

RAISING THE WINGS

Soledad

Tuesday, October 21, 2014

I got home at half past four in the afternoon. I felt annoyed and upset, it had not been an easy day at work. Lately it was hard for me to go. Even though I only worked from Monday to Wednesday. I was not hungry, so I took a bath. I figured that would take my stress off a bit. I turned on the television and there was nothing interesting, I turned it off and looked out the window for a while. It was traffic time, the drivers seemed upset and honked the horn because they were not moving, the train was passing and the noise it was making added to the one from the vehicles. I was distracted by hearing the screams of a lady walking in front of the house, she was yelling at a child and was pulling him, the child cried and wanted to get away, she walked faster, forcing him to keep up with her. “How can she do that? I wondered, what is the poor innocent doing to her? I turned away angry and nostalgic from the window. If I had a son, I would never treat him that way.

I looked for a book to get out of my thoughts. I was immersed in the reading when a quote caught my attention. I underlined it, took a picture of it with the cell phone and shared it on my Facebook.

I will go through this life only once.
Therefore, whatever good I can do
or any kindness I can show towards
any human being, let me do it now.
Do not let me delegate or neglect it,
because I will not go through this life again.

I was thinking about the phrase when the phone rang. I did not want to answer, I had no intention of speaking to

anyone. The phone was still ringing, so I assumed it was important and, finally I answered. It was Ms. Nuñez, from the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF).

Monday, September 10, 2012

I was nervous, but determined. I had groomed myself a little more than usual. That day I asked for permission to be late for work. I felt my legs bending as I got out of the car. At the entrance was a guard.

-What can I do for you? – he asked kindly.

-They told me that here are the office of DIF, I am here to ask for information about the adoptions.

-They are not here anymore, Miss, they changed them to the Central Park. I do not know if they are already working. They changed just last week, but they can give you information there.

-Thank you – I replied, and left quickly.

I got in the car. I could not believe it! It had taken me so long to take that step and it turns out that the offices were no longer there, it made me mad.

I stayed for a while in the car deciding whether to go to the Central Park at once or forget about it and go to work. After a few minutes I drove directly to the Central Park. At once, I thought, I can't be asking for permission over and over. I entered to the offices and saw everything in disarray: papers on the floor, computer equipment and furniture everywhere. In what looked like the information module was a young man. I went towards him determinedly and said to him:

-Good day, young man, I am here to ask for information about the adoptions.

-Good day, miss. Come with me, please.

He took me to a small office. A man about fifty years old was connecting the computer.

-Sir – said the young man to him –, they are here to ask for information about the adoptions, can you assist her?

The man kindly greeted me and removed some papers from a chair so I could sit down.

-At the moment I cannot provide you much information. As you can see, we are in the process of change. We do not have any phone lines yet, but if you want to, leave me your information so that they can contact you.

He wrote down on a piece of paper my name and phone number.

-That is all. As soon as a workshop of school for parents is scheduled, they will call you to see if you are still interested. During the year three courses are given, but since DIF changed from municipal to state-owned, we do not know if we will continue the same or there will be changes. As soon as a course is available we will inform you.

I said thanks and left angry. A workshop for parents? Is this how the process begins? Truly I do not understand, I am not a mother. Why do I want to come to a workshop?, what I want is to adopt a child! How rude! On the first paper he saw he wrote down my information, not even on a sheet, and in all that mess it is easy to lose it.

Dear God: I already threw in the nets, you decide what I will fish.

MY DREAMS

As a child I dreamed that growing up I would marry a handsome and wealthy man, as was the case with princesses. I

would have three or four children, I would live in a big and beautiful house with a huge garden, with a maid so I would have all the time in the world to take care of my children and my husband. We would travel to many places in the world and we would be very happy.

The reality was very different. I had not found my prince charming, and after thirty years I began to despair thinking that I would no longer have a child. I lived with my parents, and when I told them that I wanted to have a child, my dad told me: “You do not know the great responsibility and how difficult it is to raise a child, more for a single mother; children need both parents”. I listened to him out of respect, I thought he told me all that stuff because he was old-fashioned, and because maybe he would be ashamed if I was a single mother.

At night I used to think: “who, from the men I know, could be a good candidate to be the father of my son?” He should be handsome, intelligent, tall – because I do not like short men –. I did not wait that long to have a foolish and ugly child! In addition, he would have to undergo medical tests, I would not expose myself to being infected by some disease or AIDS. He should be someone trustworthy, but who? Actually, I did not know anyone who met my expectations. I have always been very demanding, even with myself, maybe that is why I never found the prince charming, or he does not exist. It is only part of the imagination that we feed as girls when we read the stories of princesses.

Lolita was my friend for many years. With her I could talk about anything, she never criticized me nor judged me, for me she was a very trustworthy and intelligent person, as well as fun, because she always made me laugh. I had told her that I wanted to have a child, that I really wanted. One Saturday when we were going to El Paso and there was a long line on the bridge, as we arrived to the immigration checkpoint, I told her that I had dreamed that I had a son and that all day I had been nostalgic. As we talked, I watched the advertisements in

the stores. “Look how beautiful those baby things! I would buy him only brand name clothes. Look at that crib, how beautiful. I want to have a son and I want him now! I do not want to get frustrated, but I see it more and more distant”. She was driving and fighting with the glass cleaners who were in the bridge. She turned around more calmly and told me: “In the back seat is the newspaper. There is a note that may interest you. It is from yesterday, but I kept it because, when reading it, I remembered you”.

