

**In Search of Happiness; Girls' Testimonial Writings
for Parents and Teachers**

Marta Anchustegui, Compiler

Introduction

This book includes nine testimonies of girls who were victims of some kind of abuse. They are realities that could have been ours. They are stories that have just started to be written but that already bring about a deep uneasiness. Each of the authors who agreed to participate in this project did so with the intention of disclosing their reality in order to, somehow, raise society's awareness and to avoid that these situations keep repeating generation after generation.¹

Documentación y Estudios de Mujeres A.C. (Documentation and Studies of Women - demac), a non-profit organization, is dedicated to promote women's autobiographical writing through the workshops To lose the fear of writing[®] and others aimed at helping them put in writing their life stories, and also to hold the contests For women who dare to tell their stories[®], always open to all those women willing to participate. Its main objective is to encourage women to take ownership of writing as a means of empowerment. At the same time, demac intends to make the most of such testimonies to make known the reality of Mexican women.

Dr. Amparo Espinosa Rugarcia² and Amparo Serrano Espinosa³ had the idea to carry out that same project of autobiographical writing among girls and teenagers who had been victims of neglect and physical, sexual or psychological abuse, and with whom the Foundation Amparo Serrano, A.C. was already doing activities. Although the idea seemed wonderful, its implementation was not so simple. How to motivate girls aged between 12 and 19 years old who were in those situations (many of them prematurely converted into adults against their will) to personally experience the process of relating in writing their life stories? This work implied to stir up "buried" memories that probably had never been shared or whose actors they did not want to touch again.

Las Mercedes foster home⁴, where the Foundation had already a presence, agreed to collaborate with the idea, but it was necessary to find girls willing to make known their experiences.

The aim of the project was to convene and receive those girls who, by their own conviction, would be willing to commit some of their time to attend and actively participate in the autobiographical writing workshop. That way, they might personally discover the unimaginable benefits of growth and transformation that the autobiographical writing entails. In addition, their efforts would be reflected in a book of their own authorship about Girls who dare to tell their story.

Surprisingly, the participants exceeded our expectations. They were enthusiastic and saw it as an opportunity for relief, for denunciation as well as a chance to relive happy moments that they once lived with their loved ones.

The testimonies collected here are the result of the autobiographical writing workshop that I gave at Las Mercedes over six months. I transcribed and I structured them commissioned by demac, but they are intact and they stick to the lexicon of each individual author. One of them cannot write due to a physical disability, so she dictated her life story directly to me which I captured as is.

These girls are real warriors, as they are called by the foster home director, Ángela González Colimoro. At their young age, and with scarce emotional and material tools, they had the courage to set a limit to the abuse and to take advantage of the opportunity to let go their past and to build the future the foster home now offers them. Although they are compelled to cooperate in the homework of the foster home, they are also required to study.

They get a dwelling, food, education and love, while they are surrounded by companions with whom they get along and persons who care for them, listen to them, protect them, and most important, do not judge them. The girls must comply with regulations, otherwise they are returned to the Federal District General Prosecutor's Office. No one compels them to stay there. In those circumstances, each week new faces appeared at the workshop and we missed those who had decided to leave. Therefore, the work pace had to be fast, constant, and include a deadline for completion.

The writing workshop was carried out through three hour sessions, once or twice a week, for half a year. There were days when some of the girls preferred not to show up—perhaps due to a lack of confidence or to the difficulty to reveal their past—and we respected their decision. However, most of them rejoined the group once they got used to the dynamics and felt at ease. It should be noted that most of them never hesitated in responding to the questions suggested as detonator to trigger writing and they did it so with all honesty, although usually very succinctly.

Initially the authors answered specific questions; they also practiced spontaneous writing and wrote letters. Gradually, each of them started filling the information gaps that kept appearing and were mostly personal and specific issues. They made drawings and collages related with their lives that they used as parts of puzzles to create stories. The group agreed that all of them should choose a pseudonym as a means of protection. Each girl chose the title of her own testimony and all of them voted for the title of the book: *In Search of Happiness*.

The intensity with which each of them defends her privacy and that of their families was manifest, as well as the affection, the recognition and the admiration they feel between them.

As a whole, the stories reveal social problems common in all media: alcoholism, submission of mothers faced with violence, women turned into head of the family due to the incompetence or the absence of the partner, very young girls forced to take charge of their younger siblings, sexual abuse and pregnancy of minors. These testimonies recount with simplicity the various forms of suffering, abuse and neglect that at such a young age its authors have suffered, as well as various ways to respond to the aggression.

In some cases, the abuse was so severe and so frequent that the girls had to learn how to ignore and evade their emotions. They were not allowed to react. They felt trapped and forced to keep silent.

The fact of sharing their testimony and disclosing that they were victims of some type of aggression has helped them to come into contact with those emotions. No one has judged them in this regard and I guess they are satisfied of having done so. Today, most of these young girls see the future with optimism.

These girls are in the process of healing their wounds, they try to let their past go and they struggle to cope with the present in order to find happiness someday. Monica Mariana says it clearly in the testimony of the following page.

The writing process has provided them with the possibility of self-knowledge and rediscovery of themselves, and has allowed them to free themselves from blame, to denounce their attackers and to shout to the world their reality.

Marta Anchustegui

I think about the future and I see myself married to a good man, close to Ana Cecilia and to another son whose name will be Carlos. I would like to live in Mexico City and be a physical therapist. I want to help other people who lack any assistance, just as I was helped here at Las Mercedes. Everything that happened to me was a great lesson for me, but I will never stop visiting the persons who supported me, because I will never forget them. I love them very much.

Mónica Mariana

19 years

A family forever united

Esmeralda

December 4, 2012

I am Esmeralda, I am 17 years old and I am the mother of a girl. I had her at age 13. Four years ago I arrived to the foster home. They brought me from the DIF, after my school teachers helped me to charge with rape my mom's partner.

I was born in the State of Hidalgo where I lived with my mom and my six brothers, until I got here. My mom is a very loving woman who always cared about us. She grows corn, beans, and everything she can. She lives on that and also on the allowance my brothers give her. All of them dropped out because they preferred to work.

When I was a little girl I liked to be with my mother and my brothers. I liked better to play with boys than with girls, because I considered these very silly. My brothers always played softball, basketball and catch me, but what I liked most was to go to the countryside to pick pitahayas. We collected the fruit and we counted it and that was very fun; moreover, afterwards we ate it with hot chili.

Before coming here, I lived a couple of weeks in another foster home. At the beginning I felt very strange because I knew no one. Moreover, I stopped speaking for two years, so it cost me a lot to get adapted. Nothing had happened to me, I just didn't want to talk. The psychologists used to get mad at me because they asked me many questions and I didn't answer them anything. When I began to speak again and to mingle with girls, I realized that they were very problematic and I thought that all of them would hit me, so I wanted to leave this place. But little by little I adapted myself and now I am very happy.

My four-year-old daughter, Nacarada, lives here with me. I enjoy to look after her and to be with her. She is very obedient and beautiful. I'm very happy at the foster home because here I have all the things that I didn't have at home. They help you so you can keep studying and in exchange they only ask you to have good grades and that to pay attention at your personal care. In addition, they give us workshops on subjects such as dancing, taekwondo, English and writing, and sometimes they take us out for a walk or to a concert, as that of Channy. I love music.

Here in the house I am in charge of the kitchen. I like very much to cook, especially rice, because mine tastes very good. My dream is to study gastronomy and to be a great chef in the State of Mexico. I want to open my own restaurant so that all the persons that I know can go to eat there. I imagine the place full of people and everybody happy, asking for more and more dishes.

As soon as I can, I want to help people who do not have something to eat and who live in the streets, but above all, I would like to change all the bad persons who hurt others. I don't like to see other people suffer.

I would like to have a stronger character because I am very sensitive and very sentimental. I cry over the slightest thing and that upsets me, I don't like to be so. I didn't like either that my mom didn't trust me when I told her about my stepfather, although he had threatened me. He told me that if accused him things would be worse for me.

My mom trusted him because she didn't notice it, since he abused me when she was out, until she recognized that it was true. That asshole is the father of my daughter; the good thing is that she bears no resemblance whatsoever to him. She will never know who her dad is. She will never know it because I don't intend to tell her the truth. I'm going to tell her that her father died.

That's what I would like: that he paid for what he did to me, for being mean and a swine. I hate him. I hope a train or a truck crushes him and tears him into pieces, into dices. If he hadn't raped me I wouldn't be here. I would be very happy with my mother and my brothers. Thank God I'm with good people who helped me and who love my daughter. I'm going to get ahead; I'm studying for that. And meanwhile, I hope that such miserable son of a bitch stays in jail for the rest of his life. Thank God my

mother and my brothers are well. My mom's boyfriend is in jail. She realized that it was true that he was hurting us, that I was not lying: he had raped me in my own house.

I wanted to tell my story so that girls don't let themselves be fooled by their boyfriends or husbands and neither by their parents; so that they learn that they mustn't do that, because it's wrong. And to parents, that they must keep their eyes open, that they must watch over their daughters so that they don't go through the same thing as I, and that they believe everything they tell them.

To all the girls who are going through the same problem as mine, I want to tell them not to give up because it is possible to get ahead in life.

I also thank the foster home for helping me with my daughter. To the girls who are living in the streets or who have problems at home, I highly recommend this house because it is very good, because they will help them to get ahead so they can be good in the future. I especially thank the person who gave me education and helped me with my daughter when she was interned in the hospital because she almost got pneumonia. She was there with my daughter all the time. Thanks for everything mom Angie, I.L.Y.

An Overcome Life

Palmira

January 10, 2013

My name is Palmira and I am 15 years old. I was born in the State of Mexico, on February 3, 1997 at 2:35 am. Three months ago I arrived to the foster home and I feel megahappy and glad. I feel very much at ease.

I arrived here because, luckily for me, a nice lady, whose name is Isabel, found me at a park in Constituyentes Avenue and directed me to a foster home. She took me to one in Tepito, but as there were many girls they brought me here. I ran away from home and, as I had no other place to go, I went to that park.

