, that I was very frightened; I came to believe that they would amputate it. It was horrible and just touching it caused me a tremendous pain.

After few weeks of treatment, my ear was fine, I just then had to work with massages the facial paralysis. Definitely, once again, I had to quit my job. I said thanks at the aesthetic and the owner told me to return when I got better. Of course, I wasn't planning to continue affecting my health.

I devoted myself to my recovery and, without realizing it, I got used to doing nothing. I fell into a depression for not knowing what to do with my life. I hoped for weeks to pass, and so for several months. I took the bad habit of eating and watching television lying on a couch. It bothered my mother, she didn't understand why I was letting myself get depressed. She talked to me trying to cheer me up and give me options to do something in my life: look for another job, study another technical career. I always found excuses to refuse to do something.

Obviously, I gained weight and became more and more discouraged. I dressed with the first thing I found and made me a pony tail. Nothing mattered to me.

After a year, my cousin Adriana began working in a restaurant where they also gave banqueting service. She helped to prepare the food, wash dishes and supported in the decoration. It was not a very heavy duty and it was only on weekends. My cousin invited me to work with her, I suppose to get me out of the routine that I had. I started Saturdays. The ambience was good, there were many young people and we had fun while we worked. It was a very beautiful stage, I made many friendships and I had new experiences. I enjoyed my job and that improved my lifestyle.

Two years later, a friend with whom I played football in Tepeaca, proposed me to work with her husband, who had a jewelry and needed someone reliable. At first I said that I could not, since I was happy working only on Saturdays. The rest of the week I was with my mother. My friend kept insisting until I agreed to talk to her husband: Don George.

The job was from Monday to Saturday, from nine to nine, and it seemed to me too heavy. I mentioned that I was working on Saturdays and

didn't want to quit. Don Jorge suggested me to work with him and that he would allow me to skip Saturdays, that way I would have more income.

I started working with his son, Jorge, *el Güero*. He was very cool, he made me laugh, but he was very demanding; He was trying to get me to learn both jewelry and watchmaking. He taught me to distinguish the different gold kilataje and Don Jorge taught me to change watch batteries, the machines and extensibles. Also to cut and shape the crystals for watches. In a short time, I knew how to do several things, besides having an excellent friendship with both. I liked working with men, since it was another treatment and there was no one to fight with, as in the events. Both, Don Jorge and *el Güero*, shared with me their problems and their joys. Often I scolded them and they to me. Sharing meals, playing or talking turned work in a complicity. I felt so at ease with them that I stopped going to work to the events.

Don Jorge taught me to go to Mexico, to the neighborhood of Tepito, where he purchased the merchandise and I found out how much was costing him. This was very meaningful, because that way he showed me the confidence that he had me. He kept telling me that I should pay attention to learn and if someday I was asked who had taught me, I could answer that Don Jorge.

The end of year came and they gave me my first Christmas bonus. I did not have an idea of what would I spend it on. Don Jorge offered me to take me to Mexico. This time we would look for something so I could undertake my first business. After seeing many things, I chose to buy bags to sell among my family. That motivated me very much, because without any interest, Don Jorge helped me to do something new.

They were already important in my life; they knew good and bad things of me, as I of them. They were very fond of women and I didn't have another choice, as a good friend, to cover them up. Although it bothered me doing it, they convinced me.

There was so much trust with them, that I didn't hesitate to tell them about my bad experience, since they always asked me why I didn't have a boyfriend. *El Güero* hugged me and said: "I knew something had happened to you!, but do not give up, you will see that somebody will come and will erase that bad experience". Don Jorge said the same thing and both told me to count on them for everything that they really appreciated me for being a good gal. I thanked them for hearing me; they were the only ones that knew the truth. I asked them to keep the secret.

While I worked with them I got sick of salmonellosis and typhoid several times. At first I thought it was from eating at restaurant. I'd go to medical consultation and quickly I was fine, the same happened with the coughing. There were seasons when I had it continuously and then it was gone without medication. When commenting it to my doctor, he didn't give much importance, according to him it was more important to treat the salmonellosis and the typhoid. He thought that the cough, surely, was by allergies. Neither I gave it importance.

MY FIRST BOYFRIEND

The only time I didn't agree with *el Güero* was when my cousin Adriana introduced me to one of her friends: Alejandro. He was an old-fashioned, polite, very demure and catholic guy. That made him seem presumptuous and conceited, according to *el Güero*.

Alejandro began to hang around with me and almost daily he would go to pick me up to the jewelry and take me home. So we were for a while, maybe two months, until he asked me to be his girlfriend. It seemed to me that I would not find a better option, because I liked his way of being, of course, I was sure that he wouldn't disrespect me, so I accepted.

This decision led me to change my relationship with *el Güero*, since the confidence that we had bothered Alejandro. He kept on telling me that it wasn't right to get along like that with him. Although it bothered *el Güero*, he respected my decision and we focused on the job.

Little by little, Alejandro forbade me more things, like wearing skirts and be cheerful and sociable with people. I didn't like that much, but I accepted it because he had become an illusion in my life. At last I had something nice. We were like that a few more months.

One of my unmarried cousins came out pregnant. When Alejandro found out, he began speaking bad of her, saying that it was because she was crazy and that nobody would take her seriously anymore. He commented that the virginity of a woman is the most important thing that can be given to a man and things like that. In that moment I understood that if Alejandro

knew what had happened to me, he would not believe me and, for sure, he would leave me if he knew that I was no longer a virgin.

Having commented this with *el Güero*, he advised me not to tell him at all because, at the end, I wasn't so sure if I would stay with him. *El Güero* was convinced that Alejandro wouldn't believe me and proposed me to think in the possibility of leaving him. I decided not to tell him anything, at least until being sure that there would be something more formal.

After a few months, Alejandro asked me for one of my rings which had my initial. It was the first ring I had ever made. I offered him to make it to his measure and he answered no, that he wanted it to know my measure. I never thought that it was for my engagement ring.

Fifteen days later, Alejandro went to pick me up to the jewelry store as every night, but this time he was tidier. He had told me to ask for permission to be late, since it was Saturday and he would take me to dinner. We talked about our relationship. He said that he felt great with me, and that he would like to be a family and more because he had realized that I was a woman who was worth it. I remained speechless. As I listened, I imagined what he would say when I told him that I was no longer a virgin because I had been raped. Surely he would hate me for having hidden it, or perhaps, with a bit of luck, he would understand and I would be happy with him.

We kept on talking and finished dinner. He took me to the park, we sat down, he took my hands and told me that he was sure of what he was going to do. He asked me if I wanted to marry him and start a family. He had already spoken to his parents, they wanted to meet me and, obviously, everything would be in accordance with their catholic customs. While he continued saying many things, I observed him. He had told his parents that he was my first official boyfriend and that, for my nineteen years, surely it was because my parents were very upright. They loved that, since they wanted a demure woman and, above all, virgin, for their son. "What do you think? do you love me?" I replied I did love him, but that there were things he didn't know about me and that I hadn't told them for fear of losing him. I began telling him since my aunt's death up to the day of the rape. It was very sad to see his indifference and his change.

After listening to me he crouched down and told me that he regretted what had happened to me and that, with all his heart, he wished that some day I would find that special person for me. "Things happen for a reason and I thank you for being honest before we married, since I have it clear that I want a woman that has only been with me." Virginity was a very valuable

thing and for me not to be changed things. I cried. I told him I understood and apologized for not telling him before. He hugged me and, after a while, he told me that we could not keep on seeing each other because we had no future. "I get it. I hope that you don't regret it for not giving me the opportunity and, even more because the rape wasn't for pleasure." He replied that he imagined the hell I had to go through, but that he didn't believe me and, much less, would try to be with me after what, according to me, I had lived. I believe that, in the end, he thought that I had invented that story to justify for not being virgin.

Alejandro said goodbye to me and left. That was the last time that I cried for him. I felt so much rage! I was not even angry at the rape, but because it was the same for him to marry one or the other, the only requirement was to be a virgin.

I got very depressed. My family asked me what was wrong with me because my face looked sick. I had fever a couple of times, but I didn't think it was important.

The following Monday I arrived at my job and told *el Güero*. He got very angry and told me not to cry for a man of such quality, to thank God, because, who deserved somebody better was me. *El Güero's* words made me feel very good and started understanding that he was right. Far from being a better person, since I was going out with Alejandro I neglected my friends, didn't take my own decisions and, worst of all, became dependent on him. I realized that I had been a victim of psychological violence and had not wanted to accept it. To see reality comforted me and made the separation less painful. I understood that what there was between the two, in fact, had not been love.

It wasn't even a month when I heard that Alejandro already had another girlfriend and I thought that she should be a virgin. By then that made me laugh, since now it was me that, not even as a joke, wanted something with him. *El Güero* would look at him and said: "There goes your little virgin, Magdalena!" We laughed a lot. I went back to my reality, to enjoy my job and my friends.

Months later, Alejandro returned to look for me. According to him, it was because he saw my suffering when I saw him and didn't want me to think that it was my fault. I let him talk. When he finished, I laughed and said that I had already learned the lesson, that I hoped he would get over it, that my life didn't spin around him and that, with all my heart, I wished him to find the virgin he needed. "Do not worry about me, I am better than ever

and, thanks to you, I learned to value myself as a woman.” I added that I prayed God to accompany us both. I turned around and left very strong and sure of what I had said to him. I thanked God and promised not to hate him for wanting a virgin woman. El *Güero* made sure that I didn’t forget him, because we made fun of it. I didn’t know when I would have a boyfriend again, but I was sure that I would focus more on the quality of person with whom I went out.