I took the *Diario de Juárez*. On a full page came the story of some children who were in shelters. As Christmas approached, they were asked about what they wanted to ask Santa for. They replied that they wanted a family, not toys, bicycles nor tracks, only a family that would adopt them.

-Maybe it is the way through which you can have your son – Lolita said with a complicity smile.

-My son has to be like me, he must carry my blood, I do not know if I can love a child who is not born from me. What if they give me an ugly or spoiled one? The truth, I do not even want to consider it.

-It is an option – she replied –, after all, you decide, but you want a son and they want a mother. How ironic, don't you think?

Thursday, December 20, 2012

I did not have a car, so I asked Lolita to please give me a ride to work. She picked me up at seven thirty in the morning. The trip is approximately thirty minutes. I was about to arrive when I got a phone call. It was my brother, that I should go immediately to the hospital because during the night my mother went into crisis and she had to be intubated, that the

doctors said that there was nothing more they could do. He had already communicated with my other siblings.

Lolita made a turn immediately to head to the hospital. On the way she told me to calm down, that maybe it was time for my mother to depart. I got really upset.

-My mom can't do that to me – I yelled at her –. She can't leave my dad and me alone!

-It is time for your mommy to go, let her leave in peace – she insisted.

-Do not talk to me anymore. My mom is not going to die!, understand it, she is not going to die! – I sobbed inconsolably.

My mom had many complications. She was diabetic since thirty years ago and was never controlled. She had been on peritoneal dialysis for five years because her kidneys were damaged. She had a pre-infarction and only one artery in her heart was functioning. We had been in and out from the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) very often for a long time. Now we had taken her to the emergency room because of a pain in her stomach that kept her from sleeping.

She had fourteen children: three died as babies and we were eleven who survived. She was a woman worth admiring, so tender that she took the time to cook to each one of us what we liked. She never screamed, she never hit me. On the contrary, she was very sweet. When I got home from work and I had had a bad day, I did not tell her, I only leaned on her legs. She stroked my hair and gave me such little kisses that they made me want to continue. “You had a bad day, Güerita”, she said to me. “No, mommy, I am tired”. She smiled, she knew me better than I did. When I made her angry during my adolescence, she cried, maybe out of frustration, but she said nothing to me. Since I could not bear to see her cry, I did what she wanted me to do. For many years I was the only one who lived with them. All my siblings were already married, in their own houses. She and my dad were my whole life.

-We arrived! – Lolita said to me –. God bless you! if anything comes up, phone me, you know you can count on me, right?

-Thank you – I replied with my eyes irritated by crying.

That day was one of the saddest in my life. My mommy left us at eight forty-five at night. When I found out, I fell to my knees, I felt as if a lightning bolt struck me. It was so much the pain that I could not be standing up. What would my life be without her? My dad and I were dedicated to taking care of her, we ate whatever she wanted. I remember every moment of the funeral as a movie, every detail of what happened.

At Christmas I did not want people in the house, but my siblings insisted that we had to move forward, that we still had my dad. After praying the rosary of the novenary, I went to sleep, I have never cried so much in my whole life. How to overcome the loss of a loved one? How to overcome the death of your sweet mother?

March 2013

Two months had passed since my mother died and I missed her more and more, I felt depressed. Now my father and I were alone in the house. That house so big and silent that you could hear the noises from outside. There were days when I felt that the pain was going to kill me.

Sometimes I thought that God had not given me children for some reason. Now I did not feel like doing anything, just sleeping and crying, going back to sleep due to tiredness and waking up with that huge emptiness. Every space on that house reminded me of my mother.

My father, like me, only wanted to sleep, but he didn't seem sad. Several times I complained to him if he did not miss her. He sweetly said to me: "Oh, little daughter, how could I not miss her if I lived with her practically all my life, but she

was already very sick and suffered a lot. It comforts me to know that she is in a better place”. His answer, although true, did not satisfy me.

I never told my dear mom that I wanted a son. She used to tell me to look for a good man to marry me, that she was going to have a peace of mind knowing that someone was taking care of me and providing me. I always alleged her that this did not guarantee that I would be fine, that, on the contrary, it was sometimes worse, that I was free to go wherever I wanted. And I gave her examples of friends who had failed in their marriage, or of male batterers. She smiled and told me that every day she asked God to find a patient man, tolerant and who would love me very much despite my willful nature. She said that I was very loud-mouthed, but that I was a good person. It was in this month when I received an unexpected phone call.

-Miss, we are from DIF. We want to know if you are still interested in adopting a minor, since the course of School for Parents will begin on April 5.

My heart was beating fast, it took me a moment to answer:

-Sure, I am still interested.

-Very well, see you then.

We said goodbye. Now, at least, I was calmer, the opportunity presented itself, well, it was somewhat probable, I had to complete the three months that the course lasted and then complete the procedures. I felt like my brain was thinking faster than normal.