My dad was born in Acapulco, State of Guerrero, and my mother in the State of Mexico. He is a bricklayer and my mom was a housewife. I have two very naughty brothers, who I love. They are tall and handsome, very nice. The truth, I get along better with the younger one because I argue a lot with the other one and besides he doesn't listen to me. Angel, the young one, used to go with me everywhere, always.

My whole family is important to me, but the truth is that I only know my grandmother on my father's side and I don't anyone on my mother's side. They say that I look much like my dad and my grandparents don't love him. I have a grandmother in Brazil, but the only time I saw her, she didn't speak to me; she even told me that she was not my grandmother. My dad told me not to pay attention to her.

I love to study. Before I came to the foster home I used to attend a school where I was voice sergeant and I had a scholarship. I miss a lot not being able to continue studying there; besides, I also miss my best friend and my boyfriend.

Before coming here, I used to live virtually alone. I woke up at 6:00 a.m. I heated some water to take a bath and went out to buy milk. When I came back, I ironed my uniform, I bathed, I dressed, I combed my hair and put some makeup, and I left to school.

When I finished school, I did my homework, I changed clothes, I ate and did my housework. Then I went to meet my boyfriend after work at 3:00 p.m. and we went to his house. We played and then we went to our friends' house and we had get-togethers on Fridays. We drank and smoked, and then he took me home at about 11:00 p.m. My dad was never there, that is, at home I used to live practically alone because he always took my little brothers to my grandmother's, and as I didn't know where she lived I couldn't go and bring them back home. Until night, at about 11:30 p.m., he brought them back home and we all went to bed.

My mother died at age 28, I was eight. She will always be my best friend. She was very young and beautiful. When I was little, my mom loved me very much and played with me, and my dad was always with her. Every Sunday we took a stroll and my dad was a very hardworking man. My mom was very pretty, in fact she looked very much like me. I am beautiful, short, brunette, and slightly chubby; I have short hair, very beautiful eyes and the body of a princess, as my mom. When she became ill, I cried a lot because she looked really bad; she acquired liver cancer because she got a tattoo; I guess the needle was infected and her liver was disappearing.

My life changed when my mom died because my dad went to the United States for three years, and left me alone in my house with my little brothers. He phoned me every eight days, and sent me money. The neighbor accompanied me to collect it.

When he came back from Texas, soon after he got together with that woman and it was then when he changed because she hated me and he paid attention to her, who told him that he was spoiling me and that's why I didn't listen to him. At that time he didn't live with me anymore, I was alone and he came to visit me Saturday and Sunday.

At that time I had a boyfriend, Pablo, but he got mad because I broke up with him. I didn't want to go out with him anymore, and another boy from my classroom, Jose, asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend. I told him that we had to know each other more, and he began to be always with me during recesses. Paul told me that I was going to pay dearly for everything, and that every day that he had been going out with me I was going to pay for it double. He uploaded to the internet some pictures of me, obviously they were photomontages. He knows a lot about computers, so that he managed to upload them, as he had decided to do it.

Along with my pictures, on Facebook he wrote that I was a girl who had lice and that nobody at the school should go around with me because I would pass them on to them. He then wrote that I had slept with almost five guys and that I had AIDS, and everyone made fun of me. I lost even my best friend.

Then he published that I was mad because I cut myself and took drugs, and he uploaded some very ugly pictures of me scratching my head, another in bed with several guys, another scratching all my body, another cutting myself, and another getting high. Finally, he went to tell my dad that I had told him that I was no longer a virgin, and that's why he didn't want to go out with me anymore, because I also didn't take care of myself, that I wasn't worth anything anymore.

The truth is that I hate Paul and I want to take revenge on him. I promised myself that I would take revenge for everything and that he will pay for each and every one of the things he did to me. He is going to suffer and cry, as I did, and I hope he will never be happy. I will never forgive him.

He spoiled my whole life. I'm here because of him, because my father got horribly mad due to what he told him about me. He hit me very hard and he told me that it was a hooker; he threw me out of my house, and told me that he didn't want to see me again in his house because he was fed up with me.

From that day on my dad kept going to see me on Saturdays and Sundays, but he came and hit me just because, and that's why I didn't arrive to my house, because I was very afraid of him. Finally, I decided not to return and it was then when that lady found me on Constituyentes avenue.

The truth is that neither the woman my dad was living with was of assistance because they compared me with her daughters. My dad says that I am a different girl, and that he would like me to be like his wife's daughters, but they don't have a boyfriend or friends, they never go out, they only stay at home and never talk on Facebook, the only make their homework. I'm not like that, and my dad always told me that if I were like them everything would be different, but everyone is as he is and I don't want to be like them. They are extremely boring and apathetic, and he always was throwing on my face that they were better than me and that hopefully I, his daughter, could be like them.

If I could, I would change my daddy's way of thinking. I would like him to listen to me, to understand me; that he always were with me through thick and thin. I would like to change him because I love him, and I know that he also loves me, but in his own way. I would tell him: "Daddy, I love you so much, but I want you to change. If one day you read this, I hope you change. I love you."

I know that maybe I was not easy. The first time I went to bed with a guy I was 12 years old and he was 17. My dad hadn't return from the United States. And during some time I also got used to get high on Sundays with my boyfriend and my girlfriends. The truth is that I did it to draw the attention of my daddy. I forgot everything that I felt. I didn't care about anything, and I felt that it helped me to forget my problems. My dad never knew it, because he never cared about it. He never saw me nor asked me how I felt.

But from now on I'm going to behave very well, I will ask God to help me be able to fulfill my dreams and, when they come true, I'll be super happy forever. In the future, I see myself with a career and I'll be a high school teacher. I'll have a boyfriend who loves me very much and we're going to get married. I am very pretty, tall and thin, with very long hair. I imagine myself being able to buy all the clothes and shoes I want and like. I see myself together with my dad and my brothers, very happy for my life, and with no one hating me. I see myself showing gratitude to all the persons at the foster home because thanks to them I will be the person I dream about.

If someone is going through the same thing as I went, I want to tell that person, who perhaps thinks that the world and life are coming to an end, don't lock yourself in that world because there's a lot more and you have a life to live. There will always be someone to help you. I wouldn't like anyone else to feel what I feel in my heart now. Take care of yourselves. Let's hope parents value their children's lives because they harm us too much.

It's important to say that, despite all that I have suffered, I don't want to remain stagnant, but instead I try to outdo myself every day and I am surprised because here at the foster home I learn something new all the time.

Today everything is great. I thank you because I know that nobody gives so much for someone they don't know. I thank the whole staff, as well as all the visitors who help us. I already forgave my dad and he forgave me. I love him despite of everything. I don't hate him; on the contrary, I love him. But despite we already forgave each other, I don't want to come back to him because here I feel very well, happy and joyful.

One Step Forward

Yesenia

January 11, 2013

I was born in Villahermosa, state of Tabasco, and I am 15 years old. My dad, Juan José, used to work a lot building houses, and my mom, Raquel, worked wiring television, cell phones, etc. I devoted myself to housework and to take care of my sisters and my brother.

Well, I gave the impression of a housewife, I looked like my mom's mother, and my mom like my oldest daughter or my husband, whatever.

My mom cheated on my dad with a friend of his called Alfredo and they split up. From then on I don't know anything about my father. Alfredo was younger than my mom. In fact they have a very beautiful daughter whose name is Elizabeth. She is a very talented girl who loves to dance and sing. When they separated, my mother fought for her guardianship and won all the battles that she started and fought.

The truth is that my mother didn't miss my father at all; she didn't even know if she loved him. When my mom left Alfredo, there was a time when we moved many times from one house to another. At that time my mom was single, but I knew that it was temporary, that sooner or later she would have a partner, a lover.

She soon met Zacarías. First they were friends, then fiancés. For me, they were lovers. He was 20 and my mom 27, or older. Eventually she paired up with him; they even had a beautiful, handsome son named José Miguel, who now is six or seven years old. He was like an angel with a bright smile.

Zacarías was a very bitter man who I couldn't stand, but who little by little I ended loving as a father. I didn't know if I needed love or what, because when I was with my father Francisco I didn't love him like that, although I knew that he was my real dad.

Well, but that's past time. The truth is that I didn't remember the events I lived with my dad.

When Zacarías began to beat us I was so angry, furious. Then he raped my sister Eli and even some of his own girl cousins. We still lived in Ciudad Juarez. Until one day when he abused my sister a lot and I reported him. I said that he beat me and my brothers, that he drank a lot and he hit my mother. The affection that he was just gaining withered like a flower without water. I didn't want to know anything about anyone, including myself. I didn't know if my mom was stupid, or I who let him beating us. They put him in jail for four years and we were taken to a foster home and to the DIF5 to testify. My mom was left on her own for the first time.

I didn't care about anything; I wanted a brick truck to hit me.

My sister ran away from the foster home and I stayed. Then my mother won custody and we went to live with her. When she picked me up, she had already moved to a very nice house that I liked a lot.

My mom met Jesus and I couldn't stand him because he was very stupid. My mother had such bad likings. Sometimes I even thought she was a prostitute when I saw her boyfriends and her likings. Moreover, she got pregnant of a girl that I could never hold, as I did with my sister Elizabeth and my brother José Miguel. My mom said that there was nothing available to avoid becoming pregnant. In fact, my sister also got pregnant at age 12. She got together with Erik, Jesus' brother.

When I was 11 years old my mom took us, José Miguel, Mara, Elizabeth and me, to live in Acayucan, in the state of Veracruz, with the family of my stepfather. My other two sisters, the oldest 16 and Silvia 4, stayed in Ciudad Juarez, so my mom returned there shortly after and left us in Veracruz.

Until then I hadn't been able to study, because since I was seven I started to look after my little brothers. My sister Mara was four years old; Elizabeth three and José Miguel two months. They were very small and very naughty. I did what I could. My sister Eli was nine years old, one year older than I and she took care of me. I was very responsible, my brothers called me mom.