THE REUNION

I continued with my routine, trying to enjoy what I could with the outcome of my work. One day going out of the jewelry store to go and eat home, I felt again the panic of five years ago. Again the shiver entered my body like an alert.

While I waited for the traffic light give way, a taxi passed in front of me. The driver kept watching me and, for a moment, I was paralyzed. He looked surprised. I didn’t know what to do. The taxi advanced and the man didn’t stop watching me. I ran towards the park afraid that he would see where I would go. I ran as fast as I could. My legs were trembling, they went numb and I was sweating cold.

I don’t know how I got to the jewelry store. I opened the small door to enter the workshop, almost at once. I got in without announcing that I had already arrived. I went to the back part, where the bathroom was, and began to cry. When el *Güero* heard me, he came in to see me. I was sitting on the floor, shrunk so no one could see me. I couldn’t stop trembling.

-What’s wrong? –*El Güero* asked me.

-The taxi drier...is outside. Please, do not let him in. He saw me and I’m very scared.

Without thinking, he went to look for him. He didn’t take long. When he came back, he hugged me and told me that there was nobody and that, surely, I had confused him. I kept on crying and trembling. I imagine that el *Güero* saw me so bad that he didn’t stop hugging me and reassuring me that he would take care of me.

It was amazing the panic I felt. Although it had already been five years, it seemed it had only been five minutes. Just like that I finished the day and *el Güero* took me home. Since that night I wasn't calm anymore, I was afraid that the taxi driver would be waiting for me. To think that the story could be repeated terrified me and I preferred taking other measures before being abused again. For a few weeks, *el Güero* y Don Jorge accompanied me to my house at night, and at lunchtime I would not go out and stayed in the workshop.

Another day in the morning, when I was going to work, from the park I saw that the jewelry store was still closed and I chose to sit on a bench to wait for *el Güero* to arrive. I was entertained with the phone when I heard a horn. I raised my face and saw that it was the taxi driver who waved goodbye at me with his hand. I got paralyzed. Suddenly I heard the sound of *el Güero's* Volkswagen, I beckoned and ran to meet him. By then, the taxi was gone. I told *Güero* that the one from the taxi had found me. He replied that he had been able to distinguish him. "Come up, lets go look for him to write down the plates and denounce him". We walked around the park and through other streets; we couldn't see him. After a while we returned to the jewelry store. *El Güero* wanted to find him and confront him; I prayed God not to see him again.

By then, the pressure that I was feeling was already so much, that I started thinking in other options, like killing myself. I had to think well how would I do it. I would have to leave a letter where I explain and apologize to my family for having concealed the rape and for having taken the decision to kill myself, that way they would understand and would not judge me. I discarded to hang myself in my house because whenever they saw my room it would hurt them to remember me. I also thought getting hit by a car, but I didn't like that someone else would pay for my sins. None of the options convinced me. One day I saw Don Jorge working with a liquid that dried everything it touched and I asked if it was dangerous: "If by mistake it is taken, the effect is similar to acid and, would be a quick death." To test it I placed some flies on the top of the liquid and saw how, in a few hours, they were dissolved. Definitely, that liquid was the best option for my plans.

I was so obsessed trying to kill myself, that didn't notice that *el Güero* was watching me. After a week of analyzing the options and their consequences, and leave a letter in my room explaining everything, I waited for the opportunity to be alone in the jewelry store's workshop.

One day, some *Güero's* friends came looking for him, I informed him and they went out to talk. That was the best moment. I went to the bathroom, where Don Jorge kept the liquid. I served myself half of it in a disposable glass and then added gilding powder that, according to the label, was dangerous when ingested. I mixed it up, and when I almost had it in my mouth, I felt a slap on my hands. It was *Güero*! In the jewelry store there were mirrors that made it possible to see who was entering or leaving. This way, *el Güero*, suspecting that I would do something, kept on watching me. That is why he entered quickly, threw the glass and, with a rude tone, told me not to do any nonsense. I saw him and saw tears in his face. I felt so bad! I let myself cry, he hugged me and said to me that that was not the best way, to think about my parents and what they would suffer, not to let that guy succeed in disgracing my life. After talking to him, I understood the seriousness of my decision. I promised not to try again and went back home.

At night, I saw the picture that is over my bed that has the image of the Lord of the Universe, a gift from one of my aunts. Many times I claimed the image to have abandoned me, I screamed at him horrible things to the point of not believing in him anymore. That night, my faith returned and, when I saw him, I begged his pardon for trying to take my life away. I promised that from that day on I would overcome the tests he puts me. I would try to strengthen myself and, next time I find my aggressor, I wouldn't run and would face him. Months passed and my life returned to normality.

In April, when The Children's Day fair arrived, I was attending at the jewelry store when my aggressor passed by. This time he was walking. When he saw me he stopped at the door, as if he wanted to buy. I looked at him, now with rage, but with the same panic. I told *Güero* to come out of the workshop to help me attend, and my aggressor, on hearing that I was speaking to *Güero*, left and got lost among the people. It was more and more frequent that I encounter him. Finally, out of fear, I decided to quit my job. Only inside my house he would not find me. I talked to my brother and told him that I didn't want to work anymore. He asked me why and it occurred to me to tell him that because I had problems with *Güero* and that I couldn't stand it anymore. He told me that if I was no longer comfortable, not to go, but that I had to thank them and not leave the job thrown away. When I told *Güero* that I would quit the job, he got mad at me because he needed my help. My fear was stronger and told him to excuse me, but that I was thinking more about my welfare and that, definitely, I didn't want to risk encountering my aggressor. I finished the week and didn't go back again.

Once again I was at home and didn't have the slightest intention of going out. My parents and my brother were sick of me doing nothing. Many times, my brother scolded me and demanded me to work or study, to do something to generate money and support in the house. I felt very bad, but I preferred them thinking that I was lazy than knowing the truth.

I kept getting sick. I had a headache and foot ache, I still had typhoid, salmonellosis and other things, including cough. According to my doctor, those diseases were caused by my mind. I provoked them. That's what my doctor said!

After a few months, seeing that I almost never went out, Gloria, one of my friends that also worked with Don Jorge, went to visit me. She asked me why I had locked myself in and I told her what was happening to me. She did not stop visiting me and, in one of her visits, she convinced me to go out for a walk. The only condition I asked for was that we wouldn't walk in the Tepeaca park because I was afraid to encounter my aggressor. She suggested to go to a nearby town called San Hipolito, fifteen minutes from Tepeaca. In that place we ate and then we went to the park, where a kid and two guys were playing basketball. One of the guys caught my attention, he looked at me too and smiled. He approached us and suggested us to play with them. I answered no, but my friend said yes and encouraged me. We played for a while and then they invited us a soda.

The guy was called Armando; he was dark-skinned, short and thin, native of Catemaco, Veracruz. He surprised me when he asked me what was happening to me because he could notice a great sadness in my look. I do not know what happened. Suddenly I felt that I knew him from all my life. He inspired me so much confidence that I did not hesitate to tell him everything.

Armando worked in that place as a subordinate agent of the Public Prosecutor's Office, he gave me lots of advice and promised he would help me, since his father had worked years for the FBI and knew many people who could help me. I thanked him. I felt so safe with him! His character was tough and, one might say, a bit violent. At the same time, he had the gift of singing and that reassured me. That afternoon he sang to me several songs written by him. We spent all day in that place.

From then on, I visited him every third day and he didn't stop calling me to find out how I was. He told me that as soon as I see again my aggressor, I should phone him to fetch him; that he would not let him to hurt me again.

As the days went by, I got more attached to him. In the nights he called me to sing and so I would sleep peaceful. Armando helped me strengthen myself. He always said that I should be strong, that it was the only way to keep people from hurting me. He forced me to face my fears.

Since I was little I was terrified at the sound of the rockets and much more to the shooting. One day, he took the backload that he used on his work and fired to the air. When he saw my fear, he looked at me and put it on my hands in firing position, while telling me that I must put the strength in my arms, because the impact would be so strong that could hurt me, I refused, but with his help I managed to shoot and couldn't help crying. He hugged me and said that it was a way to end the fear, that he would be in charge of making me a strong woman, despite being small, that should not limit myself. Little by little, my fears were lessening. His strength and closeness gave me confidence to believe in what he was saying to me.

After two months of treating Armando, one afternoon I was going to meet my friend Gloria in the Tepeaca park to go and eat with him. When I arrived, I noticed that there was the taxi. This time, I walked close to him so he would see me. I pretended not to see him. The guy got out of the car and started following me. In that moment I dialed Armando from my cell phone and told him that the taxi guy was coming behind me, that I was very scared. "Stop at the shoe stores, I will come and get you. Give me a few minutes", he said. I got into the shoe store, I asked for some shoes and while I tried them on, I saw that the guy was watching me from afar. My cell phone rang. It was Armando. I explained where I was. I walked towards my house. In that street there is a vacant lot and Armando told me to stop there, simulating tying my shoe laces or with any other pretext. The guy was following me. I told him that I would, but to assure me that he would come to my aid. "Trust me." I bent down to tie my shoe laces, trembling. I felt the aggressor's presence, and when I perceived him close, I couldn't avoid turning and trying to run. The guy grabbed my arm strongly and forced me into the vacant lot. He asked me if I had missed him. It was horrible to feel his hands. "What would happen if Armando did not arrive?" We struggled. Was thinking of escaping.

Finally, Armando arrived and hit him in the ribs with the backload. He aimed at him and began to insult him, while his partner handcuffed and gagged him so he couldn't scream. They locked him up in the patrol and we went up as well. We arrived at the town's Presidency where Armando worked and they put him in a basement. Armando hit him and got him wet with cold water. He continued to hit him with a macana. It was so much

hitting that I screamed at him to stop it. I was afraid he would kill him. Angry, he asked me, what was it that I wanted. He hugged me and said to me that he would take care of it and make him pay for what he had done to me.