I did not tell to my family what happened, I always did what I wanted, besides, I had to be sure first.

Luz is a very intelligent and beautiful woman, with a great gift of humanity. She was the general administrator of the school where I work, she was also my boss and a great friend. It was her to whom I told about it, since I would have to be absent every Friday from work in order to go to the workshop

and she would have to authorize it. She hugged me and said: “You know you can count on me, do not worry”.

Friday, April 5, 2013

I showed up very groomed. I wanted to give a good impression. The course was from two to five in the afternoon. At the door I was welcomed by a courteous social worker and led me to a large room. Then she asked me to sit wherever I was comfortable. There were already four couples. Nervousness was noted in everyone, the marriages were holding hands, I imagine that to give courage to one another.

At two o'clock they closed the door and started the introductions. From DIF, a social worker, a psychologist, a graduate in law, and one more who was the one who had direct contact with the minors who were ready for adoption.

Ms. Núñez began: “Good afternoon. You will be told what the rules are during the course. I am the one who is going to represent you in the family courts. The requirements are:

-Attend and finish the course of School for Parents. It will take place every Friday; it starts today and ends on June 29. If you have more than three absences, the course is canceled; there are no justifications. You must be on time, since the door closes at two o'clock sharp.

-The documents to be submitted at the end are:

- Filled application, which will be given to you at the end of the course.
- A biography of the applicants.
- Official identification
- Certified copies of birth certificates, as well as of marriage.
- Three letters of recommendation.
- Photos of the house (rooms, façade, patios, etc.)

- Letter of no criminal and police record from each of the applicants.
- Letter of work.
- General medical examination.
- Psychological evaluation of applicants (issued by a psychologist of DIF).
- Socio-economic study (means test).

-For the psychological evaluation and socio-economic study, a date will be given to you at the end of the course. I wish you good luck. You will not see me anymore until I summon you to review the documentation.

Ms. Solórzano, a social worker, introduced herself and retired after informing us that she would do the socio-economic study and the follow-up home visits.

Ms. Pérez, a psychologist, continued: “My colleague and I are going to work directly with you. I am going to observe you and we are going to do some exercises. At the end I will make an evaluation, but do not worry, if for any reason it is not satisfactory, you will attend a therapy until you are ready. Meanwhile, the adoption process stops”.

Lety, as she introduced herself, without title, welcomed us. “I am going to coexist with you these three months. I hope you feel confident to talk to me if you have any doubts during this period. I am responsible for visiting the shelters and interviewing the minors who are there. I can tell you that all of them want to be adopted and be part of a family. Now it is your turn to introduce yourselves, say your name, what do you do for a living and how long have you been married”.

There were eight couples. I was the first to introduce myself. “My name is Soledad, I am thirty-eight years old, I am single, I work in the administration of a school and I am here because I wish with all my heart to have a son”.

At the end of that day, I had arranged to go have a coffee with my dear Lolita. How timely. I could tell her what

happened and how uncomfortable it was that everyone watched me and asked why my husband had not accompanied me. Fortunately, in the state of Chihuahua, adoptions for single persons are a reality.

Friday, May 3, 2013

My first birthday without my mother. Every year my dad and her came to my bedroom before I went to work, and they sang *Las Mañanitas* to me, they hugged me, they gave me some little gift and I left happy. This day, my daddy could not sing to me, he felt a lump in his throat. I hugged him and tears filled our faces. After, he gave me the blessing before leaving home.

I wanted to continue crying along the way, but I convinced myself to try to be strong. “It is day to go to the workshop of School for Parents, I must not be sentimental nor sensitive.”

That day we were asked to do an activity: to write a letter to our son, imagining that we would read it to him as soon as we met him. I do not know how old he is, whether it is a boy or a girl, much less when will he come into my life. This is what I wrote:

Son, I have waited for you for a long time. I was eager to meet you. I will try to make you very happy. The first thing I want to tell you is that you are here by God’s work, it is to him to whom I asked to bring you into my life. And God, in his infinite mercy, decided to give me this beautiful gift: being your mother. I want you to understand that you will always count on me, even if you are an adult. We are going to travel to many places, I will teach you many activities so that you can determine what you like to do, such as riding a bicycle, skating, swimming. There are so many things to learn! Maybe you like playing an instrument or painting. I am going to help you develop all your skills so you can get to know another world. One in which you understand that there are many things to learn and enjoy. And I will do my best so that you

do not miss anything. You have a very big family that is waiting for you anxiously, in addition to a granddaddy who wants to get to know you and hug you. And a grandma who takes care of us from heaven. The most important thing is that I will love you forever, you will never be alone again.

Having finished our letter, the psychologist asked us to get in a circle and asked if anyone wanted to share it. I must say that mine was simple compared to those of other women who read theirs, in addition that they had a lump in their throat and some, definitely, could not read. I did not want to read because it was not necessary for other people to know what I wanted to say to my son. How curious, I wrote it as if it was addressed to a boy and, honestly, I preferred a girl, because they are more tender and, in addition, you can match from the dress, the coat, to the purse and the bow for her hair.