We had no money, so I sold some things that my mom had bought and that she was not going be aware that I had sold them. Sometimes I took care of some of our neighbors' children so they paid me, or I went out to search for money, because many times people lost money and I picked it up to buy rice

or eggs and thus feed my brothers. Some other times I cleaned the house of my cousins Albert and Mauricio and they paid me. Or I went from door to door asking for sugar or eggs and they gave it to me.

Over time I realized that the situation was difficult and that I needed money to pay my brothers' tuition. My uncle Leopoldo and my aunt Matilde offered me to work taking care of their eight-month-old daughter Chantal. It cost me a lot to accept because I wanted to be with my brothers until death do us part. On April 12 they picked me up to take me to live in Mexico City with them. Until now I'm still here and I don't know what happened with my mom because she left me at age 11, and right now I am 15.

When I arrived in Mexico I only spoke very little Spanish because in Veracruz everybody spoke popoluca. Some people laughed at my manner of speaking, but I didn't care because I had come here only to work and not to waste time with people. I took care of the two children of my aunt, a boy and a girl whose name is Chantal and who called me mom. Shortly after, I started to go to a school so that they taught me to speak well and my uncles taught me to pronounce because I spoke very weird. It was a very difficult period.

One day I called home to know how my brothers and my family were, and it turned out that my stepfather's brother-in-law had taken with him my brother and they didn't want to tell me anything. The only thing I knew was that my brothers were with my grandmother Cecilia and my grandfather William, that is, the family of my stepfather Zacarías. Since then I was not interested in working, my sisters were angry with me and my brother didn't want to know anything about me for having left them. My mom had disappeared with my two other sisters and I didn't know what to do, but I knew I had to get ahead.

After August, when I turned 13, my mom deigned to call my grandmother Cecilia, who told me what was happening. My mom needed money to maintain my sisters and my sister Eli's son. There was nothing I could do except to wait that over time my brothers could forgive me for having abandoned them.

By then, I had grown very fond of Chantal, my aunt and uncle's daughter, but they were angry with me because she called me mom. Furthermore, they never paid me for my work; they didn't even thank me for it.

At that time I became friends with a girl, Rosa. I dreamed of having a friend for life, but then she stole money from my aunt and I didn't notice it; the truth is that I got mad because she denied it. My aunt noticed it because she sent me to buy tortillas and after searching her money like crazy she saw that in her mobile phone Sony there were some pictures of Rose and mine with her children. She was furious and told me that she didn't know what was happening to me; that recently I was talking back a lot and getting angry for anything. So I decided to run away on December 1 at 6:00 a.m. with my friend Rosa, who was only 12 years old. I entrusted Chantal with my 11 years old cousin, whose name I don't remember, but we lived in the same neighborhood. I took my stuff and, so they couldn't catch me, I said that they were Ruby's, a girl who my cousin liked and visited us very often.

That December 1st, the day I ran away, I didn't think in anyone, not even in my siblings. I remember it so well that I regret having done it, because if I hadn't ran away, right now I would be with my sisters and I would go to look for my brother and, if necessary, even under the stones. But now I'm paying the price without them and for what happened to me with my aunt Matilde.

When we ran away, Rosa changed her mind, but I didn't, so I asked her to let me stay one night at her mother's and that the next day I would look where to go, but her brother said no, that I couldn't stay at their house. We went to see where I could stay and we saw a camper and I thought to get in there, but then the owners came and they told me to go away.

By that time, my cousin and my aunt were already looking for me and they met another girlfriend of Rosa and she told them that she didn't know anything about me, although she knew, and she offered me to stay at her home if I wanted to. It was a very beautiful house that I liked a lot. The next day my uncle and my aunt went to question Rosa and that stupid girl told them and they found me, but I told

them that I didn't want to go back with them. My aunt called eight police cars and they started to review the whole issue.

The mom of Rosa's friend was Cecilia, the same name as my grandmother's. She helped me a lot. She drove me in her car to the police station to testify and when I thanked her she told me that friends are for that, but I knew that I would never have reliable friends, that friends do not exist.

The moment I was testifying I knew there was no backtrack; that I would never see my aunt and my uncle again. It was December 2nd. Two policemen drove me to Agency 59 where there were boys and girls. A doctor and a psychologist checked me. I didn't say a word, I just wrote my answers. I was as in my own world, but suddenly I started crying and couldn't stop. They told me to let myself vent my feelings.

My stay at the attorney's office was a bit of terror. Everyone slept in a bed, they were bunk beds. The girls' room was full, so I slept in the children's room. I stayed there eight days. If we wanted to have breakfast we had to take a shower early. We could not go out not even to get some sun. I didn't even know if it was night or day. At lunchtime they gave us the leftovers of the employees. They gave us a lunch in the afternoon and at night, and we didn't do anything but watch TV most of the day.

December 9, 2010, 2:30, Thursday, they told me that I was leaving. I thought that with my uncle and aunt and I started to jump for joy, but they put me in a police car and I thought they were taking me to jail. But we arrived at a house with a sign that said "Foster home".

When I asked where I had arrived, they told me that it was a house where they help semi-street girls who have suffered a lot. They provide them with studies and help them. The social worker attorney told me to enter and see if I liked it. When I entered I felt a nice wind blowing and I saw how all the girls were eating together. I told her that it was very nice. The two directors were together and some of the women who work there. They asked me if I wanted to stay and I said yes, very excited to know the girls and have friends, know the house and start to study. And I stayed. They showed me the house, they gave me clothes and several other things and I was interviewed. I hadn't thought about my brothers, until they asked me if I had siblings or if I was only child. I told them everything about me and, finally, the social worker told me her name and that I could leave. I sat on the armchairs and the director told one of the girls that ask me my name and where I came from. Lorenza approached me and gave me some guidelines. She told me that I would be sleeping in the yellow room, the same as her. She gave me a teddy and introduced me to her friends, and I thought that she was going to be my best friend. We got together a lot and we got along well until she introduced me to her best friend, Flor. I didn't like that she already had a best friend but I respected her decision and accepted it. I gradually became companion of all of them and when I needed a favor I asked the girls.

When I entered an open school, I pulled my socks up to do my best for life and to think about my future as an adult, but I thought that such an issue shouldn't bother me yet.

The day they brought me to the house I arrived with two other girls, Margarita and Sonia, but they soon decided that they didn't want to stay here. I felt that as a dagger in the stomach. But I started becoming friend to a girl named María Sofia. She was very short and very nice. She wanted to be a teacher. I didn't dare to tell what I wanted to be because they were dreams that I had, that I didn't know if they were jokes. One day, inadvertently, I told the psychologist that I wanted to be a singer and an actress, and she told me that it was fine, that it was a very nice dream.

After some time, I became accustomed to the house. I also missed my brothers, so I knew I had to get ahead to be able to help them, although they were still angry with me. I like all the workshops that they have given, such as music, dance, theater, sewing, computing and values. I kept on making friends, as Katia, Maite, Flor and Regina. Maite's son had stolen my heart. That little boy, named Santiago, smiled at me. He was three years old. He was very nice, I loved him. Sometimes we had arguments among friends, but afterwards we patched things up. I learned that I shouldn't worry. Katia decided to go back to her mother's and Flor also left. The world was falling down, so I became a close friend of Tatiana. We used to go out together on Saturdays and Sundays with their friends. We went to the park

and to the pictures. It was very exciting to be together. For the first time in my life I felt that she was my best friend, together with Maite and Regina. I helped Maite to take care of her son. Santiago was like a very beautiful angel. He looks a lot like my brother Miguel, but he didn't replace him, absolutely not. I am not so happy, but someday I'll be. I will not stop shining and I will always smile.

One day, Tatiana left and didn't come back. I couldn't believe it. It was such a horrible nightmare. In the house, they thought that something had happened to her. One of the staff asked me if I knew something about her, but I told her that I didn't know anything. We thought that she was going to come back, but she didn't. I felt as if I had a kick in the stomach. I remembered Leti when she left and then the world fell on me. I felt that I couldn't breathe. I began to cry bitterly. I knew that she was not going to return and that I was never going to see her again. To think about it made me cry.

Aunt Guille had informed us that we were going on a trip to the port of Veracruz. Not even that soothed me. The trip was two weeks away, and so my birthday, my fifteen years, but I didn't care about anything. All I wanted was to see Tatiana and hug her. The days passed and I wasn't able to overcome it. I kept looking after Santiago, my angel, to entertain myself.

I joined the dance workshop and it reminded me a lot of Tatiana. She danced super. I liked how she danced and her smile. Then I recall that I was never going to have a friend like her, not even Lety and Katia. But I knew that Maite and Santiago were my friends and that we would always help each other. Tatiana was a great friend and I will never forget her.

August 30 was my birthday, my 15 years. It was a Thursday and that day we left to Veracruz very early. I had slept at Andrea's bedroom so that we could get up together. Maite wasn't going because she had an exhibition and they would not allow her to miss four days. I didn't like the other girls on the trip, but who was I to pass judgment on anyone. Before we left they sang Happy Birthday to me and I thank them. They congratulated me. I thought I was going to cry when they were singing, but I didn't. I couldn't care less: it wasn't the same without Tatiana. Then I got some very nice gifts that Maite, Regina and Tatiana had bought before she left.

Later, we distributed ourselves among the buses with girls from other foster homes. Upon arrival we bathed because it was very hot, and later we went for a tour to the Naval Museum. We took photos and played the ribbons. By chance, while we were playing I heard one of the girls from the Tepito's foster home say that if she lived there with her family, she would be happy. The truth is that I hadn't thought of that, but my brothers were living very near. For a moment I thought of running away, but then I forgot it and I kept playing with the other girls. We had a great time. We swam, ate ice cream, visited the great Naval Academy and we went to the water slides. When we arrived in Mexico, it seemed that we came from Africa. We thank the driver and the people who had looked after all of us.

When we went into the house, some of the girls were awake and laughed at us due to our sunburn brown color. Andrea and I tried to use correcting fluid, but it didn't stick to our skin. They even called us 'blondies' and that made me laugh. After we came back, I felt better, and I wasn't sad anymore.