When the guy was able to talk, he told Armando that he was innocent and that he would sue him for having arrested him, that he would regret for what he had done to him. Armando ignored him and pulled me out of that place.

After that, Armando told me that we had two options. The first was killing him and bury him far away. I said no, since I could no longer sleep, much less with a death in my conscience. The second was to take him to a prison in another state where they owed favors to his father, but in that place we would have to pay so he would stay and not go out anymore. I had to decide. If we left him free, he would retaliate, with more hatred, from both. I realized that it had been very easy for Armando to arrest him, but I never thought about what was next. Kill him not. Despite the damage he had done to me, I did not want that load for the rest of my life. Taking him to prison meant a lot of money. I did not know how I would do it, but that was the best option for me.

Armando told me that he agreed and that he would support me economically, that I didn't have to worry.

With the keys of the taxi in the hand, Armando and his partner went to Tepeaca to pick it up and to get rid of it. I never knew where they left it. The guy was locked up for three days in the basement. Meanwhile, I started selling the jewelry that I had bought when I was working with *Güero*. I sold many more things and borrowed money. For his part, Armando was looking for his father and the people who could help us. I collected eight thousand pesos, which was very little, but Armando had money and he would help me.

Confident that at that prison they would help us, we put him in the van, sedated, so that he seemed that he was sleeping. While Armando was driving, I was at his side, more nervous than the day of the rape. In prison they took my statement and they didn't get tired of asking me the same questions. How was it?, When?, Why didn't you denounce it?, Did you know him?, How did he rape you?, Are you sure you are not lying?...An infinity of questions that made me repent and feel that the delinquent was me.

After the interrogations, the judge took me to his office and told me to excuse him, but that it was necessary, since he wouldn't forgive himself imprisoning someone innocent for paying received favors. He told me he had a daughter my age and that he wouldn't want her to go through the same

thing, that he would help me, but that I had to thank Armando's dad. He explained that I had to give another name for my safety and Armando's: Carolina González Pérez, a very common name and chosen by them, with which they simulated the confrontation, the paperwork and other requirements.

Armando gave them eighty thousand pesos to distribute among the people that knew what was going on. The guy denied what he had done to me. He even denied knowing me. At various times he said to me: "daughter, please, tell the truth. You are causing me a lot of trouble. I had never seen you." The judge informed him that he would assign a lawyer if he could afford it. The guy said that he had no money and that he had the right to a call. "Of course, but I will tell you when you can do it", the judge replied. While they were taking him away, he was telling me to tell the truth, that the damage to him was very big. I believe that, finally, he understood that he would not go free, that we had paid so he would be arrested. With much anger, he shouted at me that he would go free and would look for me.

The next day, early, I returned home. For my family, I had gone to work to an event, far away.

When Armando stopped my aggressor, I thought that I could finally sleep peacefully. It wasn't like that. His image came telling me that he would look for me. My situation was worse. I imagined that he escaped and that this time he would kill me. I lived with that fear for months.

I continued my relationship with Armando, now as his girlfriend. Although I came to love him, I wasn't with him out of love but out of gratitude. For a while he went to Veracruz, but visited me every fifteen days. On two occasions, due to the despair of my situation and the pressure from my family, I was about to go away with him, but I always repented.

I decided to study computer. Armando supported me, and when he came to Tepeaca, he would go and pick me up at school without notifying me. I was trying to be sociable, but I couldn't get many friends. Although I tried to concentrate on the study, I was always thinking in the possibility that my aggressor escaped.

There were several occasions in which Armando picked me up and I never noticed that on each visit he had a car of different color, but of the same brand. One day, one of my classmates asked me what my boyfriend did for a living, because it called her attention that he always went in a different car and he looked that he wasn't from Tepeaca. I didn't know what to answer.

Armando was no longer working as a police officer and I had not thought of asking him what he did for a living. Thanks to the computer school I started using the email and the famous *chat* to communicate with Armando in Veracruz and meet friends online.

CONFESSION

My mood began to decay once more and my brother, already desperate, seeing that I was at home all day, called my attention with anger. I was crying. He suggested that I go with my doctor to have me checked. I agreed on the condition that I would enter alone for consultation.

The next day, my mother accompanied me and commented to the doctor that I didn't want to do anything and that she no longer knew how to help me, that, please, if he could talk to me. The relationship with my doctor was good; I had a lot of confidence in him. He asked me many questions: Was it for some man who had left me? Was I pregnant?, Was I afraid of something? And a thousand more questions, until he reached the correct question: Did something happen to you that you do not want your family to know?

I began to cry and I replied yes. It was already so much the weight that I felt, that I thought it was a good time to tell the truth, because I couldn't handle that burden anymore.

When I told the doctor that I had been raped, my mother's face changed. I think she expected thousand things, but not to be like that because of a rape. She contained herself not to cry, while the doctor encouraged me to go on with my life. He prescribed me tranquilizers and asked me if I had taken something on that occasion not to get pregnant. "Of course not", I replied surprised. A possible pregnancy didn't even pass through my head. That would have been terrible.

My mother asked the doctor if he thought convenient for my father to find out what had happened. He said no, because, thank God, there were no serious consequences and, with psychological help, I could get forward. He commented that for a father, it would be a very strong coup to know that his princess had been damaged and that the best thing was not to mortify him and support me. When I calmed down, we left.

On the way we chatted of several things, but not about the rape. At night my brother asked what the doctor had said and my mother told him. Obviously, they knew about the rape, but still I hadn't told them who the aggressor was and, much less, that I had him arrested. I thought it would be better saying it little by little.

The next day, my brother talked to me and told me that now he understood, to excuse him for treating me like this. As well he asked me why I didn't trust him, that he was sure that since the assault something else had happened. Our relationship improved, but my health was getting worse. I still had salmonella and typhoid. I felt very weak and the body pain and headaches were very strong. Besides, I had constant dizziness and nausea. They took me to the doctor again.

The doctor told me that I had to overcome my traumas; to seek psychological help and that he would send me to do some analysis. He was sure my illness was mental.

Indeed, part of what I had was a depression, but by receiving the results of the analysis, the doctor said that the count of typhoid bacteria was very high and that he didn't know how I could be standing. He spoke to my parents and recommended urgent hospitalization. At last I was able to rest and to unburden myself of so much physical and mental pain.

They medicated me and gave me tranquilizers. After a day they would do me more studies to see the improvement. The doctor advised my mother to do me an HIV test (Elisa) to discard that possibility as a consequence of the violation. We accepted, secure that it would be okay. The results were negative, and we were not surprised. Now we were more confident not to tell anything to my father, for it was nothing serious, except salmonella and typhoid.

I returned home much better and Armando called me to know how I was. For a few months I stopped working on the social events, because, according to me, that was the reason of my illness.

NEW LOVE

It was in the month of April, when leaving the computer school, I went to an internet site and entered a massive *chat* to entertain myself a bit. I checked in as *Colibrí*. I had fun chatting and making friends. That's how I met that person who, over time, would be very special in my life: *Pablo81*. We hit it off from the first minute. Like that was for several days. He asked for my phone number to hear my voice. He is from Tehuacán, Puebla, but in that time he lived in Virginia, United States.

It was very curious to realize how this person, being so far, provoked so many things in me. Within fifteen days of getting to know us, he knew already everything about me and I thought I knew all about him. I was falling in love on the internet.

We chatted daily. He said that he was falling in love and that he wished he could meet me in person, because he knew perfectly my soul and my voice. We sent each other photos and letters. When I confessed Pablo that I had a boyfriend, he proposed me that I leave him and to accept to be his girlfriend. That way, for sure, someday we would meet each other. We were both sure it would be worth waiting for that day to come. At the same time, he confessed me that he had been married and that he wanted me to know, according to him so that I wouldn't be disappointed later.

I was determined to break up with Armando, but I didn't know how. He had helped me so much, that I could not fail him and much less hurt him. It was worth giving up Paul for him. Armando thought it was weird that daily I would be on line, chatting. He started to suspect that I was chatting with someone else, but every time that he tried to comment it with me, I would confirm him that I would never leave him.

On one of his visits, while we were having dinner, my cell phone rang. It was Pablo. When I saw his name on my cell phone, I shivered with joy and, at the same time, with fear. I didn't know how Armando would react. I hung up without answering and turned it off.

Armando wasn't a fool. He told me that he loved me very much and that I shouldn't lie to him. He asked me who he was and I replied that a schoolmate. He got upset, but told me that he trusted me. I told him that I was his girlfriend and that I wouldn't cheat on him, that if I would fall in love with some one else, I would tell him. I could not fail him, so I would end my friendship with Pablo. Armando loved me too much and I owed him a lot.

On one occasion, Armando lent me his cell phone to entertain myself playing in the car, while he was visiting a friend that owed him money. Suddenly, his cell phone rang several times and I thought that it was something urgent. Confident that his family knew about me, I answered. It was a woman named Geny, from Veracruz. According to her, she was Armando's girlfriend and she was pregnant. Her health was bad and for that reason she insisted on the phone. It didn't bother me; it was the best excuse to leave him without remorse. I told the woman that I had answered because Mr. Armando forgot his cell phone in the hotel's reception where he was staying, and that, I would give him the message as soon as he returned. That's how it was.

When Armando returned, I told him what had happened. I asked him since when he was with her. He replied that it had been two years, but that he loved me, although he wouldn't leave her because she was ill. I told him that I understood him, but that he shouldn't force me to be with him. After that call, I checked his cell phone and I found messages addressed to her with much affection. I was clear that he was still with me so as not to hurt me with his abandonment. Because I loved Pablo, I suggested Armando to end up our relationship. He didn't agree because he assured that it was because of someone else, since I was not angry nor jealous.