When I got out of there, I felt despair. I already wanted to meet that little person. How would he be?, and would his character be docile?, or perhaps he would have a strong character, like mine.

Saturday, May 18, 2013

This day, in the workshop they gave us some questions that we had to answer with the truth, since they would be taken into consideration when seeing if the child was compatible with us. At least that is what the psychologist said.

Would you accept a child with a disability? One with burns? A Tarahumara child? A dark-skinned boy? “What silly questions – I thought. God has already decided who our son is, we do not choose him. Even when it is biological, we do not know if it will have a disability or if in an accident he suffers burns. But, well, it is just an exercise that I have to do.” When we finished, we were told that some adoptive parents would tell us about their experience. A woman of about forty-two years

old entered, tall, thin and with very fine features, but very simple even in her dressing. What is for sure, she showed an enviable tranquility and happiness.

I was invited to tell them my story. I will be brief so you do not get bored. I was married and loved my husband, but we were unable to have children. That separated us little by little, until he left me. I suffered a lot because of his abandonment, I went back to live with my mom and I had to get a job. I had a lot of free time, so I was constantly depressed. My sister is a volunteer at the shelter Los Ojos de Dios, I don't know if you know it. There they receive all kinds of children, but mostly with some disability. My sister, in her desperation to help me, said to me: "Stop crying, there are many children who need support, there is a lot of work, you will not have time to be sad and you are going to help someone else. Come with me to the shelter". Since I had free afternoons, I decided to go with her. I had to feed one of the children. Their smiles are the best thing in this world, with great innocence. Their eyes are so pure that you can see their soul. I fell in love with that place, so I also signed up to volunteer. I had been two days in the shelter when I felt a gaze, I turned around and I saw my beautiful angel, she was in a wheelchair, she could not hold her head, but she had a smile that impressed me. That day, when I left, I said very sure to my sister: "She is my daughter and I am going to do whatever it takes to make sure she is with me soon". Everything else is history and it is not so important, she is already with me, thank God, and she makes me very happy. Since then, my girl has improved a lot, and my greatest happiness is arriving from work and seeing her waiting for me with that beautiful smile. Those children are angels, do not be afraid to adopt them, please, you are not doing them a favor, they are the ones who illuminate our life.

Saturday, June 1, 2013

It is the last month of the course and I have not known my classmates well enough. I have only found out that they are couples who have suffered a lot before getting here and who have already exhausted the options of having a biological child. Some have deep wounds in their hearts. The psychologist told us that it is a loss that they, as a couple, have to overcome before they give them their child. Some even say that they distanced themselves from their families and friends because the question tired them: when are you going to have children?, in addition, at children's parties they get depressed when they see other families with their children.

“Today we are going to work on the possible problems that your children may have – Lety told us –. You are going to answer a questionnaire and then I will tell you some real stories of the children who are in the shelters.”

The questions were:

If he is little when adopting him, would you tell him that he was adopted?, at what age? What are you going to do if your son wets the bed at nights?, if he eats too much and at all hours?, if you run into a relative on the street?, if he tells you that he was raped?, if he does not want to eat?, if he does not accept you as his mother/father? Mention a reason why you would return him to DIF.

At the end, some shared their responses. The psychologist told us that perhaps these questions would seem illogical or very strong, but that is the reality of many of the children who are in the shelters. “These are real problems that your children can show and you should prepare yourselves as much as you can. Because it is very difficult to be parents, but doubly complicated for a child who already has deep wounds made by someone who should have taken care of him. I am going to tell you the story of Lulu and Dulce, both girls who arrived to the shelters”, said Lety.

“A six years old minor was adopted by parents who, like you, wanted a child. Lulu, as we will name the girl, was happy

with her new parents: Juanita and Ramón. A month later Juanita showed up and told us that she needed help, since the little girl adapted to her without a problem, but when Ramon was at home or went out with them, Lulu got uncomfortable, she became irritable and she did not let Ramon come close to her. In addition, during the night they heard noises in the kitchen, and it was the girl who was eating things that she found in the refrigerator, despite the fact that during the day she ate very well.”

Juanita mentioned that it was very difficult for Ramon the fact that Lulu did not accept him, because she was already calling mom to her. Juanita was suggested to talk to the girl, but if in two months she continued with the same attitude, they would have to take her to a psychologist. About the food, it is normal, adopted children believe that they are going to be returned and they eat as much as they can. But this eating disorder should not last long. When she feels part and gets used to not lacking things, she will stop doing it. As for Ramon, he may everyday give her a small gift and give her space, he should not approach her so as not to inconvenience her. On one occasion, Juanita was preparing dinner, Lulu was helping her and she was telling her about her school. Juanita said to her:

-Do you trust me?

-Yes, mommy.

-Why do you trust me, sweetheart?

-You are a woman, mommy, you can't hurt me.

-And why don't you trust Ramón?

-Because he is a man, mommy, and he can hurt me like the others did.

-Which others, daughter?

-My other mom's husbands hurt me.

Lulu started crying and told Juanita that her mother's husband raped her when he got home, and that her mother never defended her. That she knew that all men were bad

because her mother had changed husbands several times and the same thing always happened. Juanita hugged her tightly and cried with her. She told her that not all men were bad and that Ramon did not want to hug her nor approach her because of that reason, that he loved her in a different way, and that he was there to protect her, not to hurt her. Little by little, Lulu accepted Ramon and, after two years, in the follow-up interview, by DIF staff, the girl told them that Ramon was the best dad in the world.