Today I am very happy, exerting myself so that my dream of becoming an actress and a singer becomes real. I will fight like a wild beast, with tooth and nails, and I'll cope with anything blocking my path. I'm going to do my bit because I know that all dreams can come true, because I really want to be a singer and stand on a stage looking at my fans. First I must find out how well do I sing, and even if I don't sing well, I will be an actress and act in soap operas and movies.

I'm going to support the foster home as they have supported me, and I will give other girls the same tools that I was given to succeed. If I get to be a big star, I'll help semi-street children and those living in foster homes. I'll never forget what I am.

To sing is my dream and to be an actress. I want to act in movies such as the Twilight saga and soap operas such as Violet. I am very strong and I know that I can make it.

I think about it, and abandon my little siblings Mara, Elizabeth and José Miguel and not being able to see them is the most difficult thing I've done in life because I have no idea if they are with my step-

father's family of with my mom Raquel. But it was something I had to do and I know that sooner or later I will see all of them again.

I would like to tell my mom that I forgive her for having abandoned me with that family, because I know that she couldn't maintain us. Maybe I wasn't a good girl and I ask for her forgiveness for having abandoned my little siblings.

With my story I want people to know me and be aware of things that happen. It is also a way to remember what I've experienced and the experiences I've had. I want to tell all the children like me, that even though they live in a foster home, it is possible to get ahead; that everything can be achieved and that the family is the key of everything.

I hope that parents understand that their children are the most important persons of all.

They must listen to us even if they are very busy and have many things to do. Their children are borrowed, so they have to look after them and love them 'til the end of the world.

My Family's Life

Sonia

December 8, 2012

I am Sonia, I am 12 years old and arrived at the foster home on December 2011. I liked very much living with my mom, my sisters, who are 16 and 14 years old, and with my niece Monica, who is one year and a half old. We call her Sofia affectionately, because she was born the day of saint Sophia.

When I lived with my mom, we always visited my cousins, my uncles and my grandpas. I like them all. My dad is 35 years old and I can't stand him because he always spanked me on my butt with his belt. My mom is 31 and she didn't hit me; on the contrary, she used to give me very good advices. She always looks after me and she is very loving and that's why I love my mommy very much.

When I was little, my mom used to play with me, and when I grew up I started to play all by myself with dolls and having tea parties with them. Sometimes I rode on my bike, or I went to my aunts' house or somewhere else with my mom.

When I arrived at the foster home I felt very distressed because I didn't know anyone, but also the persons who work here are cool. I like the foster home because they give us presents. Visitors come to give us toys and they take us on a walk. We have mom Angela, the social workers and many aunts who look after us. At night, dad Tesoro looks after us. At first, I didn't behave well because I didn't spruce up and I talk back a lot, but that's over now.

My part of the housework is to clean the dining room in the morning, then I take a workshop, I do my homework, and in the afternoon I go to school. My favorite subject is math, I like it a lot. Sometimes I behave well and sometimes I behave bad because they make me very angry. I don't like the other girls to stick their nose where it doesn't belong, that they scold me and that they behave like jerks.

I didn't like either that my dad spanked me.

I came here because after my parents got separated, my dad filed a complaint against my mom and so the Attorney General brought me here. My dad reported my mom because he said that she couldn't maintain me, although she could because she worked at Avon. Now she is studying first grade of primary school. She will learn how to read and write. She is making her best to recoup my guardianship so I can go to live with her and my step-father Mauricio, who works as a bricklayer and who I love more than my real dad.

Before my arrival here, I spent nine days at the Attorney General Office and I didn't like it at all. They only gave us lunch to eat all day and we all had to bathe with the same soap, with the same loofah, and with cold water, and that disgusted me a lot. We slept on the floor, only with mats.

My parents separated because he hit my mom and us very hard. Most of the time he was drunk, but he also hit us when he was sober. That's why I hate him so much. He was always drunk and when he came back home he beat us all. He beat my mom every day with the cable and he also pulled her hair, and as she has curled hair it hurt her very much. He used to put me face down and hit me on my butt with his belt.

When they separated, first I lived with my mom, but then my dad filed the complaint against her and I had to go to live with him and his new family. When I lived with him, I had to get up early to go sell flowers. If said him no, he beat me and told me that if I didn't go he was going to put mom into prison. He sent me out at 7:00 in the morning and he returned at 1:00 in the morning. I didn't like to live with him because my stepmother's daughter hates me and she also beats me because I didn't do everything she ordered me to do, and their sons said me ugly things because I didn't obey her. They told me that I was a bastard and that I go live with my mom.

Now, to be able to go to live with my mom, the judge has to say yes, and it is necessary that my mom exerts herself so that she can win the guardianship and I can go live with her and not with my dad. She is studying first grade of primary school. She has to prepare herself, and my dad has to withdraw his complaint.

Officers of the Attorney General office brought me to the foster home, but they didn't punish my dad for hitting me. He knows that I'm here, but I don't want him to come visit me. My mom comes every eight days and I like her to visit me. We talk a lot about her situation.

I think that disclosing my story is useful to get to know myself better and it can also help other children. To those children whose father hits them I would advise them to lodge a complaint against him and that they go to live at a foster home.

What I want most is to go to live with my mom, my dad Mauricio, and with my sisters and my niece. I'll do my best and behave well. I'm going to fight, to have faith and a lot of hope, and to get prepared to be a lawyer when I grow up.

The Suffering of a Family

Lucero

November 2, 2012

I am Lucero and I am 13 years old.

I was born in Mexico City on August 12, 1999. I like my name very much.

I never doubted to join the writing workshop; first, because I like very much writing, and also because for me it is important to write my story to vent myself a bit of so many problems and to tell all the children who have a dad or an aggressive family that they must speak up, that they must not remain silent because if they do so they will be threatened all the time: it is better to speak up.

My mom's name is Silvia and my father's Francisco. I have two sisters, Silvia and Mayra. Silvia is 16 years old and she is a mother since she was 14; she has a daughter and she is expecting a second child. She lives with her husband and they get along well, they are a real family. My other sister is Mayra and she is 12 years old. My grandparents are Carmen and Pedro. They are separated because my grandpa hit my grandma and thus there was no other solution but to get separated.

My parents are also separated for seven years due to the same problem, because my father beat my mother: many times because he drank and took drugs at night, but he also hit her when he was sober. My mom feared him very much.

Nine months ago I arrived at the foster home. I was brought here from the Attorney General Office Number 59 where I spent nine days after testifying against my dad because he beat me. I didn't like to be there because we slept on the floor, only with mats, and they gave us the same food three times a day. I stopped eating five days because what they gave me was revolting. My mom brought me food, but they told me that if I ate what my Mom brought me then I had to share it with everyone. They didn't let us go out at all and they had us watching television nearly all day long.

Here at the foster home I have many companions, although I don't know well how many we are. I feel a little bored because I have almost no friends, but I do have my sister. And I like that here I take workshops, that I get along well with the aunts, but yes, sometimes we argue. I like the staff. I am very grateful to Angela and the aunts Minerva, Elvia, Margarita, Diana, Sol, Karlita and Marcela because they have given me the best of themselves and they want the best for us. I also thank dad Tesoro because he looks after us at night.

I like very much my school, I go in the afternoons. I only have one teacher. I have a super time there and I learn a lot. My favorite subject is Ancient History. Besides the school, I like many other things, such as records, clothes and shoes. I love to dance, sing, jump rope, bathe and eat. Also necklaces, bracelets, study and watch TV. I like singing and my favorite bands are Los Temerarios, Aventura and Bronco. I like my house, be at the computer, bikes and read books like Twilight, Dawn and New Moon. My favorite class is writing.

There are also many things that I don't like, such as being here, but either way, I'm here due to problems. Although I am very grateful for everything and little by little I'm getting used to the change.

It upsets me that some of the girls talk behind your back and they don't have the nerve to tell it to you. But there's one thing I sure do, I ignore them and if they tell me something I turn a deaf ear, I don't like to live here. I don't like that they conspire and neither that dads hit their children. And it hurt me when my dad paid more attention to his stepchildren than to us, because he hit us but not them, that's why I am here.

When my parents separated, my little sister and I went to live with my mom, and my older sister, Silvia, stayed with my dad. He forbade us to see her for two years. He never hit her because she didn't let him. Then I went to live a while with him, and my older sister went with my mom. The only thing that my dad knows to do is to sell flowers and he compelled us to do the same. He used to go to the wholesale market to buy them and he sent us from 7:00 in the morning until 1:00 in the morning to sell them and he didn't care.

We didn't have something to eat nor to dress, so we took money out of what we sold because he didn't give us anything, but when we got to the house, he counted the money and if it was not complete he hit me with whatever, until he left me bleeding and he told me "You don't even sell what you eat, asshole". But I didn't pay attention to him.

My stepmother was a friend of my mom and she got involved with my dad. She always wanted to hit me, even because I didn't want to eat the chayotes; although I didn't want to let her hit me, she is very strong and I couldn't defend myself; my father defended her and her children. My stepmother used to tell me "Go away, crappy bastard", and instead of defending me my dad said, "You deserve it, you asshole", and he hit me. That's why I hate him so much.

That was my life with my dad for two months because he had gained my guardianship from my mom. But one day that my stepmother hit me, me and my sister ran away and we went with my mom, but a month later my dad lodged a claim and they took us to the Agency, after that they brought us to the children's home.

I spent five months without seeing my mom, but now she visits me on Sundays and she brings me very tasty sandwiches. I am very happy with this visit. My dad also comes alone, but I don't want to see him. He brought me clothes, but I gave them to my companions. I don't want anything from him. I just argue when I see him.

On the other hand, my mom is very cool. She has always loved us. She has a couple who loves us very much and who is a great stepfather. He took me to live in his house, he never hit me, he put me in a school and he maintained me. That's why I love him a lot, as a true father.

My mom is studying so that she can regain guardianship and she is receiving psychological therapy. Her attorney told her that she has to learn how to read and write because she doesn't know anything and she is already learning. She has to prepare herself more so she can provide for us and I am also striving.

I'm also going to study a lot to be someone in life, to be able to provide for my family, to support my stepfather because he always cared about us. He provided us studies, house, clothes, everything we needed.