I broke up with him, but he told me that he would keep looking for me because he loved me. I told him that I would always be there when he needed me, as a friend. He was so upset that he said that if he saw me with some one else, he would kill me. "How can you tell me that after all what we have been through together? Do you want me to stay with you out of gratitude? You don't love me and you are going to be a father, that's the most important thing." He hugged me and asked me to forgive him. He said that he would let me free because I should be happy and that he would try to do the same.

Confident of not having hurt Armando, I continued with Pablo. After a week, I told him and he asked me to be his girlfriend. Happy, I said yes, since he knew all my story. Thereby, between constant calls, internet chats, photos and so on, I was happy despite the distance.

END OF THE ANXIETY

My illnesses were more constant, but I always got the same answer: “It is your state of mind” and my typhoid, according to the doctor, was not serious. I could get on with my life normally and not longer mortify my family with my ailments. I came to believe what he told me and tried to keep my mind distracted so I didn’t get sick.

By then, I already had many friends in the computer school, among them, Dalia and Osuany. They were cousins. Dalia was a nurse and worked at the General Hospital of Tepeaca; Osuany was a single mother and both liked to drink and to have fun.

On Dalia’s birthday I was invited to party in a bar which is downtown. I thought that it would be a good occasion to have fun. That gradually became routine and we drank almost every third day, without excess.

In my house they didn’t perceive that I was arriving a bit drunk. On the contrary, it seemed like a good idea that I was occupied.

I was still in contact with Armando and that way I could find out of the process of my aggressor. Although the fear that he could escape was already minimal, his threat was still present in me.

One day I was shopping with my mom and my nephews, I received a call from Armando. I answered afraid to hear that the guy had escaped and I trembled with fear. Armando knew me so well, that immediately told me not to worry, that he was calling to tell me that the man had hanged himself inside the prison in which he was and that he had taken a picture to send it to me, that way I could be convinced that he wouldn’t go out to hurt me. At last, I would be calm. The person who harmed me so much was dead.

I told Armando that, please, to assure me what he said. I didn’t want to wait any longer to see the photo. I asked my mom to wait for me, that I had to recharge my cell phone. I looked for an internet and when I saw the photo I cried; It was a fact that he would never bother me again and finally I would sleep peacefully. After seeing it very well and make sure it was him, I deleted it. Nervously, I went back to my mom and my nephews to finish our shopping.

At midnight I dialed Armando, because I needed details. He told me that the man had killed himself because in several occasions he was raped inside the prison. “He already paid what he did to you!” Knowing he had been raped didn’t made me happy and much less left me satisfied. I came to

feel guilty that a person would have taken his life for having been a victim, like myself, of a rape. That thought disappeared after a while, when, commenting with a priest who knew me and knew what had happened to me, made me understand that that person had chosen a path of destruction and evil and that I should not accuse myself or be ashamed for having defended myself. Finally, it was his decision and that was his fate for having enjoyed doing evil to many young women. The above mentioned I knew because, when we were confronted, the authorities realized, by his filiation, that I wasn't the only victim, that there were more. At the end, the support of the priest comforted me and liberated me from so much pain and resentment. He suggested to forgive him so I could begin the new life that was waiting for me. When commenting with Pablo, he agreed since, according to him, it was already the time to be happy.

Again I thanked Armando for helping me, although I always had the doubt if he would not have sent someone to kill him so that I was more calm.

On the other hand, I was able to separate from Armando more peacefully because, when we located another of the rapist's victims so that she would denounce him, the girl's father, when he knew that we had given money so he wouldn't go out free, he thanked Armando and gave him back the money that he had spent. This way, I no longer felt so in debt to him.

I will never know if Armando sent someone to kill him, or whether it was the the other victim's dad, or if, indeed, he killed himself. The only sure thing is that, from then on, I lived without the fear of finding him again.

PABLO

With Pablo I shared many things at a distance. We laughed at the phone, he supported me in my plans and, several times, even economically. So it was two and a half years, with the hope that one day he would come to Mexico.

It was in September 2008 when *Pablo81* gave me the news that in a month I would see him in person. He would return to Mexico to live in Tehuacan, three hours from Tepeaca. He would be very close and we could see each other often. I was very excited. After almost three years of waiting, I would fulfill my dream of seeing that person so special to me. I trembled and felt a great shiver. Thank God, on that occasion it was out of love.

On October 6, 2008, at seven o'clock in the morning, Pablo phoned me to tell me that he was already in Mexico. "Tomorrow I'll see you and I'll be able to hug you!", he said to me. I could not believe it. We agreed to meet, the next day, in Tecamachalco, at ten o'clock in the morning.

I woke up early; in fact, I did not sleep from the excitement. I took a shower and got ready. I didn't know if he would like me, but I made an effort to go the best as possible. At ten o'clock I was already at the agreed place. My cell phone rang. "Where are you?" I replied that at the bus stop and he told me that he would pass in a black van. It wasn't more than two minutes when he was in front of me. He recognized me and smiled at me. When I got into the van, his first words were: "I knew it was you!", and he kissed me.

We went to have breakfast and talked about our story, from the first day where we met online. Later, we went to the movies and he told me that he would take me to my house, because he wanted to know where I lived.

That way we went out together half year. We saw each other every eight days, he phoned me twice a day and showed me lots of affection. Repeatedly I traveled with him to Oaxaca, Veracruz, Tabasco and Mexico City. He had a trailer and he was engaged in transporting merchandise.

I was happy at last. With him I had my first sexual relationship and he managed to erase the bitter experience of the rape with much patience and, above all, with much love. He knew what I had been through and he was very careful in the way he treated me. After that approach, I couldn't imagine my life without him. My family didn't agree with our relationship, but I was very sure of what I wanted and would defend it at all costs.

My mother told me that Pablo was lying to me, that of course he continued with his wife. I didn't believe her and argued with her. I used to

party more often and my mother believed that I was going to work at the events.

My friendship with Osuany bothered Pablo, because he said that by far anyone could see that she was very crazy. That bothered me. However, I began to take my distance from them and took the opportunity to be more with him. Although it was for a few hours, I was happy at his side. That was enough for me.

My only concern was that I was still getting sick. Now I had some little balls, as fat, on my back, arm and leg. Pablo asked me about them, but I didn't know what caused them. I didn't give them importance, since, probably, they were also provoked by my mind. Pablo did not think the same and would get angry, he said that I should go to the doctor, since he wanted me for the rest of his life. "Don't play with your life", he scolded me and gave me money for the medical consultation.

On that occasion I went with another doctor who Dalia had recommended me. He told me that they were abscesses or something hormonal and ordered analysis. With his answer I stayed calm and decided not to do anything. I told Pablo that I was taking treatment and he believed me.

I kept working on weekends, when I didn't see Pablo. He didn't like my job either, since it was more likely that I would drink and, by the time I go out, I was in danger when returning home. So, I had to let him know the time I went out and when I returned, since that made him calmer. Now, I think he wanted to control me, because I end up giving him a daily report of my activities. When he phoned me, I had to answer immediately so he wouldn't imagine bad things.

Pablo proposed me that we live together. He told me that he would look for a house at the entry to Oaxaca. I got so excited that I told him yes, but not so far because I needed to be close to my family. "Why in Oaxaca and not in Tehuacan?" I already knew his brothers and nephews. He answered that it was because he traveled more frequently to Oaxaca, and that way he could spend more time with me and would have where to rest. I believed him.

Although I loved him very much, I needed my family's approval and, at the first opportunity, I told my brother about my plans. I told him that Pablo had been married and that he had two children, that I loved him very much and he had proposed me that we live together. My brother told me to think things through, that I wasn't a girl anymore and that he would respect

whatever decision I made. My mother didn't like his response, because deep down she wished he would make me change my mind. I felt happy. As my father would not agree, with him I would act differently. I would go and live with Pablo and then we would go back and talk to him.

When I told Pablo what my brother said, he was glad and started looking for a house so we could go as soon as possible. We started planning and seeing furniture, because he wanted us to have what was necessary to live comfortably.

Eight days later, my brother told me that he had thought things better, that he still respected my decision, but to be aware that I would be destroying a family, because probably he was still living with her. If not, to explain why he wanted to take me to Oaxaca. "If you have children with Pablo, I will love them very much, but I don't want Pablo in my house. Think about what kind of father he is; he is going to leave his children to go with you. In time, he will make the same to you." He asked me to remember the days, nights, years and special events that we spent alone with my mother, to remember the reason why our father wasn't with us. "It was by going out with other women, but, nevertheless, he never left us to go live with someone else." He told me many things that were certain and on which he was absolutely right. In spite of that, it was bigger my need to be with Pablo and not lose the opportunity to try.

When I told Pablo what my brother had said to me, he told me that he would never abandon his children, that he would go with me, but that he would be very aware that they did not lack anything. That he hoped that I would agree with him and support him. It seemed to me that he was right and that I would have to help him with his children when necessary.

The Christmas and New Year holidays were almost coming and Pablo told me that he would spend those dates with his children, and that the next ones, probably, we would be together. I took the opportunity to be with my family.

Pablo was very affectionate and showed illusion that soon we were going to live together. For me that meant my happiness; at last, an illusion would come true.

The New Year arrived and I wanted to be calm with my family, so I told Pablo that I would work that night. That way he wouldn't send me messages until the next day and I would avoid getting angry with my mother.