Sometimes you, parents, are the best psychologists, because what we did not achieve in the time that Lulu was in the shelter, her mom did it in few months. But you must be prepared. Another thing to consider is that most applicants want children from zero to three years old, and this greatly delays the adoption process. Many believe that babies do not have trauma, but I am going to tell you another real story.

Dulce is a baby girl who came to the shelter when she was eight months old. One of the dynamics with babies is that every day the nurses take them out from the nurseries and put them on a mat on the floor in order to do mobility exercises. Nevertheless, something strange was happening with Dulce. When the nurse approached her crib to take her out, the girl began to cry and turned around to get as far away as she could. When they carried her and put her on the mat, the same thing happened, she rolled over her own body, like a log, to get away from the nurse.

They called me from the shelter and told me what happened. I couldn't find an explanation. When reviewing the minor's file, I discovered the cause of her behavior: the minor's stepfather burned her body with cigarettes, reason why she was afraid of adults. Why do I tell you these stories?, because there are many Lulus and Dulces in the shelters. You are here because of the need you feel to be parents, but in reality DIF is not interested in you, but rather that the minors we have in the shelters find a stable home that loves them despite what they

have suffered with their biological family. You were asked what would be a reason why you would return the minor, because that happens frequently, and our children have already suffered the loss of their biological family to suffer now the loss of their adoptive parents. This causes them great psychological damage. Here is not a store where you come to buy a child to satisfy your need. Children need strong parents to help them with their trauma, and it happens with babies as well as with older children. In addition, your children already have a history and you must accept that, it is part of their life and it cannot be erased”, concluded Lety.

I left thinking about the difficult things that those innocent and poor creatures had lived through, about what things would have happened to that son who was waiting for me before arriving to the shelter. I thanked God for my parents, for the immense love they always had for me. I felt lucky and happy. All my life I would miss my mom, but I had only beautiful memories of her. Besides, I was no longer a girl.

Up until this stage I wanted to adopt a child who would not be over the age of five, but after Lety told us that many children in shelters no longer have the option of being adopted after the age of seven, I decided that, in my application, at the end of the course, I would write down that my son be from zero to eight years old. After all, that child, if he came, was going to be by God’s grace.

When I got home I told my dad that I had decided to adopt a boy. I thought he would give me another speech that he would need both parents, but, on the contrary, he told me that we both needed a child in our life, that he was very happy about it and he even asked me about when they would give us our child. He gave me great confidence knowing that he would accept him without problems.

Saturday, June 22, 2013

Today I am going to the course very optimistic, since it is the last day. Next week we will only come to a gathering, in order to be given the list of requirements and dates for the psychological test and socioeconomic study (means test). I can't believe it, I am about to finish the first step that separates me from my son.

The talk of this day will be given by the psychologist. She is young, about twenty-eight years old, tall, white complexion, short hair, but well groomed. I feel that she is not very sympathetic to my being single, several times she emphasized that it is needed a mother and a father to take care of the sons and daughters. Because of her age and profession, it seems to me that she has very square thoughts. In addition, she has insisted on asking me if I would adopt a dark-skinned boy or an ugly one.

"We are going to see a fragment of a movie and we are going to comment on it – she told us –. Perhaps you have already seen it, but I ask you to try to capture every moment anyway." It was the animated movie *Up!*, which I had already seen before and I liked it. Now I am going to see it from another point of view. The fragment that showed us is the beginning, when the characters know each other as children, then they get married, they have their house and begin imagining children, but they cannot have them, and despite that, they are happy until they grow old.

"Now I am going to ask you a question that you must answer individually: what am I going to do with my life if that child that I hope and long for does not arrive?"

What? – I asked myself –, what is wrong with her?, we are here to have a child. Why is she asking us that question?, is it perhaps we failed the course?, are we not ready to adopt or what is happening? I forgot about my questions and concentrated on answering.

I have plans to open a flower shop, I attend the courses offered by the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez (UACJ) of arts and crafts, I like the smell of flowers and it relaxes me. I also plan to travel, it is what I like the most, knowing places and food with different flavors. I have asked God for my son, and if he does not give him to me, it will be because it is the best thing for me, so I will continue with my life.

When finishing, she told us to position our chair so that we could make a circle.

“When you got married, it was for love, I imagine – the psychologist continued –. You were not chosen to have children; you fell in love and decided you wanted to share a life together. Already after marriage, you must have thought of having children. Therefore, if it is not possible for you to have a child, you should be happy and carry on with your life. Loving each other and having fun in things that, as a couple, you enjoy. As we saw in the movie, they loved each other and enjoyed each other until being elderly and when death did them apart. After knowing that they would not have children, they suffered, but they overcame it. I wish all of you get what you have come looking for, but do not be discouraged, the world does not end if for some reason it does not happen.”

Thus ended our last day of the course. The truth, I thought she was crazy, that if it was not through that means, I would look through another one, because I was determined to adopt a child and she would not stop me.