I want to help persons who are abused, and children and adults who lack a place to live. To achieve it and to be better in life, I have to change my attitude and my fear of my dad, who is the person who has hurt me more. I don't have to hate him: it's not necessary because he is going to pay for everything, as well as my stepmother, because there's a God who sees everything.

My story has been a good lesson for me. I hope children learn it so when they get married they don't have to suffer and they don't hit their partners, and that parents understand that we, their children, are the only ones who pay, not them.

A girl who moves ahead and leaves her past behind

Monica Mariana
December 9, 2012

I am Monica Mariana, and I am 19 years old. I was born on August 19, 1993 in Toluca, in a hospital. I think that my dad accompanied my mother when I was to be born. Between both of them they chose my name, and I like it a lot.

Three years ago I arrived at the foster home. Personnel of the DIF brought me here. I like living here because they give me a good life to succeed. I have met many friends, but I also miss my former friends. I have a daughter, Ana Cecilia. She is four years old. Her birthday is on September 6. I am studying the second grade of junior high school at the INEA, and I like it a lot. It's a mixed school without a uniform. I go with a companion. My favorite subject is math and the one I don't like at all is History.

My parents' names are Agustín and Susana. I have four siblings: Nicolás 21 years old, Abril 10, Diego 8, and Perla Alejandra 6. I loved to be with Diego because he is very fun; on the other hand, I didn't like Nicolás because he always ordered me to do his things. Most of my family lives in Toluca, including my paternal grandparents, Hortensia and Pablo, and my maternal grandmother, Petra. I don't remember the name of my grandpa because he died very young.

I had my daughter when I was 15 years old. I chose her name due a bet with a friend of mine. She named her Mónica Mariana, and I named her Ana Cecilia. She is very mischievous and grumpy. She already goes to kindergarten. I like to see and have my daughter here with me, to play with her, listen to music, go to the movies, draw, watch TV and make bracelets.

My arrival to the foster home is the best thing that has happened to me in my life. First I was sent to one located at Ciudad Satélite6, when the DIF's personnel rescued me from my house; I was 14 years old. I stayed there four months, while my daughter was born, and after that they brought me here.

I live here very happy. We are 56 in total, including 14 children. They treat us very well and the food is tasty. I enjoy when they give us spaghetti, vegetable soup and pork rind. I have to take care of my own housework and that of my daughter, as well as needlework. Besides the Director, who we call mom Angie, there are three aunts who look after us during the day, and father Tesoro is in charge at night. Aunt Margarita comes on weekends. All of them are very nice with us.

Before I arrived to the foster home my life wasn't easy. My dad fixes cars, he is a mechanic. He is not a hard-working man because he used to start drinking in the morning, and he came back home at night drunk as a skunk. He came and fell asleep. He didn't scold us or argue, he just went to bed and the next day he did the same.

My mother washes other people's clothes every day. She left home early and she left me in charge of my three siblings. That why my mom annoys me. She left me in charge of her children and I'm not the mom. She left me in charge of them since I was six years old. She went out very, very early, and she came back every day at 9:00 pm. We never saw her because when she left we were sleeping, and also when he came back.

Besides being too young to make me responsible for my brothers, it was also more complicated for me to look after them because I was born with a problem in my feet, and I walk with difficulty. I have the feet inward. My family noticed it when I turned one year old because I couldn't walk. I learned to walk when I was three. My aunt taught me because she has the same problem, as well as my dad and my brother Nicolás who don't walk well either. My brother Diego has a problem, but in the intestine. They inserted him a tube to go to the bathroom and he lives with it. Neither that seemed odd to my family, that's why my mom didn't care about my disability and left me in charge of my siblings.

I got up every day at 7:00 a.m. and prepared breakfast for my four siblings. The only food I knew how to prepare was noodle soup, so I gave them that for breakfast, lunch and dinner. My little sister was one year old and I prepared her porridge, watery, but porridge, and I fed her.

After cleaning up the kitchen, I bathed my younger siblings and cleaned the house. There was a room, a bathroom and the kitchen. When I finished, I washed the clothes. Then I had to prepare the

lunch. Over time I learned how to cook stew. As we didn't have a TV set, in the afternoon I played with my siblings, and if one of them got sick I took him to the doctor who was close to the house. None of us went to school; I guess it was because my parents didn't go either. We lived at my maternal grandmother's house near Toluca. She was there sometimes and sometimes she wasn't, but she remained lying down, she did nothing.

When I turned ten years old, my grandmother (to avoid calling her something else) began to make me work as a prostitute. Supposedly, she sent me to butcher shop to do her 'shopping', vegetables, fruit or meat, but she had already her plan. My parents had no idea where I was going because they never were at home, and I never told them anything, although I was my father's favorite. Up to date they don't know the truth.

The first time my grandmother sent me, she only told me to go to the butcher shop. When I arrived the butcher gave me the meat. I turn around to leave and he covered my eyes and put on my face something to put me to sleep. The next thing I remember is that I woke up at my grandmother's house. I woke up all drunk. I asked my grandmother what had happened to me and she told me that nothing, that I had fallen asleep. My tummy hurt a lot and when I told her about it she told me that it was due to all the junk food I ate.

That way she began to send me every day with a different man. It's obvious that they paid her, but I don't know how much. They put me to sleep and carry me to a room behind the butcher shop, and there I stayed for an hour or two. They put me to sleep until I turned 13 years old, because then it was no longer necessary, I already knew what I was going for.

One day, when I was already 13, I started to behave very rude with those men (they all were older than 50) because I was tired of always suffering that pain in my tummy and below. I went with a man and I grabbed his penis very hard, and I told him that if he raped me once again next time it would be worse. He shouted. He accused me with my grandmother and she scolded me, but I behave equally rude with her.

Finally, I met another butcher, who is the father of my daughter. He made me the same thing at the butcher shop and it was worse, because he was older, he was 60. One day he went to see my grandmother and asked her if I could go to his house. My grandmother said yes. So I went, he was married but his wife was out. I arrived as a nice little child, as if it were nothing. I asked him what he wanted and he told me that he wanted to have sex with me. I said yes, but when he got undressed I grabbed his dick and his balls, and I squeezed them with all my strength, until he begged me to release him. I even told him what he was going to die from and I left. However, I was already pregnant. I always had my period, but after being with him I didn't get it, so I knew he was the father. I was 15 years old.

The first thing I thought was to get an abortion. I was scared. I didn't know who to turn to or who to ask for help. A 12 years old friend of mine was that first who helped me. She told me that she was going to take me to the doctor. We went and he told me that I was pregnant. He asked me if I had a boyfriend, and I said yes, because I was not going to tell him my story. I went home and didn't tell anyone. Still, my aunt noticed that I didn't eat much and felt tired. I told her that it was due to what I ate, but she knew I was going to the butcher shop and she asked me if I had had my period. I said no, so she took me to the doctor and then they confronted the man. He never involved my grandmother; he only said that I had come to his house asking for a bucket of water and he had raped me, but that he was going to take care of all the pregnancy and the baby expenses. It wasn't true: he moved with his wife somewhere else and we don't know where he is now, but I don't care because I don't want to know anything about him anymore.

The DIF social workers came one day to see how I was doing with my feet because they were going to make an appointment with the doctor, but when they saw how we were living and that I was pregnant, they took me and my sister Perla, who was three years old, to two foster homes. Nicolás and Abril were left at home. They took Perla with them because my mother wasn't at home and my grandmother didn't do anything for us.

They installed me in a foster home at Ciudad Satélite and I stayed there four months. There were only pregnant women and girls, about 60 in total. They treated us very well, it was really cool. My aunt came to visit me, as well as the DIF social workers. A few days after my daughter was born, the same DIF personnel brought me to this foster home.

It is difficult to explain what I felt when Ana Cecilia was born. At first I didn't love her at all. At the Ciudad Satélite foster home they asked me if I wanted to give her up for adoption, and I said yes, but they never told me anything else on the matter. I behaved very rude with her. I hit her with my hand, enraged, and here they always scolded me for hitting her, but the truth is that she looks a lot like her father, and I recalled ugly things whenever I saw her.

When she turned two years old, I still had the idea of giving her up for adoption, but I needed the signature of one of my parents because I was under age. I looked for my dad and I was told that he was in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I went to look for him with the social worker of my foster home and a person of the DIF. When he saw me he said: "What are you doing here!" I told him that I needed his signature so that I could give the girl up for adoption. He said: "My signature won't come out from here." I already had my mom's fingerprint (she doesn't know how to write), but I needed both signatures. Then I told my dad that if he didn't give me his signature Ana Cecilia was going to be left exactly as they had left me. Then he told me that he was going to give me his signature but he asked me a favor: "Take a picture of her with you." I told him: "You don't have to ask for it, here it is. I already have it." Then he gave it back to me and said: "Think about it all your way back." I got into the car and the President of the DIF Toluca said: "Sign here. You only have one more week with her, so don't become too fond of her. Mom Angie asked aunt Mine to please take my daughter to her house and so she did; she only came to the nursery and went back. I was confused and sad. I didn't want to eat and didn't sleep well because I missed her. The week went by and the DIF personnel didn't come to take her away, so she came back with me.

When she turned three years old, they called me to tell me that they already had a family for Ana Cecilia, and I told them that they could come to take her. I already didn't treat her badly, I had already become fond of her.

The DIF personnel came to pick her and mom MOM talked first with them. Then she grabbed me and told me that they had come to take the girl with them. I went to the door and they told me they were going to take her, but I told them: "When I asked them to take her away you didn't come, now I want to know first what will happen to me." They told me that I was going to stay here at the foster home.

They handed me the document to sign it, but I ripped it up and told them that the girl was not leaving at all, that she was staying with me.

Today I think that having my daughter is the best thing that has happened to me in my life because she makes me very happy. I'm going to study to finish junior high school and then high school, and then I want to be a physiotherapist to help people with physical problems. I'm going to work hard to provide for Ana Cecilia. I want her to have an education, a lot of love and that she never suffers.