The 31st in the afternoon I sent him a message from my mother's phone because I had no longer balance. I told him that I was going to work,

to have a nice New Year, that I loved him very much and that I would write him the next day. Whenever I sent him messages from any other number that wasn't mine, he would respond or he would call me back to my number, because he knew that it was because I had no balance. On this occasion, he replied a blank message, to my mother's number. I was surprised, but I sent him another one that said: "Thank you for your blank message, I love you too." In a few seconds a call entered to my mother's cell phone. In that moment I knew something was not right. I was sure that who called wasn't Pablo. As I answered, I walked to the yard, since my mother was close and I didn't want her to hear. A woman's voice asked me who she was talking to, that she wanted to know who was bothering from this number. By then, I was sure that it was his wife and I was determined not to lie. That phone call showed me the reason my mother had when telling me that they were still together.

Pablo had lied to me and I would not be as the ruthless mistress. I would answer her with the truth, and if she hated me, she would know that it was not all my fault. She asked me if I knew that he was married. I replied that I knew that he had been, but that now he was alone. That was enough for her to insult me and curse me. I thought in hanging her up, but if she called again, my mother would answer, so I let her continue and answered all her questions. Finally, if he left me, his wife would know that he had deceived both her and me. I told her that I had been going out with him for several years, since he was in the United States. That he had told me that he didn't love her anymore and, for that reason, he was about to move in with me. She kept on insulting me and repeated that she would seek me out to beat me. "You can curse me everything you want; in that we are not equal. Maybe it is one of the reasons why Pablo is with me. I didn't know you were still together. I love him very much and he shows me the same thing. Today I realize his deception and that hurts me more than your insults. It is to him to whom you have to ask for explanations, not to me."

She was furious and started mocking. She said that I would never have Pablo just for myself, because he would never leave her, for him, the most important thing was his family. I admitted that she was right and told her that I was sure that everything would change because I considered myself a very valuable woman who knew how to recognize when she lost. "In this occasion I don't lose, because it helped me to see what I did not want and taught me the quality of man that you have as a husband. I will not look for him anymore, I am not interested in a womanizer and unfaithful man, with

such a capacity to lie. Tell him not to look for me either.” Finally, I hung up the phone.

I couldn't help crying. It was so much my disappointment! My mother came out to the yard, she looked at me and said: “It was his wife, right?” I nodded. She told me to lock me up in my room if I wanted to cry, because my uncles were starting to arrive.

About half an hour later my cell phone rang, it was Pablo. I didn't want to answer him. He insisted a lot so I did. I asked what he wanted. “Let me explain the reasons why I did not tell you the truth, forgive me, I don't want to lose you. I love you and I swear I did not lie about that. She is sick and I could not leave her, give me time to talk to her and go with you.”

That call changed my way of looking at things. I told him that nobody would ever love him like I did, that I thanked him for the beautiful moments that changed my life for a few years, and having helped me to erase my bad experiences, having taught me how to love and so much more. I asked him why he had cheated on me, why he had excited me. “You ruined my life and illusions. Until this day you had been very important, I loved you so much as I hate you now.”

He asked me to meet, but my mind told me that I should forget about him. I told him to make things right with his wife and to make sure that she would not dial again, because it was my mother's phone. I asked him not to call me anymore and hung up.

That night I invited one of my cousins and my friend Osuany to dinner, in addition to the family that my mother had invited. It was a good occasion to drink. I pretended very well and never brought out Pablo's theme.

For several days he insisted on sending messages. He said that he missed me and that he didn't want to lose me. I did not answer. I couldn't overcome his cheating. But I missed him a lot and his messages made me feel good.

On the other hand, I had a good excuse to go out and have fun every eight days. At home I said that I was going to work and returned at two or three in the morning, being careful that my parents wouldn't notice the state in which I came back.

Three months after we had broken up, he called me from a public telephone. He said he was near my house and wanted to talk to me. He asked me to see me in the park; If I didn't go, he threatened to go and look for me at my house. I accepted. My nervousness was a sign that I hadn't stopped loving him. When we met, he asked me to forgive him. He said he

missed me: “Swear to me that you no longer feel anything for me”, he demanded, and I couldn’t. He gave explanations that I did not believe, but he persuaded me to go on together. This time we would see each other whenever I wanted to.

Back home I felt really happy. I knew that, now, our relationship was a game, nothing serious. I wouldn’t change my going out with my friends and, best of all, I wouldn’t report about anything I did.

That’s how we were for four months. I continued to accompany him now and then to his travels. At the places where we arrived they knew him very well, especially women. You could tell that it bothered them to see him accompanied and several times we got angry about it.

One day that I went out with my friends, Osuany went to the bathroom and left her cell phone on the table. By chance, the phone rang and I could see that the one who called was Pablo. I didn’t think and I answered. He didn’t recognize my voice and he asked how I was. I told him well and that Osuany as well. I asked him to explain me why did he call her. He said that he had dialed her because my phone sent him to voice mail. I didn’t believe him and hung up. Something told me that he lied to me. I searched the text messages, there were several from Pablo in which he proposed her to go out. Osuany replied that she would go out with him in exchange for borrowed money. When she returned to the table, I complained that she had betrayed our friendship. She told me that he had looked for her, that he was a womanizer and that the best thing I could do was to leave him. I felt so much rage, that I ended our friendship. Pablo dialed her again, they argued and she hung up the phone. Osuany and I decided to continue our “friendship”. I understood that Pablo wouldn’t change.

I went home and locked up myself to cry for him. I got a bad diarrhea and a headache. I thought that, again, my mind was provoking my aches and pains. I told my mom what had happened with Pablo and Osuany and she advised me to leave them both. Surely the anger had made me sick. Pablo kept on dialing me and I changed my number.

After this new disappointment I kept on drinking and my sadness was more noticeable: I started to lose weight and have a fever at night, more when I was going to work. I bought a box of effervescent aspirins that always carried with me. I decided not to give importance to diseases. I kept seeing Osuany at work. She told me to do something to improve my mood. Pablo sent me mails and that motivated me a little, but since I didn’t respond, he

stopped doing it. I didn't know anything about him and, as much as I wanted, I didn't understand what was going on with me.

I missed Pablo, I still loved him, despite everything, he was indispensable for me. I didn't understand how I overcame rape, harassment of my aggressor, the confrontation and many more things, but I couldn't with the separation from Pablo. I told myself that I was a strong woman and that I had to overcome it. My body felt exhausted and no longer obeyed me. At work I was asked if I had problems, because I looked very thin. I did not know what to answer. I did not know if I was this way for Pablo or because my mind was getting worse.

DIAGNOSIS

Somehow, I had to leave that phase, so I decided to accept an invitation from a friend from work to go out with him one Saturday. His name was Alejandro. Apart from being handsome, we had always gotten along great and I liked him. I thought he would help me get over Pablo. We went out more often. Alejandro had been married to one of my neighbors and I went out with him to have fun; He avoided people seeing us together. The only ones who knew were our co-workers.

Over time, my memory of Pablo was less frequent, but in my house the said that they saw me worse, to no longer think of him and to eat better, because maybe I had depression because of him. My body was telling me that something was wrong. I noticed that I was losing my hair by strands every time I showered or combed my hair and every morning when I got up I would see my hair on the pillow. "Surely I lack vitamins," I thought. The fevers were more frequent and, at night, I could not stand the heat in my feet. My skin, in the chest and the crotch, was growing dry, as if I had dandruff, and as much as I put on cream, it didn't regenerate. I noticed many changes in my body, and when I commented with my family I could see their face of annoyance. Again with my aches and pains: Stop, Betty, don't start".

During those days, one of my cousins, very close, was getting married: we would have a party in the family and, surely, I would have fun and I would forget about my ailments. My family is very big and the majority knew of my

ills, to the point of making jokes. They didn't call me Betty anymore, but Dolores (Aches). I kept worrying because I felt weaker and I was continuously lying down. My mother would get upset, because she thought it was a symptom of depression. She would get up, she would tell me that I should activate myself and not think of nonsense. I took advantage of every moment when she went out so I could rest.

The wedding day arrived and my best clothes were big on me: I had lost a lot of weigh and there were even people who told me that I looked better this way. At times, I felt good. Already at the party, it was very cold and I had a fever. That day I noticed another discomfort: when breathing, I felt burning in the throat when inhaling and exhaling. I commented with my family, but they ignored me.

Days went by and I got worse. They took me, again, with my doctor. He asked me why I was losing weight, if it was because of being depressed. My mother told him what had happened with Pablo, since she was sure that was the reason. The doctor spoke with me and prescribed me antidepressants and vitamins. I told him that I was still with cough, but now with phlegm. He prescribed me something for cough and asked me not to make my family look bad, to take the medication and if not, he would hospitalize me again. With mocking tone, he told me that I would help him change his car. I promised to follow his directions. I told him that I knew my parents and my brother should not spend more on me.

My mother looked anguished. I saw fear in her face. In some way she tried to distract me and, in one of those days, she took me downtown Puebla. We went in a church where the Lord of Mercy was. I could not help crying; All I could tell him was that I believed in him and that I would accept whatever he decided. "In your hands I am, Lord."

Not even eight days passed and my condition was more critical: I breathed with great difficulty, I almost had no hair, my skin tone darkened and I weighed forty-five kilos. I had dropped ten in less than three months. In addition, I continued with fevers, body decompensation, muscle pain, heat in the feet, constant cough with a lot of phlegm and it was harder and harder for me to breathe normally. My relatives were alarmed and they started doubting that it was something mental.

In my thought and in my soul I could feel what lived in me. I was certain of what it was, but I didn't allow my lips to repeat what my brain screamed at me. I was so afraid that my thought would come true! I saw my

God and said to him: "Lord, let it be anything but that". I could not even tell him.