That day I phoned my younger sister and told her that I had just finished the course to adopt a child. She said to me: “From this day on, I will ask in my prayers for your son, so that he no longer suffers until they deliver him to you”. She knew I would be a good mother.

Sunday, June 30, 2013

Mrs. Nuñez came in: “I congratulate you for completing this course. Now I am going to give you the adoption application. Reflect very well on what you are going to write, if you want a girl or a boy and what age. Do not think about what you learned during these months, it is about what you wanted from the moment you came to ask for information. Likewise, make it clear if you do not want to adopt children Tarahumaras or with disabilities. I will also give you the sheet of paper with the requirements. From now you have three weeks to get the documents. As you submit your application, I will you the date and time for the handing over of documents; when you do it, an appointment will be scheduled for the psychological test and for the day that the social worker will carry out the socioeconomic study at your home”.

I finished filling out my application and turned it in. In it she wrote: “Exp. 001/13, your appointment for handing over of documents will be on July 20 at nine in the morning”.

I left happy. My file was number one, that was a good sign.

Sunday, January 19, 2014

It was six o'clock in the morning on Sunday, when my father passed away, in his room, in his bed and surrounded by all his sons and daughters. This seemed a nightmare. My mother's first mourning anniversary had just passed, and now the cornerstone of the family was leaving us. I hugged him very tightly and I did not want to let him go, I wanted to stay imbued with his scent; my only consolation left me.

A year after my mother's death we were in the same room at the Mausoleos funeral home, but now accompanying my father. He was not there to calm me or comfort me, he was in that cold box, with his little eyes closed as if he was asleep.

Since I was a child I was very attached to him. My mom told me that a neighbor used to make me angry because she used to tell me that he had gone with another lady and I cried inconsolably, until my mom would tell me that he had only gone to the store.

When I grew up I was a more jealous person than my mom. As soon as I saw my dad talking to another woman, I would go quickly to hug him saying that my mom was calling him. He would smile and say: "Let's go, honey". When I got home from work, I would tell him absolutely everything that had happened at work. He listened to me attentively and always guided me.

At night he would say to me: "Put that little forehead over here". I approached him, he kissed me, he made the sign of the cross on me and said to me: "Now to sleep, honey".

Of the eleven sons and daughters they had, we are only three women: the oldest, who is ten years older than me; I, the middle one, and the youngest, who is seven years younger than me. We always fought asking him which of the three did he love the most. Despite being different, he knew how to make each of us happy and how to give us our space and his personal affection.

Since I was a child, my dad was my hero, whom I admired and who could do everything and solve any problem we had as a family. With him I felt safe, what could happen if my dad was there for me? With him I could spend long hours talking, he knew how to listen carefully and advise about anything. He was all I had left in life and he had already left me.

I have many memories of my dear old man. On Sundays we used to get up late, we went to mass and, on our way out we went to eat. He was my little companion; in the afternoons when I came home from work, he was waiting for me for dinner. Even if another of my siblings was there, he would tell them: "Let's wait for my *Güerita*". I had been orphaned, alone

in this world, with no one to pray for me or give me the blessing. “This is a nightmare”, I kept telling myself at the funeral. It is not happening!, it is not happening!

When everything was over and we deposited his ashes next to my mother’s, several of my siblings offered me their house to go live with them, at least for a few days. But all I wanted was to be alone in that house which brought back so many memories. When I returned from the funeral I lay in his bed, it still had his scent. I rolled on the floor in despair, and then I knelt down hugging his bed. Nothing mattered to me anymore, nothing worse in this life could happen to me. Why work?, I would not die of hunger, I did not want to see people nor be told that they felt my pain. No one could understand me, I was going crazy!, I screamed with all my might. The tears were no longer enough to bring out my sadness. I hit myself and pulled my hair lying on the floor.

A week later I showed up at work with the intention of quitting. Luz, my boss, became very serious and told me: “I do not accept your resignation, you are going through a difficult time and that makes you take hasty decisions. Your anguish does not let you think, so I am going to make you a proposal: I am going to change your schedule, your work week will be from Monday to Wednesday, your hours from eight to four, and if you finish your activities earlier, you can leave. Also, the day you do not feel well, you do not come, you can work from home. Starting this week, those are your new working conditions”.

She told me so surely that I could not find reasons not to accept. Later I understood the great affection she had for me and that she had done it to make sure that I was well. I will never be able to repay her love and understanding in these difficult times.

Tuesday, October 21, 2014

It was five-forty-five in the afternoon when I got that call. Before answering, I looked at the caller's number and felt my blood run cold. It was Ms. Núñez, who was in charge of the legal aspects in the adoption process. I answered quickly before she hung up on me:

-Good afternoon, Miss Soledad?

-Good afternoon, it is me – I replied nervously.

-Soledad, I am phoning you because I have an adoption proposal for you. There is a minor named Victor, he is six years old, how do you see it?, are you interested?

My heart was beating a thousand times an hour, I felt such an emotion that I wanted to cry. I could not believe it, I wanted to scream with happiness. My son would already come!

-Of course I am interested – I replied happily, on the verge of releasing the crying.