If you could change something in my life, I would change my grandmother because, she harmed me a lot. I lived at her home with my family and she was the one who ordered me. I don't know where she is, but I know that she is still alive and although I already forgave her for everything that she did to me, because it is better to let go the past, I don't want to see her ever. What she did to me was not good, it hurt me a lot.

I never told my parents out of fear. They never knew because they never were at home. My aunt became aware because I was going to visit her when I felt bad and sad, and she saw me crying. She asked me if I had problems and I told her that I hadn't, that I only felt like that because I had to look after the kids.

I know that I will succeed. I have been operated three times of my feet, and I need a fourth operation. I hope someday I will be able to walk like Ana Cecilia, and to meet again with my dad and my

siblings because when I think of them I feel very nice, I love them very much. I am always with them in my heart, and I wonder what they are doing. The only thing I know is that my siblings are also in a foster home. I wonder if my dad is working and if stopped drinking. I hope so! I would like to have my own house in Acapulco because I love the sea and the beach and that we could live there all together so that my daughter could know them and grow with them. I don't want to see my mom anymore; I only have bad memories of her. I didn't like that she didn't look after me and my siblings. She never knew what were we doing or where were we.

I hope my story shows other children going through this same problem that it is possible to get ahead, but that it is important to ask for help and not to remain silent. I understand very well what you are going through and I know that it is very difficult, but you must get away from the persons harming you, because, if you don't, afterwards you will be sorry because it will be too late. Don't you ever keep silent! You will be fine with the people backing you up. Tell them all your secrets so that they can help you properly. These people are going to be your friends. Let yourselves be help because you can rebuild your lives with someone, but first you have to know well that person, because, if you don't, she or he can do to you things that you may not like. Trust people who want to help you and take care of yourselves! Don't go through what happened to me and have a baby so young.

I advise parents to open their eyes so the see what their children are doing. Dedicate yourselves to them, and don't entrust them with work that is not their responsibility. Let's hope that parents with alcohol problems ask for help so that they can work and thus be with their children and help them.

Today I can say that after all that I went through I'm fine. I walk better after my surgeries and I live peaceful and happy in the foster home. I think about the future and I see myself married to a good man, close to Ana Cecilia and to another son whose name will be Carlos. I would like to live in Mexico City and be a physical therapist. I want to help other people who lack any assistance just as I was helped here at Las Mercedes. Everything that happened to me was a great lesson for me, but I will never stop visiting the persons who supported me, because I will never forget them. I love them very much.

Miranda's Diary

Miranda

January 7, 2013

My name is Miranda, I am 18 years old, and I was born in 1995 in Atlacomulco, State of Mexico.

Since I was born, Natali, my sister, now 17 years old, and I lived with my maternal grandparents because my mom worked in the countryside with my aunt Anne producing coal, and also she took care of my other sisters: Marina, who is now 15 years and Maria, 13. My two younger sisters have a father and Natali and I another one, although he never lived with us and I don't know where he is. Therefore, for us my mom was my aunt, because we called mom my grandmother.

I began to go to school when I was six years old, but I don't know why my sisters never went, because my mom and my grandma know how to read and write. However, I dropped out of school long ago, when I was 14.

Since I was very little I was abused, since I was eight years old. When I was born they took me to live with my grandparents, but when I was two years old my grandmother died of diabetes and I went to live with an aunt because my grandpa drank a lot. In fact, right now he goes to Alcoholics Anonymous.

The husband of my aunt, Eduardo, abused me when my aunt left the house and threatened me to through me out if I accused him. I have two children from him, Julio Cesar and Fernanda. My mother chose the name of the boy and my aunt the name of the girl. I never told anyone because I was afraid. The first time I got pregnant I said that I had been raped, and I told my aunt. I was almost eight months pregnant and nobody had noticed anything.

When I was pregnant of Julio, my aunt, my godmother and my godfather went with me to the hospital to give birth. I thought about giving him up for adoption, but I didn't. I waited and eventually I loved him. My mom thought that I had been raped by the owner of a groceries store. Eduardo never acknowledged that they were his children and he neither told me anything about them. He worked in the countryside building wood-fired ovens and harvesting, but when he was at home and my aunt went out, he took advantage of it. After some time, he began abusing also my sister Natali.

When I got pregnant for the second time, I notified the DIF, and then my mom and my aunts found out. My mother brought a lawsuit against my uncle. Nine years had already passed since he had started abusing me and my sister, and then we went to live with an aunt called Ana, because where my mom works she wasn't accepted with us. But that aunt treated us very badly. She went out of the house and told us that we had to do all the housework. When she came back she also wanted lunch to be ready and her clothes to be washed. As it was my duty to wash the dishes and when she arrived they were not clean, she through me out of her house with my children. However, when I was leaving, as at about 5:50 and it was already late, my aunt took my children from me, calling me crazy and saying that I was a bad person for them, and she trough me out alone, but then I went to one of my godmothers, whose name is Guillermina, and she took me to the Presidency and that's why the personnel of the City Hall helped me recover my children. Then they took me to the DIF and from there they brought me to the foster home.

I told my sister Natali to leave with me, although she is very stupid because she was also thrown out, but she didn't accept to leave my other sisters, due to the awful way we were treated. She preferred to stay, but I left with my children. Sometime later, my mom sent them to live with my uncle Pedro, his wife and their children. But one of them is in fact already with me, Marina, the one who is 15 years old. My mom brought her because she didn't want to be there anymore, she says that she misses me and my children.

My dad never lived with us, nor I know where is. As he went away, my mom had to work and left us with my grandma, and then we had to go with my uncles. I never said to anyone that my uncle abused me and at the school they didn't know either. My sister also said nothing, and luckily she didn't get pregnant.

When my aunt found out that her husband abused us, she asked me why I hadn't tell her that my children were my uncle's children. Nine years passed before my mom and she knew it all. I said nothing until I went to the DIF, and in the end my mom and the DIF personnel were those who most helped me. I can't stand Eduardo, my aunt's husband, because he abused my sister and me. Moreover, he hit us when he did it. I want (the authorities) to send him to jail so that he pays for what he did to us, but they haven't done him anything yet.

The authorities said that they were going to search for him, but they haven't find him

Meanwhile, I want to study in order to bring up my children. I'd like to continue studying to be a preschool teacher, and in the future, be with my godfathers, my godmothers and my children. But not right now; for the moment I think I'm better in the foster home.

I keep some memories of my childhood. I recall that when we were little we called my mom Cachirula. And not here with me, but at my aunt's I have pictures of Atlacomulco when I was baptized, when I went to visit the place where I was born, and also when I was going to school and my Grandma came to pick us. I want my children to have a good life.

I am very happy at the foster home. I have many classmates and friends. The truth is that I cannot say that something bothers me because I would lie, I like everything here. Now I only think about my children and to get ahead so I can give them the best.

Now my mom lives here in Mexico, at Ciudad Satélite, with her employer, but she comes to see us every 15 days and she is happy that we are here.

All the stories teach something, and I want that, with mine, children learn that they must always speak the truth and never remain silent; that they must voice what is happening to them. For their part, the parents must watch over their children so that they don't go through something similar to what happened to me because my mom neglected me.

Courageous and Alone

Montserrat

February 19, 2013

I wish there was a fairy godmother who could grant me a wish; I would ask her to be with my family, my son and my brothers, but mostly with my dad and my grandmothers in Honduras. But my dad and my grandmothers are not there any longer because they died.

My name is Montserrat and I am 15 years old. I was born on January 11, 1997 and I am a Capricorn. My mom's name is the same as mine; the truth is that I really like my name because of that.

I was born in Honduras, in the city of Yoro, at the Manuel de Jesus Zubiran Hospital at 2:00 in the morning. I have a son who was born in Mexico City, in the Tlalpan district. He was born seven months premature, and weighed 2.250 k. When I saw him I said: "By God, he is a very cute boy." He was born really small, like a Nenuco. I was very afraid to bathe him because I felt that he was going to break into pieces and he was a sweet nothing. Then he grew up and became very handsome, with his shiny black hair and his dark, really dark brown eyes. He almost didn't cry, but he asked to eat a lot, or he got angry because I wasn't fast enough. Now he is one year old and he already walks. He paces around. All the girls love him a lot. His name is Alejandro Santiago. I called him Santiago because of his dad, and Alejandro because of my cousin. He has my two last names.

I always went to school in Punta Ocote. I felt very nice to be at the school. It was a Government school, but I loved being there. I had a teacher who is my favorite of all my life, Sonia Arreaga. I had many friends and I liked art, Spanish, physics, English and mathematics, although I was not so good at math, I almost didn't understand it, but I did my best at school. I almost never failed an exam and I made good girlfriends, especially one named Katia, I miss her a lot. Being at the school was like a dream of which I didn't want to wake up. Year after year I was making new friends.

I have a family of five persons and with my son we would be six. We are all Honduran. I really like my family because they understand me, all of them explain me things when I don't understand them. Although my dad is no longer with us. He died six years ago and when he died our lives changed. I was 9 years old, my older sister 12, the younger 5 and the youngest 2. That was very sad for us. My mom had to work to maintain us and help us get ahead, and we weren't going to have a father who gave us love, affection, respect and his warmth.

The death of my father took us by surprise. I was nine years old and I was on vacation. We went with my mother to visit my uncles because an aunt had come back from the United States. We hadn't seeing her for four years and we were very glad to see her again. We stayed there a week and when we were going to come back, my uncle's wife called us and told us that my father had died. At first I didn't cry because I have an uncle who I affectionately call dad and I thought it was him, but then he told me that it was my real dad and then I started crying, I couldn't stop, and my aunt phoned me because she is in the United States, and she told me that she was going to send me a doll and controlled myself.

My dad died because he was with another woman who wasn't my mom. That woman had a maid. This house-worker was also at fault because she got pregnant from my dad, and when her employer found out about it, she had him killed. Both of them were lovers of my dad, but the lady became jealous because her maid was also dating my dad.

After that, one year passed and my mom decided to move to the United States and she left us with my grandma.