It was time to rectify some past thoughts: after my rape I asked God, demanding him, to let me die. So many times I asked him that, now that I couldn't see his image over my headboard, I didn't know how to tell him that I really wanted to live. I felt ashamed and could not tell him. Now I had what I had always asked for and it frightened me. "Forgive me for those bad thoughts and help my family." Who came to visit me to know how I was doing, did it more frequently and, although no one told me anything, I know I looked terrible. Their faces screamed at me that I did. It hurt them to see me like this, because their eyes shone full of tears.

One of my aunts who knew about my relationship with Pablo spoke with me and my mom. She asked me if it was because of him that I was letting myself die. I answered no, but she didn't believe me. She told my mom that she would look for him so he would come and see me, that she should let him come in so I could get better. My mother's concern led her to accept to let Pablo come in to see if I could get better. The next day, my aunt told me that she had talked to him and that he would come to see me. Nor did that encourage me. Definitely, that wasn't the reason of my discomfort.

The expenses grew so we decided to enroll in the Popular Insurance. We went in mid-June, I was told that in less than fifteen days, I could start using it.

There was no improvement and my brother decided to take me to his house to be closer to the doctor and hospitals. I was there from the first days of July, but I missed my father. I imagined him in the house, alone and sad. My brother would take me to see him and would return me to his house. I took lots of medication and flavor serum; I did not eat much because everything caused me nausea. I could no longer stand by myself and, to get into the car and to get off, my brother had to carry me.

July 7th, 2010 arrived, my twenty eighth birthday. I had visitors that day. After they sang happy birthday to me, they encouraged me to keep on fighting and not to become discouraged. That night no longer I was able to sleep because of the lack of breathing. My brother saw my mom so distressed that he asked her what she wanted him to do. They would hospitalize me so I would get better. I was distressed at the thought of the money they would spend. The doctor would tell me again that it was my head. Already in the car, I told my brother that I didn't want to be hospitalized, that, please, to take me to the Health Center of Tepeaca, to

leave me there and see what they would do, that I didn't want to go with the same doctor anymore.

They heard what I said and I entered the Health Center where, luckily, my mother knew the nurse. She helped us so we could be received promptly. The doctor who took care of me was very young and very friendly. I told her my history, she checked me and told me that possibly was pneumonia. She prescribed me medication and gave me an order to go to the General Hospital of Tepeaca, with the internist.

When I told the doctor who attended me about my long treatment of typhoid and salmonellosis, plus the weight loss, in less than ten minutes came to the question that I feared so much: Have you ever had an HIV test? I answered yes and that it had come out negative. "Why did they do it to you?" I said that my doctor proposed it when he knew I had been raped. "We will do it again along with other tests to discard tuberculosis." The studies would be done outside the hospital and would cost.

Between my brother and my uncle Gildardo, my father's brother, took me home an oxygen tank so I could sleep and rest a little. The doctor cited me three days in a row to take gastric samples and do another tuberculosis test. My mom and I left the hospital very thoughtfully. My brother told me not to worry, that the first test had been negative and that, in addition, I hadn't had relations. "or yes?", he asked me. I replied yes and he got upset, but then he said that the good thing was that, then, I had already overcome the rape. Meanwhile, the idea that it could be AIDS did not leave my head and the fear was constant.

I had the laboratory studies done in Puebla. The Elisa test results and the confirmation would be for July 13. Those in the tuberculosis study, forty days later.

The next three days I continued to attend the hospital to have samples taken of gastric juice. What surprised me the most was the doctor's professionalism. He knew a lot and put a lot of effort into my case. I didn't have to line up nor take turn. As soon as I arrived, I went to consult. He knew my file number by heart and my date of birth. It made me feel safe.

I had to go to the hospital by taxi, as I was getting weaker. Many people supported me: neighbors, friends and, above all, my family. In particular, my dad's sisters, aunt Esperanza who lives near my house. Aunt Viki and Uncle Gildardo, as well the rest of the family. It seemed that I had them brought in the worst moments. They were always with me.

On July 13th my brother went on vacation and went to collect the analysis. He arrived in the evening. He always used to go to check on me. This time he kept on talking to my mother in the kitchen and, after a while, he came to see me. He came in very serious, he looked at me and said:

-I was talking to mom about your situation. She is stubborn and does not want to understand that you should sleep alone, not because you can infect us, on the contrary, because you are so weak of defenses that we can bring infections to you. I know you understand me and you will force mom to sleep in another bed.

-Yes, I'll talk to her.

-Tomorrow, at last, the doctor will tell you what is it that you have and about that is that I want to talk to you. First of all, you know that we love you very much and you should be sure that no matter what happens, whatever, we are going to be with you. I also want you to promise me that you will be strong, as you have been, to face so many things that have happened. I want you to compromise with us to make a big effort so we can get ahead together from whatever comes. Do you promise me, sis?

-I promise.

There were many reasons why I should live. The most important for me were my nephews; I wanted a future with them, I wanted to see them grow. At that time, what really hurt me was that they couldn't approach to me. Since they were babies, whenever they came home they slept with me. My room was theirs too and we shared pranks, laughter, tears, scolds, adventures and games. They are a fundamental part of my life and it hurt in my soul to see their sad faces saying, from my room's door: "Hello, aunt, and good bye. We love you". If I wanted a future with them, I had to know what I was facing.

July 14, 2010: appointment at the General Hospital to receive results. Aunt Viki, with her husband, Uncle Arturo and my cousin, they were at my house very early. They live in Puebla, but they didn't mind traveling early to be with us. They would accompany me, my mother, my brother and my sister-in-law. My father would not go, I think because he was scared of knowing what was happening to me. It seemed better to me that he was at home, because I have always felt he is more sensitive and weak.

We arrived at the hospital. The doctor took the last gastric test while he asked my mother if she already had the results of the Elisa test and the Western Blot confirmation. She showed them to him and took us to his desk.

-Who came with you?

-My son, my daughter-in-law and my brothers-in-law.

-Are they reliable?

-Yes, doctor –my mother responded.

It was then when I heard the doctor give me the news that my subconscious had been screaming for a long time and I didn't want to hear.

-I'm sorry to be the messenger of bad news, but it is my duty to give you the diagnosis and information: you are HIV-aids positive.

I watched my whole life go by in a second and my first thought was: death. My first reaction was to cry and tell my mother that I didn't want to live like this. I didn't know how long I would live and it was sure that I would get worse everyday. I asked myself questions aloud: Why me? How will I live like this? How will my father react? How will I tell my brother? No one is going to love me anymore! How will I explain it to Pablo?

What worried me the most was my father, now not only he had to learn about the rape, but also that I had HIV-aids. I could not stop crying. In her desperation, my mother opened the doctor's office door and called my aunt Viki. She came in and said to her: "My daughter has AIDS!" My aunt cried and told me to calm down. I went out of the doctor's office and, taking my aunt by the shoulders, I said to her: "Auntie! please, tell me it is not true, that this is a dream. Please, wake me up. Tell daddy God to give me another chance, that I will know how to take advantage of it. Please, tell Him, he listens to you. I am dreaming, right? This can not be truth. Tell me, please, it is not true".

I kept shaking her and she cried. Her gaze told me yes, that it was true, that it was not a dream. At that moment my brother walked to meet me, he hugged me and told me that everything would be fine. I answered him angrily and crying that no, that nothing would be fine anymore and no one was going to love me. He cried as well, as he asked the doctor if there was the possibility of error, like the first time. The doctor answered that it was very difficult, but that they would take another sample. He asked me if I wanted to be hospitalized for pneumonia and I said no, I wanted to run away from that place. My mother and my aunt said yes, because I had not rested and I was very altered. The doctor wanted to know who would stay with me as responsible, and without thinking, my aunt said she would. My mother had to be present when they talked to my father. My brother could no longer stand it and cried as he left the hospital. My mother asked my sister-in-law to go after him to reassure him. Meanwhile, the doctor and my

aunt took me to the laboratories to confirm what, from a long time, I already had sensed.

They took me to an isolated room where my aunt had to disguise herself to be with me. I was still on a hospital gurney, with a serum on each arm. I felt half of my body asleep and light pinching in the other half. Suddenly I was no longer crying; it was more anger what I felt. Then an attendant came and told me he would take me to a special room. He placed an enormous sign on my chest, around sixty by forty, with my full name plus: HIV-aids + POSSIBLE TUBERCULOSIS. He asked me how old I was and I told him that I had turned twenty-eight on July 7th. Very sarcastic, he told me: "Like the saying, they gave you your gift".

While he was taking me to the room, I heard the screams of a woman who reproached God the situation she was going through and saying why he punished her like this, while crying with desperation. When I heard her, I asked God that if my test was big, what would be hers. When I passed near the woman, I felt rage to see that she was about to give birth to a baby. With pleasure I would change places.

When we got to the room, they placed in the head of the bed the huge sign. My nervous system was bad, I could feel it and see, as half body was still asleep and the thumb of my left foot couldn't stop spinning. It was too much my desperation and I wanted to go home. The doctor came to talk with me and told me that he carried two news: a bad one and a good one. I asked him to give me the good one, because I was sure of the bad one. My tuberculosis results were negative and could now for sure treat the pneumonia. Then he said that the bad one was that my HIV test had come back positive again.

I didn't expect any other news. I was sure that the HIV was already in me, I didn't even expect a miracle. I communicated to the doctor with an arrogant tone, that I wanted to leave because I felt very bad. I pulled the sheet to discover my left foot so he could see how my finger kept on turning. The doctor laughed a little bit and told me to give him ten minutes, and if in that time I was still feeling the same, I would leave. The nurse put me a medicine and the doctor told me that he had to explain me about my situation: "The disease you have is caused by the low defenses of your immune system, that is, the lower they get, the more fragile you become and that allows you to acquire a chain of diseases such as those that you already had in your medical history. There are treatments, but they are very expensive. More or less it would be around thirty-eight thousand pesos per month".