-Only, before making the decision, you need to know that the minor has HIV.

I felt the world was coming down on me. My son, whom I asked God for so long, was not healthy.

-I am calling you after office hours because this call is unofficial, it does not commit you to anything. You can continue on the waiting list. I dared to make the proposal to you for two reasons: first, the minor has the age range that you wrote in your application; and second, you mentioned that you did not want children with disabilities, and his illness is not.

I could not answer, my heart felt happy, but it echoed over and over in my head: HIV, HIV. My thoughts were confusing.

-Think about it and I will see you tomorrow at eight in the morning in my office for an answer. Excuse me for putting pressure on you, but if I do not get a family for the minor, he will be transferred to a shelter in Chihuahua. Again I reiterate: do not feel obligated, if you do not accept, I will look for another minor for you.

I answered in a subdued voice that I would think about it, that I did not know if I could give him the necessary care. We said goodbye and I hung up. Why is this happening to me, God? I asked you for a son so much, but I do not want him sick; besides, I do not know anything about HIV! All I know is that it is contracted by sexual transmission or by blood transfusion.

I felt happy to know that I would meet my son, but then the word HIV returned to my brain. Why was this happening to me? I wanted my son now, I needed him, I had waited for him for a year and a half, but I did not want him sick. What if I became infected?, or someone in my family? If I accepted him, he was going to coexist with my little nephews. I would not want any harm to the children, I would not forgive myself. I could not be selfish and just think of myself. “What should I do, God?”, I kept repeating myself. Maybe I was not going to be able to take care of him. How much will the medicines cost?, will they be expensive? I do not know if alone I could handle all the expenses and, also, if I work, who will take care of him?

“God, tell me what to do, please!”. I started to pray, but I could not concentrate, so I started reading about HIV in children online. Good God!, I interrupted the reading. I imagined everything, except that my son had this terrible disease. After reading for a long time, I tossed the phone on the couch, I thought my head was going to explode.

One question did not leave me alone: how was the child infected? There were only two possibilities: because of sexual abuse or because the mother had HIV and had infected him at birth. I needed wisdom and the only one who could give it to me was God.

I decided to go to church. Every day there was mass at six in the afternoon. I would only be in time for the blessing, but I hoped to concentrate a little more and talk to my father God. It was beginning to get dark, the afternoon was beautiful, the weather was perfect, the autumn air moved my hair as I

walked, it seemed that He was accompanying me and stroking me.

I walked through the park, the screams and laughter of the children playing brought me out of my thoughts. I stopped and watched them closely. I asked myself: how will Victor be?, what would he like to play? Could he do the same activities as other children? I saw the mothers sitting on benches and, from time to time, yelling at their children to be careful. How blessed they have been!, and perhaps they do not even know. I continued on my way. It seemed strange to me that there were no cars outside. When I approached the door, it was closed, there was a sign saying that, since Monday, the mass would be at eight in the morning. I returned home with that anguish that oppressed my heart. Is it a sign that the church be closed?

I phoned Lolita; she would help me. She was smart and would not let the emotion win over her. She was very busy working in the maquila, constantly interrupting our talk, since she had to answer the factory radio. Despite that, she listened to me patiently. Then she commented that she would support me in whatever I did, but that in that decision only God could help me, that I should pray and He would give me an answer. That night I could not sleep, I asked myself: “Why reject someone who is a victim of this disease?, why not give him the opportunity?, who was I, to be deciding in his life?”. He was no less important to God, on the contrary.

THE DECISION

The next morning I got up early, although the appointment with Ms. Nuñez was until eight. I took a bath, put on formal clothes and had a coffee. I was on time. As I walked to the

office, I felt a chill run through my body, it was not cold, but I was freezing.

We greeted each other and Ms. Nuñez said to me: “There is not much more to add, in fact I told you the most important thing on the phone, feel free to say no, without feeling guilty, and I will continue with your adoption process until I find another minor similar to you”.

-I have some questions to ask, and I need you to please be honest with me: how was the child infected?

-The mother has the virus and she infected the child at birth.

-Why did you make the proposal to me precisely?

-Do you remember two weeks ago I ran into you? You were with a nun, so I had you very much in mind. Also, if for you, single, it is difficult to make a decision, imagine for a couple, it is more complicated, especially because of the little time I am giving you.

-Why are you in such a hurry for the decision to be made?

-Because if I do not get some family to accept him, they will transfer him to a shelter in Chihuahua. The minor, due to his illness, is in a home farm, but there are only children from zero to five years old. He is not attending school. I want to find him a family because he has already lived a lot in temporary houses.

-What is the child’s state of health at this moment?

-He is fine, he takes his medications and he is stable. Again, I insist, do not feel pressured, I do not want you to adopt him out of pity, because it will not work. I have to give an answer today at one in the afternoon.

I said goodbye and said to her that I would be back at twelve o’clock. When I left the offices of DIF I had already made the decision: I would adopt Victor.

I went to see a religious friend. She was very close to the family and she knew me very well. I just wanted to talk about it

with her, the decision was taken. When I arrived, they told me that she was in Mexico City taking an economics course, but if it was urgent for me, to phone her. I did it. I told her the situation as quickly as I could. After listening to me very carefully, she said to me:

-I do not know why God is asking you. You can accept or not, any decision you take is difficult, so ask God to enlighten you. He will not leave you alone if you accept this responsibility, but first of all you must ask him if that is his will.