Some time passed and we knew nothing of our mom and we became distressed for not knowing anything about our mom. Two years passed, and just when I finished elementary school, my mom called us to tell us that she was already in the United States and that we didn't have to worry about her, that she never forgot us. After that she started to send us money and things like clothes, shoes, candy and chocolates. We didn't feel sad for lacking the warmth of a father and a mother, but we had the love of a grandmother who loved and looked after us, and also uncles and aunts who loved us very much.

I liked very much to be with my family because they never treated us badly. I love my family because it is the family that I never expected to have, they are super cool. They share many things with us and they give us lots of love. I have a godmother and a godfather. They love me very much and when my father died they wanted to take me with them, but I didn't want to get separated from my family.

My grandfather died. I wasn't born yet and I only know my grandma, who raised me since I was 6 years old until I turned 13. I also got along well with my aunt and my uncle, they played with me and they advised me so that I could do well in life; they told me: "Who doesn't hear advice, doesn't get old."

Before coming to the foster home, I lived with my family: my brothers, my uncle and my aunt, and four cousins. We went to junior high school and I did it well, I got good grades. It was also really cool to be with my friends, and my four cousins and my brother. We were at the same junior high school and we lived in the same house. It was great to be always together.

Everything was fine until it occurred to me to go to the United States. I wanted to go because in Honduras there was a work stoppage and I had already lost a month of classes. Moreover, I was pregnant and I didn't know what to do, to have an abortion or to keep the baby. I didn't know either what my family or the child's father was going to tell me. I was 14 years old at the time and I asked my friend to help me. She advised me to go and live with her, but I told her that I was going to think about it. Later I told her no and sometime later my mom told me that she was going to take me to the United States and told her yes. Then she told me that I was going to travel with an aunt and I accepted, and I came. Immigration detained me three times and this one was the last. My son was born and I was brought to the foster home.

Immigration caught me in San Luis Potosí. I had bad luck because the other Honduran persons who I was going with continued and they are already in the United States. The truth is that, all in all, the Immigration officers treated me very well because they took me to the hospital when I was going to have my baby. They gave me the food the doctor asked them to give me, and they also gave me clothes for the baby and for me. My son was born premature and every day they took me to the hospital to see him. Then they took me to the Honduran consulate so that I could go back with the child, but I told them that I wanted to stay here in Mexico and they told me yes, but that in that case they would send me to a foster home and I agreed. I wanted to stay in Mexico because they were going to nationalize me Mexican because I had a Mexican child, but when I arrived at the foster home they told me that it was going to take some time. But until today there are no papers, so I better told them that I was going back to my country. They have taken long to send me back to Honduras because my mom has to call since she has the contact with the consul.

I spent several days in charge of Immigration, 15 in Chiapas, one in Villahermosa, 8 in Palenque and 14 in the Federal District. They treated us very well, we slept on bunk beds and we could bathe every day. They gave us to eat three times a day, we played and if we had money we bought candy. They also let you call you family twice a day. It was nice, although they didn't let us go out.

I never told my parents or my boyfriend that I was pregnant. My mom found it out when I was already in Mexico and she scolded me on the phone. I didn't inform Santiago either, until much later. I kept in contact with him, but then he changed his cell phone and for a long time he didn't call me. Recently he sent me his new number, but I haven't look for him; neither I know if he's going to help me with my son, but I'm going to get ahead.

I want to continue studying because I want to study architecture, it's my favorite career. I long for being an architect since the age of 11; I know that's what I want and one day I will make it. I would also like to sing and act in soap operas. I'm going to provide for Santiago to turn him into a professional, so that when he gets married to a woman he maintains her, and also their children, well, if he has children. That's my aim, as well as helping my grandmother who raised me since I was six years old because I love her so much, as well as my mother and my brothers. And my dad, even though he is no longer with me, he is in my heart.

I'm happy to have known Mexico D.F. I never imagined to visit this country and I know that someday I will go back to my family in Honduras and to Santiago. That boy—well, he's already 20 years old—I fell head over heels for him and I love him. I was 13 years old the first time I went to bed with a guy and it was him. Although we knew the consequences, I got pregnant, it was very nice to have his child. I hope that when I go back everything will be as before. Although I dated another guy who hurt me a lot because he cheated me with another girl who was my friend. I loved him very much, but that made my hatred grow to hate him more and more and I haven't been able to forget him, but our relationship would not be the same if we restarted it; it wouldn't be the same respect or the same love. It would no longer be the same, but it is good that I opened my eyes and I realized that he was not the person I expected him to be.

However, I'm not going to hate him anymore because I'm happy with another person who came into my life and he is the father of my son, and he made me very happy and he loves so much my son that he already made me forget all the ugly things that I went through in my life.

I arrived to the foster home on July 28, 2011; I was 14 years old and I was brought by Immigration. I feel good to be here with my son, they give me their support. At the same time, I'm sad for not being with my family, very far from them, but happy for having a son who is Mexican and here at home I feel well. I team up in the housework; my assignments are the living room and to bring the bread from the bakery. They give us the bread remaining from the previous day. I also cooperate in other cleaning assignments when the girls in charge are absent.

I love to skip rope, to play with the hula-hula, to listen to music, to draw, to read and to write. I also like to bathe and to have my house and my son clean. I love to play with the Barbies, to play hopscotch and to watch TV, cartoons and soap operas. My favorite music is Reggaeton, bachata and merengue. I like the dance workshop and taekwondo.

Although I'm fine here, the worst thing that happened to me was when Immigration detained me when I was going in search of a better life. Why they don't think that in other countries there are poor people, and that someday, if they haven't yet done it, they will do it, or their children, but God knows why He does it.

I have a friend who has the intention of crossing to the United States, but as I already have some experience, today I would tell her as an advice not to leave her country without papers, to rather stay at home, even if it is humble, because I regret a thousand times having left mine because I'm not with my family anymore. It is ugly when you're away and you don't know anyone.

For me it was very important to tell this story so others know the reason why they want to leave their country to make their dreams come true. Sometimes it is because they don't have enough money to study or to provide for their family. I've spoken my mind telling my story and it makes me very happy to know that it's going to be published in a book. ¡It is as if I were a writer! ¡Ha, ha!

The story of the girl who one day had it all and the following day everything had disappeared

Thaily Itzihuari

December 8, 2012

I write this story to vent my feelings and to share all that has happened to me so that everyone knows it. I want to write about my life and about what I lived with my parents so that other parents reflect on it.

My family consists of seven members. All live in Mexico City. My mom's name is Silvia and she works cleaning houses. My dad is Jesus, my brother's name is Porfirio, my sister's Andrea, I Thaily Itzihuari, my nephew Gonzalo and my niece's name is Victoria. My niece and my nephew are Andrea's children, my sister who's 17 years old. She had her first child when she was 15 years old and the second when he was 16. Their father is Rodolfo, so she says.

I am 13 years old. I like very much my school. It's mixed and with me we are four in the class. I don't wear a uniform and my favorite subjects are Biology and Mesoamerican cultures. What I like about Biology is human development.

The best thing that has happened to me in life is to have my niece and to arrive to a foster home. I also liked that my parents took me for a walk with my niece and my nephew. And there are things that I don't like, such as that some companions at the home conspire and that others treat me badly. I don't like children to be poorly treated, or that parents hit their children. When I misbehaved they hit me with a shoe, a broom stick or whatever they could find. They also hit my brothers.

My dad was born in Nahuatzen, in the state of Michoacán, and he was brought up with his parents, mistress Vicenta, and mister Javier, who lived there. Then they moved here. First my dad married a woman. Then he met my mom. Many years passed before they had children. Their first child was my sister, then me, and then my brother. My dad maintained us. He performed many jobs, such as bricklayer and private security guard. My mom was born in Toluca, in San Marcos. She lived there for some time and then came here.

My two parents, my mom and my dad, were sent to jail. First, because my brother-in-law denounced them because, according to him, they had taken his children away and they had registered them in the name of my sister. But they were also imprisoned for corruption of minors. According to the neighbors, they prostituted us with the men of the building across the street. They said that they sold for a kilo of tortillas, but that was not true. They said it because we had no food, just for that.

My parents do sent us with the men of the building, but only when we didn't have something to eat, which was occasionally. I was 10 and my sister 15. Those men were very old, but they didn't treat us wrongly. We used to go with one of them each time, they gave us to eat, and they also gave us money. Moreover, we brought food to my parents. At first I cried a lot, but then you get used.

If in this very moment I had a fairy godmother who could grant me a wish, I would ask her to sort out things so that I could go home with my parents, my nephews and my brothers, or to my grandparents' house. I was brought here by the office of the Attorney General. My sister and her children are in another foster home. My parents prefer that they are there due to the claim of my brother-in-law. The two-year-old boy is the son of Miguel who was caught selling drugs, he was 35 years old. The girl is the daughter of Salvador who is 19 years old but who no longer lives with her because after suing my parents he remarried and now has other children. We never saw him again.

Before coming to the foster home, at the Attorney General premises I felt very sad without my parents. I cried for them because I didn't make the most of them while I had them. There they gave us sandwiches most of the time or, if we were lucky, they gave us real food. We slept on bunk beds, but without mattress, only with mats. We took showers with cold water and sometimes hot water. We stayed there from November 22 to December 2, 2011. Since then I'm here, more than one year ago.

Right now my parents are out of prison and my brothers are with them. However, I cannot go back home myself because the Office of the Attorney General thinks that my parents are going to do the same thing once again. I wish they hadn't committed the things which send them to jail, but whatever

they did, they are my parents and I love them very much. I love very much all of my relatives. I would like to say to my brother-in-law that I hope he gets conscious for what he did and that someday he regrets it, because what's done is done and has no solution anymore.

In the future I hope to go back to my family, my nephews and my brothers. I'm going to study to achieve something, to leave the foster home with good studies, to provide for my parents and give them a good life, as well as my nephews and my whole family. I will work to be able to maintain all of them and I hope to achieve something to be able to do many things.

I hope that my story helps many dads to understand that they must not abuse their children, to learn how to make the most of them, and that they'd better set to work. And I hope that children pay attention so that they don't suffer what I suffered.