When I heard the number, my hopes for survival were over. Then he told me: “The good news is that in Mexico and in Puebla there is a place where they can help you with information, psychological support, medical, dental and, the best of all, is that your treatment, if you decide to take it to continue living, would be free. But I need you to authorize me to make a writing that you must show as soon as you can in that place. You will see that they will support you a lot”. That was my only option and I had to take it. The doctor left and I didn’t know more; I fell asleep.

THE AMBULATORY CENTER FOR PREVENTION AND CARE FOR AIDS AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (CAPASITS)

When I woke up, my aunt was still at my side and it was already noon. They took me to eat, but it seemed that even the air was infected, because not even the person who brought the food wanted to enter; from the door she would give the tray to my aunt. I asked my aunt if someone had phoned from my house, because I was worried about my father’s reaction. She said no and that, surely, everything was fine.

After a while my sister-in-law arrived and I asked her the same thing. They had already talked to him and he was calmer. When my mother came in, I stayed alone with her. She said that we had to put all our effort in this, that there were many people asking for me: aunts, uncles, cousins, waiting for news. I asked her if they had informed them what I had, She said no, that she only told them that I had pneumonia. My father’s brothers, the closest ones, knew the truth so they could support my dad. My brother was already better, but he was worried about the decisions I could make. Deep down, he was afraid that I could try to commit suicide. I was surprised that my mother said to me: “Your brother since yesterday, he knew what you had. The results were delivered open. He endured so he wouldn’t cry when he came to see you; that’s why he spoke to you”. Then I understood why his face was different.

I had many things in my head, but suddenly I thought of Pablo. “Mom, Pablo! How am I going to tell him? I wouldn’t forgive myself if he was

infected because of me.” My mother asked me not to think about it, at least until I was more stable. “Later we will see how to tell him”, she told me.

My aunt came back. She stayed all day and all night. The next day, the cleaning lady didn't enter either, she asked my aunt for the garbage. That made me feel very bad.

A nurse came and told me that I had to respond some questions as part of the procedure. I didn't imagine the content: name? how old are you? Are you a promiscuous woman? How many partners have you had? Did your mother have many partners? Does your mother have sex with other women? Is your father a womanizer? Does your father have sex with men? Do you have aunts or relatives selling sex? Lots of questions that seemed to me monstrous. It seemed that I was living the confrontation once more. About ten o'clock in the morning, the doctor arrived and told me that he would sign up my discharge so I could go to inform myself about the CAPASITS and start my treatment with retroviral as soon as possible.

My mother arrived with clean clothes so I could change. She commented me that in the hallway she met Dalia. Not even ten minutes later she entered my room and asked me how I was. I told her that already better, but that it was impossible not to see the huge sign with my diagnosis. She saw it and told me to put all my effort, that there were people who lived many years. After a while she left.

About eleven, I left the hospital. My friends and family were waiting for me outside. At home, when I saw my father, I verified that they had lied to me; he was not well, he had suffered too much with the news and he could only tell me that he loved me very much and that he would always be by my side. He asked me why I hadn't told him before about the rape. I told him not to cry anymore, that I would come out of that and I would be fine. “I promise you, dad.”

My cousins who live near my house arrived with my uncles. They already knew what I had and they all hugged me and asked me to fight for my life. They said they loved me and they would be with me. I rested a moment and the visits continued. My brother apologized and told them that they had to take me to another hospital to see if I could get in for my treatment.

When we arrived at CAPASITS, we were told that we would have to return the next day and they gave us the requirements: to take another Elisa test and the confirmatory, but this time in their laboratories.

The next day, at seven in the morning, we were already there. I do not remember how many days passed so they would give me the results, but when the psychologist was going to inform me the result, she explained about the disease and how the treatment helped to control it. When she told me that my result was positive, that I had HIV-aids, was very surprised when I answered:

-All right, thank you.

She looked at me and said:

-How is it okay? Did you already know? You are the first patient who gives me an answer like that.

-Yes, I knew, I need the result to enter the CAPASITS.

I had an appointment for July 28, to talk with the social worker and write my medical record. She told me that they would support me with all the services and asked me if I needed legal support, because I told her that the information about my diagnosis had come out from the General Hospital of Tepeaca by a nurse and, because of that, I suffered from discrimination in my locality, which affected me too much. She told me that when I wanted, we could sue, but to think things through, since it was a way to confirm my diagnosis and maybe I wasn't yet prepared. She welcomed me and told me that they would go with me, hand in hand, to improve my health and that she promised to speak to the Director of the General Hospital of Tepeaca to sanction his staff. I thanked her.

On August 9th they did my first capture for the CD4 count and the viral load. I had no idea what it was about, but they explained to me that it was to see in what situation I was. It was definitely aids, and I was in the terminal stage. That same day I had an appointment with the psychologist and she told me that in a short time, if I took my medication, I would be better and that all my life they would be supporting me.

Every eight days I went to the Center. My brother would take me and then he would go to work, which was very tough for him. As I could walk more without getting tired, we traveled by bus.

August 27 was my first medical appointment with the infectologist that would give me my first treatment and my CD4 and viral load results. This last one came out very high and the doctor explained to me that I had twenty-six good cells in my body against a hundred thousand bad.

My situation was critical, but I could improve it if I took my medication properly. He asked me if I would be responsible of taking it and I replied yes. He gave me a sheet of paper to sign it. In it I committed myself to take care of

myself and to take my medication. I was willing to keep my promise to my brother and, also, I would do it because I wanted to live.

When I started treatment, my situation, far from improving, got worse. My nervous system was upset, I felt very desperate, nausea and I didn't want to eat anything. All of a sudden I would have fever. I was like that for several days, without a bite, except water to take the medicine. I felt so bad, that my mother went so far as to ask me not to take it anymore, as it seemed that it was harming me more. My desire to survive led me to not abandon it, despite how bad I felt.

On October 5th I had an appointment again. My mother told the doctor that she saw me worse, that I wasn't improving and, on the contrary, I was weaker every day. I already weighed thirty-four kilos. The doctor asked me if I had taken an adherence talk and I said no. He also asked me if, for some reason, I had stopped taking the medication, even if it was once. I replied no, that I had not suspended it. The doctor congratulated me and started to explain to me that inside my body there was a battle between good and evil, to put it in a way that I could understand; for that reason, I felt worse. If I stopped taking the medication, could be very dangerous because my health was so delicate. He sent me to take the talk, where they would explain me the benefits of the medication, reactions, symptoms, side effects and, above all, how important it was to stick to it to get the best results. After that talk, I understood a little more what I felt. A few days passed and I began to notice the difference; I no longer felt despair.

I imagined how bad my appearance was, when I saw a bitter sadness on the face of my relatives. By then, I felt so dry, so dehydrated, that I could not remember how to cry. Moreover, I didn't even feel the body. There were no pains or discomforts, I spoke very little and I think I was dying. I felt my soul, I lived my thoughts and I didn't notice my body's appearance. If it was fat or thin it didn't matter, if I didn't feel it; it seemed like it was not mine. I watched my legs and they looked normal. I didn't understand why my family saw me with damp eyes, and every time that I noticed this shine, I asked to myself: Do I look so bad? Will it be that I am dying?

Suddenly I felt so calm that I could hear the sound of their voices far away. I came to think that my soul was the one who lived and floated over my body. When I had to move, whether it was to eat, drink or go to the bathroom, I didn't know how to move my bones; my body didn't obey my brain.

My family members came and prayed for me. There were so many people around my bed, that I thought it was my funeral; only the candles were missing. I cannot remember how much time passed before I could feel better, but my life would continue.

Apart from facing the HIV-aids, another worse struggle was coming, which hurt me more and, if it beat me, it would jeopardize my life. When leaving the hospital, those who claimed to be my friends were going to my house to know how I was, because Dalia had already told them that I has aids.

Dalia was the responsible of spreading my situation, and so neighbors, friendships as well as enmities, knew my diagnosis. This is how started a greater hell than HIV-aids, the hell of social prejudices and discrimination.

When they learned of my illness, they began to formulate stories: that I was crazy, or that I was in bars and that was why it had happened what happened to me. They also told Alejandro, the guy with whom I went out for the last time. When his ex-wife found out, she dedicated to spread it her way. She said that I got aids because I messed around with married men, to the point of giving exact details of where and with whom I lived, and my special peculiarities, so that I would be recognized and they wouldn't get infected.

These gossip came to my ears through my friends, that they only visited me to give me bad news. I depressed myself too much, I cried and I was distressed by what people thought and talked about me.

My family was asked what I had and responded that pneumonia, but, they were also affected by the gossip, more my father, because the day he was told my diagnosis, he wouldn't get tired of crying and of cursing my aggressor. My mother told me that he beat with force the wall, that he cried at his job and it was hard for him to assimilate that his daughter was suffering. Also, he had to endure the evilness of society that labeled me as a crazy person full of aids.