Child Abuse Preventive Guide

Violence has always existed. Today it is a global phenomenon which affects seriously modern society and impacts significantly on the physical, mental, emotional and social development of boys and girls.

Definitions

Violence: ““Violence is an oriented, worked out, learned and legitimized practice of those who consider themselves with more power than others, with more rights than others to control and intimidate.”⁸

Domestic violence: “Any act or omission carried out by any member of the family with a power relationship, regardless of the physical space where it happens, which undermines the well-being, the physical, psychological integrity or the freedom and the right to the full development of another member of the family.”⁹

Child abuse: Victims of abuse and neglect are considered those children and adolescents up to 18 years who “suffer from occasionally or habitually acts of physical, sexual or emotional violence, either in the immediate family or in social institutions”. Child abuse is also defined as “any action or non-accidental omission causing physical or psychological harm to a child by their parents or caregivers”.¹⁰

Violence occurs in all cultures and socio-economic environments. This is directly linked “to the way power is handled within personal relationships and this is a universal component”.¹¹

Below are the four kinds of child violence within the framework of domestic violence, with their respective definitions, characteristics, and typical behaviors.

Types of Abuse

Physical	
Definition	It is the physical assault causing corporal injuries in the child.
Characteristics	Traces of the aggressor object (iron, tie, belt, chain, etc.), bruises, fractures, burns, erythema, swelling, deformation of the region, visceral rupture or poisoning. Frequent admissions to the hospital due to injuries whose cause is not clear.
Behavior	Aggressive, destructive attitudes, hyperactivity or apathy, rebelliousness, shyness, fear, anxiety, isolation, guilt, feelings of being bad. Within the school sphere, absenteeism and poor performance are frequent.
Sexual	
Definition	It is any kind of sexual contact with a child by a family member or any adult in order to obtain sexual excitement and/or gratification, and that can vary from the exhibition of genitals, molestation, to rape.
Characteristics	Bruising, lacerations, bleeding, itching or swelling in genitals and/or anus, perforated hymen (girls), difficulty to walk, semen, infections, somatization. In adolescents, dyspareunia.
Behavior	Fear, anxiety, guilt, distrust, anger. In adolescents, homosexual attraction, anorgasmia, loss or decreased libido, self-abasement.

Psycho-emotional	
Definition	Attitudes aimed at damaging the emotional integrity of minors through gestures or verbal expressions that humiliate or degrade.
Characteristics	They exhibit psychomotor delay, they don't play, they become isolated, they are silent and sad, they suffer self-abasement, low self-esteem and personal insecurity.
Behavior	Deterioration of mental faculties, mainly in the cognitive area, self-abasement, low school performance, shyness, depression, low sociability, sign of feeling of not being loved and emotional block.

Neglect	
Definition	Any conduct depriving the boy or girl of the supervision or care necessary for their proper development.
Characteristics	Poor hygiene, malnutrition in varying degree, sickly appearance, clothes inappropriate for the place or climate. Lack of timely medical care and permanent adynamia.
Behavior	Shyness, apathy, irregular attendance at school, poor school performance, indifference to the external environment.

Sources: Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF-Preman).

Sistema Nacional de Salud Pública. El maltrato infantil: un problema mundial, México, 1998.

Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos México. Programa de prevención y protección de los niños y niñas víctimas de conductas sexuales: www.diputados.gob.mx/cesop/doctos/VIOLENCIA-MENORES.pdf

It is equally important to keep in mind, to analyze and to determine the possible behavior of the parent or carer responsible for the violence in the different types of abuse.

Behavior of carer(s)

Emotional or psychological abuse
Their education is intimidating at the time of setting limits.
They convey a negative assessment of children; they constantly despise their achievements and subjected them to verbal humiliation and excessive criticism.
They generate in the children an intense fear, threatening them with an extreme punishment.
They strive to keep the children away from normal social relationships with their classmates: they forbid them to play with other children, to invite their friends to their house, etc.
They are cold, rejectionist and they deny love.
They show no interest in the problems that the child may have at school, showing a clear lack of interest in his/her person.
They keep expectations beyond the reach of the child and they punish him/her for not achieving them.
Physical abuse
The account of parents or carers don't concur with the intensity or characteristics of the injuries observed.
Changing or inconsistent accounts in the narration of parents or carers.
Inconsistency or contradiction between the account of the child and that of the adults responsible.
They try to hide the child injury or to protect the identity of the person responsible for it.
They don't let the child reveal what happened or they deny what the child tells.
The child carers refer to him/her in negative terms; they resort to a rigid and severe discipline not suitable for the age of the child.
They are alcohol and other drugs abusers.
Carelessness and neglect
Life at home is chaotic.
Drugs or alcohol abuse.
They show signs of apathy or uselessness.
They have a low intellectual level or mental illness.
They suffer a chronic illness.
They were subject to carelessness in their childhood.
They don't provide the child adequate food and clothing and they neglect his/her hygiene.
They don't attend school meetings.
They don't know where the child is.

They show a lack of interest and a lack of contact with the child.
They don't take the child to health service or medical check-ups.

Source: www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf

It is difficult to prevent or stop in time the abuse. However, certain precautions can be taken before it arises.

Recommendations to prevent sexual abuse:12

Don't let the children go out alone on the street, especially at night.

Never leave them alone at home, even less if there's a person who they dislike or they don't trust, or if there's someone hired to do a temporary work.

Don't leave the children alone in cars or other unprotected places.

Get the children used to tell if they feel lonely or are afraid.

Urge parents and mothers to be friends of their sons and daughters, reminding them that their role is irreplaceable, i.e. their duty is to teach and protect them.

Be aware of places and friendships their children get in contact with.

At home, have separated bedrooms for children and adults, and also according to the gender of the children. If it's not possible, try to have the maximum number of beds to separate occupants by gender and age.

When relatives or acquaintances come to visit and must stay at night in the house, have available an additional bed (sleeping bag, lounge, mattress on the floor).

Never force the children to share a bed or bedroom with an adult or teenager who's not one of their parents.

Teach children from a very young to take care of their body, specially not change clothes or to undress in front of persons not related to their immediate family.

Finally, it is also important to know what not to do once the abuse was accomplished to avoid worsening the situation.

What you shouldn't do:13

Bring face to face the child or teenager with the abuser in order to corroborate his version of the facts.

Put the blame of the abuse on the child. You must not scold or punish them for what happened. Regardless of whether he/she resisted or not the abuse, what's important is not to hold the child responsible, even in cases where the offender was able to obtain his/her cooperation.

Deny that the abuse has occurred ("¿Are you sure?" "Don't make up those stories").

Express concern, anguish for the child or the offender.

Treat the child in a different way. Avoid touching him/her, caressing him/her, talking about him/her as the victim.

Overprotect him/her.

Glossary of the Preventive Guide

ADYNAMIA: Impairment of physical force, weakness.

ANORGASMIA: Lack of orgasm during sexual intercourse.

APATHY: Slackness, lack of interest, vigor or energy.

DYSPAREUNIA: Painful intercourse, both in men and women.

ECCHYMOSIS: Bruise, purple, blackish or yellowish stain of the skin or in the internal organs due to a blood effusion caused by a blow, a strong ligature and other things.

ERYTHEMA: Superficial inflammation of the skin, characterized by red spots.

HYMEN: Fold of the mucous membrane partially closing the external orifice of the vagina in a virgin woman.

LACERATION: Wound, blow.

LIBIDO: Desire or sex drive.

PRURITUS: Itchiness, irritation occurring in the body.

SOMATIZATION: Process by which a psychic condition is transformed into an organic one.

Bibliographic References

Horno, Pepa (2009), *Amor y violencia. La dimensión afectiva del maltrato*. Bilbao, Desclée De Brouwer.

Lorente Acosta, Miguel (2004), *El rompecabezas. Anatomía del maltratador*. Barcelona, Ares y Mares.

<www.cenetec.salud.gob.mx/descargas/gpc/CatalogoMaestro/400_GPC_MaltratoInfantil/DIF-400-09-GER> (2011), *Detección temprana de abuso físico desde el nacimiento hasta los 12 años de edad en el primer nivel*, México, Secretaría de Salud.

<<http://www.cpuente.cl/agencia/recursos/familiar>>

<www.diputados.gob.mx/cesop/doctos/VIOLENCIA-MENORES.pdf>

<www.thefreedictionary.com>

<www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf>

<www.wordreference.com>

END NOTES

- ¹ The writing style of each girl has been maintained in the Spanish original version as well as in this English version.
- ² Founder and director of Documentación y Estudios de Mujeres, A.C., DEMAC, a non-profit organization created in 1989.
- ³ Founder and manager of Fundación Amparo Serrano A.C., whose Libertad en Movimiento project (dance as a therapeutic means) is carried out in several institutions of assistance to girls and young women in conditions of great vulnerability and scarce resources.
- ⁴ Non-profit private assistance institution that began to provide its services in 2001. It was founded by Claudia Colimoro Sarellano to help homeless and even pregnant girls and teenage girls who come through the Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal (Federal District General Prosecutor's Office).
- ⁵ Initials of the Mexican federal and state government family development system.
- ⁶ Residential area very close to Mexico City.
- ⁷ Department of Immigration
- ⁸ Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. Government of Chile. National plan of intervention in domestic violence 2001-2006. www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf
- ⁹ Pan American Health Organization, 2006. [ww.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf](http://www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf)
- ¹⁰ Corsi, Jorge. 1994. *Violencia Intrafamiliar: una mirada interdisciplinaria sobre un grave problema social*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós. www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf
- ¹¹ Horno, Pepa. 2008. *Amor y violencia: la dimensión afectiva del maltrato*. Bilbao: Editorial Desclée de Brouwer.
- ¹² *El maltrato deja huella*, Unicef, Programa Puente y FOSIS, 2009. www.unicef.cl/UNICEF/public/archivos_documento/306/EL%20Maltrato.pdf
- ¹³ Excerpted from "Intervention in sexual abuse crisis", document available at <http://www.cpunte.cl/agencia/recursos/familiar> www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/208/UNICEF%20completo.pdf