Not satisfied with the damage they had already done to me, they believed they had the authority to prevent those who knew me, among them Pablo. I was just digesting the news, when he sent me a message asking me if it was true that I had aids. I didn't know what to say to him, since I still didn't have clear the theme. I asked him who had told him that. He replied that a man had phoned him to prevent him and to get the HIV test done, that he told him that I was very bad and that I had been hospitalized. I just had to tell him the truth, since it was never my intention to hide the news from him,

especially because there was a possibility of him being infected. I was the person with the duty to inform him. Confirming his suspicion, he got angry so much that he began to question me and to blame me. Among many things, he told me that if I knew what I had, why had I been with him? It hurt so much that reaction! At the bottom of my heart I expected that he would understand. I didn't let him insult me and said to him: "Look, Pablo, I really didn't know anything. I'm going through very painful moments and I was going to tell you when I was better, but so as they called you to spread my diagnosis, all Tepeaca already knows. I suffer from discrimination and the least I need that you come to blame me for being unfaithful. This could have happened to you with any of the women you go out with. Look what the things are! You played with me, and I ask God to simply be one lesson for you so you will not have to lose like me". I reminded him that he was the one who was looking for me and the damage that he had done to me. After that he did not answer me again. I felt very bad, and at the same time I rested, since, good or bad, he knew about my diagnosis and, surely, he would seek for help to see if he was infected.

In the meantime, I kept on going to the CAPASITS for my appointments and treatment. Little by little, my body gained strength. My psychologist suggested me to attend a women workshop in which they expressed what they felt and, best of all, it helped them assimilate their illness. Thanks to that, in a very short time I was able to accept myself as I was; I began to deal with society and face it; I was feeling a little more strength and I had more hair.

At that time, my aunt Viki invited us to visit the virgin of Juquila, in Oaxaca. Then we would go to Puerto Escondido. My aunt wanted to take me with the virgin to thank her for my health. I remember that, as a child, my mother took us to see the virgin and many times I went to the sea.

On this occasion I saw everything beautiful; so different that it seemed that it was the first time I went. When we reached the sea and I saw it, immediately I wanted to get on a boat and ride on it. That day, the sea seemed to me of another color; it was not blue but light green. I paid attention to the details: its smell, the waves' movement...it seemed beautiful what my eyes saw. For the first time I had the chance to see a huge stingray. There were many signs that my life had taken a complete turn, since I had never perceived the small details, the beauty of nature, the sky, the sun, the rain, the air. It seemed as if I had been blind for many years and now the HIV made me perceive and value so many things. Everything seemed beautiful to

me. I did not know if I would see the sea again, so I would take advantage of it.

After a few months I discovered that my life was not over. Thanks to HIV, my life began and I returned again to the sea. I still thought it was beautiful and that showed me that, surely, I would come back many more times.

On February 8th, 2011, I attended my medical appointment. After switching medications twice for side effects, I already felt re-established. The doctor gave me excellent news: "You have three hundred sixty-four good cells and less than forty bad. That means that your treatment works a hundred percent and you are undetectable. This means that you have less chances of acquiring new diseases and less risk of transmitting the disease. Therefore, I guarantee you that, if we continue that way, you will not die from HIV. Now you have to take care and prevent from accidents." By saying this, he started to laugh with me.

It was incredible what was happening to me! In the women's workshops I had heard that some patients, with nine years of diagnosis, still didn't assimilate their disease or, worse, that as much as they attached to the treatment they didn't manage to be undetectable. I had achieved it in half a year! That was very motivating to continue improving as a woman. I was eager to do things to end the discrimination that lurked me in my locality, for I was enraged when people murmured in the street. Yet, I needed to finish with that, but I didn't know how to do it.

Suddenly, a man knocked at my door. He asked about me and said that he worked in the Health Center, that my doctor was asking me to go there, please. I was afraid. Now what happened? The next day I went. The doctor saw me and told me not to be scared, she wanted to know how I was. I replied that I was already better and I entrusted her with my diagnosis. She told me that she figured it, and that she had waited a little to talk to me. She offered to go to my house to pray for me and my family. I accepted and, since that day to date, we are good friends. She came to reinforce the way I was missing, the way of faith.

To know how to forgive was important to finish healing my soul at the same time as my body. I learned to talk to God and to thank him because, at the end, he had given me the opportunity that I asked for when screaming at him the day that the doctor told me that I had HIV-aids. This time I would take advantage of my life and value it more. The only thing that worried me was Pablo's results. I needed to know that he was fine for my life to be

complete. Very scared, I phoned him. I thought that he wouldn't even answer me. It was not so, and when I told him to excuse me, because I knew he hated me, but that I wanted to know how he was and if I could help him in anything, I was surprised by his response: "I do not hate you, on the contrary, forgive me, but the news was dropped at me like a bomb. I had stopped looking for you because my wife was pregnant, and when they phoned me to tell me what was happening to you, I worried about the baby." I told him I understood him and that my call was not to ask for explanations, that time had already passed. What interested me was knowing if he already had been tested for HIV. He replied yes, that a doctor advised him to take three tests in different months and all three were negative. "Do not worry, I am fine," he told me. It was very comforting to know it and we remained as friends. Then, we kept in touch by phone.

By then, my psychologist had already done a great job with me. I felt stronger and, little by little, I began to have the need to do more things. In June 2012, she informed me about a civil association that had sent an invitation so that three women from Puebla could attend a project of preparation for empowerment for women and to learn self-care of women living with HIV. The meeting was in Mexico City, for five days, with all expenses paid. This in three different months. The psychologist asked me for authorization to fight for a place for me, because there were many candidates. She knew of the desire I had to prepare myself to sensitize the Society on HIV-aids.

On June 26, in the morning, the psychologist phoned me to inform me that she had two news, one good and one bad. The good news was that I would go to the workshops in Mexico, what excited me a lot, since, among so many candidates, there was a place for me. The bad news was that I would travel the next day and I had no idea to what place I would arrive and, much less, I didn't know anyone from that civil association. With everything that I had already went through I was very fearful, but I couldn't waste the opportunity. I took the risk. My family didn't like the idea, they thought that I shouldn't go, but I left. I arrived to a five-star hotel with all the amenities. To my surprise, coming down to dinner, I saw many women from different states who welcomed me. That day a new stage in my life began. I became a woman who started to know more about HIV, human rights, co-responsibility, prevention, self-care, sexually transmitted infections and, above all, that was beginning to use language in a more correct way: I had

always said that I was a woman who had HIV. Now I am a woman that lives with HIV.

Thanks to these workshops I accepted the HIV totally in my life. I accepted it as to each of the organs within the body. I learned to take care of it, to love myself and to value myself as a woman and, at the same time, to defend myself. Without attacking.

Since that date until today, June 18th, 2015, I continue attending to workshops to prepare myself, not only for me, but for those people that are not lucky enough to attend this kind of meetings. Every time that I return to my state, it is to share new information and lessons learned. At the South General Hospital, in Puebla, I have summoned patients with HIV to go to the groups of information and self-help.

Thanks to this preparation, I have noticed, very clearly, the changes in me and my family. By sharing with them the information on prevention and, above all, respect, I managed to change in them the way they expressed about sexual preferences. By changing their way of thinking, they have modified their way of speaking and of expressing about people with other preferences who, like others, are human beings and, often, with more values and dignity. Similarly, the subjects about HIV and condom, were a taboo at home; now is something we that can be talked about and commented on. It is amazing to have the information and, moreover, to respond with assertiveness and certainty. I am convinced that this is my path.

Thanks to this activity I have known more civil associations and have attended their workshops. Also, I have discovered a lot of people who, like me, want to continue in the fight against discrimination and, moreover, to be in constant struggle to defend the rights of people living with HIV. This path has given me confidence in myself, it has made me more observant and, most importantly, it has taught me to enjoy each minute of my life. Feeling satisfied with my current life is very important to me and to the people around me. I can give testimony and, at the same time, I can give hope and motivation for life. I also provide accompaniment in the acceptance process to live with HIV. To see a smile and hear a “thank you” is the best proof that my story has been worth living.

CONCLUSION

Throughout my life I have had to overcome many changes and feelings. Now I have it clear that things happen for a reason and that I would not change anything of my history, because it is my history which has made me the woman that I am:

I am a thirty-two-year-old woman, living with HIV-aids.

I am a woman survivor of sexual abuse.

I am a woman who thanks to life the lessons learned.

I am a woman without ghosts of the past nor resentments.

I am a satisfied and complete woman, with many future plans and, although it is not my priority to be a mother, I am sure that I can give life without transmitting the HIV, because the HIV does not disturb my life nor limits me as a woman.

I am a woman whom the HIV got out from sadness, anger and from victimization and made me realize my value. It showed me how beautiful life can be when you learn to appreciate it. Knowing that I could die made me value more my existence and life around me.

I am a woman to whom the HIV showed her the love of those who, indeed, loved her.

I am a woman who knows how to choose and to enjoy friendship with respect.

I am a woman who enjoys love and sexuality with responsibility and fullness.

I am a woman who admires all the people who fight to defend their sexual preferences.

I am a woman who admires and respects transgender, men and women, who decide to confront life with courage when making changes to their body for the satisfaction and fulfillment of their person. Of those who seek happiness and security without harming anyone, by making their decisions even though society does not understand it.

I am a gentle and noble woman, but not fool nor submissive. I am angel, and sometimes demon, with thousands of flaws and virtues.

I am a woman without any sure profession, but with many skills to create, with my hands, what I imagine.

I am a woman with dreams and illusions to fulfill.

I am a woman who, since childhood, believed that her life would be a tale of princesses and to which life was responsible to show her that another would be her destiny.

I am a woman who, far from thinking about suicide again, when she received the news that she had HIV, she decided to fight for her life.

I am a warrior woman, a strong woman on the road to empowerment, looking for a future in which society can be more sensitive, understanding and human on the subject of HIV and the sexual preferences without discrimination.

I am a woman who wants society to understand that HIV is not a punishment of God; that discrimination kills people, not HIV; that there is no harsher judgement than ignorance about HIV; that judging HIV doesn't make you healthier; that HIV has different faces.

Finally: I am a woman who can see the "positive" face, of HIV.

Graciela Enríquez Enríquez
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