-I already made a decision, sister, and the answer is yes, I accept it.

-Then do not worry. God is going to accompany you in that mission that he is assigning to you.

She paused and continued:

-I think you made the right choice, but as friend I need you to understand certain things. I do not see a problem in the child having HIV. He is not to blame and deserves the same opportunities as others; for some reason God is sending him to you. You must be aware that God lends that child to you for his caring and that, due to his illness, you may have him for a few days, months or years, and that at the moment he decides to take him, you must be willing to give him back to him. What worries me is that you already had two losses, and I do not know if you can bear another. You have to be very strong and brave because maybe both of you will suffer discrimination from the people you coexist with, maybe from your own family, and you will have to defend him. I am going to pray for you and your son, God bless you! – she finished saying.

After talking to her, I felt calmer and happier that I had taken that decision.

I had not yet left the convent when the phone rang. It was Lolita.

-How are you, Soledad?, I invite you for breakfast.

As soon as I saw her, I started crying. It was already too much stress that I had had and I had not slept well. Very

calmly, she said to me: “Unburden yourself, that does you good”. We had breakfast and started reading about HIV.

At twelve o’clock sharp I arrived at the offices again, but this time totally determined and with great strength.

Ms. Nuñez was surprised to hear my answer, because she thought that, since it took me a while to answer, the most probable thing was that I would not accept.

-Are you sure? – Ms. Nuñez questioned –. Do not feel forced.

-I am sure – I replied.

She explained to me right away that, due to the circumstances, the process would be a little different, that she would speak to the people from the state DIF to let them know that the child would have a home. We would start the adoption process and, that, as soon as she knew something, she would call me.

I felt like I had been beaten up. I asked my friend to accompany me to church. More than on other occasions, I needed God. When leaving, I went to my house and Lolita to work.

THE FIRST TIME I SAW HIM

A week passed without any news from DIF. I was about to present myself at the office, when Ms. Nuñez gave me an

appointment for the following day. Ms. Nuñez told me that I would see two psychologists, that one was going to put pressure on me, and I should be as honest as possible. She also explained to me that there was an error, that the boy was seven years old, not six as she had told me, although he was within the range that I had set, but that, if I had a problem with that, that I should tell her. We said goodbye and I went out to sit again in the waiting room.

Not even five minutes passed when they named me. The psychologists introduced themselves very serious.

-Tell me why you want to adopt a child with HIV – one said to me.

-You, tell me, why wouldn't I adopt him? – I replied –. Is it that he is less important than others because of his illness?, or is it that he does not deserve to have the opportunity to be part of a family?

-I am not saying that, but understand, my job is to make sure that the child is accepted and loved. That is why it is important to know what led you to take that decision. If you change your mind right now, there is no problem, no record left in your file and you continue on the waiting list.

-I never regret the decisions I make – I said to her very seriously –, I asked God for that child, you are only an instrument that He used. I do not know the reason why He chose me to be the mother of that child that is so special. Because my son is special – I emphasized – and I do not mean about his illness.

There were no more questions. She explained me the process that we would follow.

-You will have the opportunity to visit him three times in the shelter. On the fourth visit you can take him for a walk, take advantage of that outing to see what size of clothes he is and what size of shoes, because the following week they will hand him over to you in temporary custody, as long as the minor feels attached to you. We are going to give you the dates

and time of the visit, for now we have to fill out the necessary papers.

-Can you show me a photo of my son Victor?

-Sure, I will put it on the screen for a moment, because it is not allowed. Another thing, after the first visit, you can no longer change your mind about adopting him, as it would be directly affecting him and we would cancel your file. Are you aware of that? – she asked. I nodded, I wanted her to turn the computer monitor around to see my son. When she did, finally, there he was. He was dark-skinned, with bulging eyes and a bald head. He was riding a tricycle, his clothes looked old, and his face and hands were dirty.

-It was the day he entered the shelter – clarified the psychologist.

She turned around the screen back into place. I was stunned, it was all confusion. My son was not pretty, but he made me feel tenderness; there was no shine in his eyes and his smile was forced. I left from there troubled, but already with the image of Victor engraved in my memory. From that moment on, he became part of my thoughts.

As it was already a fact that they would soon give him to me, I visited my older sister and told her that I was going to adopt a child. She answered me immediately: “Do not do that!, if you want a child, have it! I am not going to love a child who does not have my blood and who I do not even know where it came from”. I calmly replied: “I did not ask you for permission, I am notifying you, and you are going to love him as much as I love your children”.

Wednesday, November 5, 2014

Today is my first visit to Victor. I do not know what to wear, formal or casual? I do not know what clothes to choose, but it

is a special occasion and that is how I should dress. It is the first time that my son is going to see me and perhaps he will have that memory forever. I will see him face to face, I am so nervous! They told me that I could bring him a present. A toy?, clothes?, food? In the end I bought him a pillow that, when folding it, it turned into a stuffed sheep, a Kinder Surprise chocolate and a Clown lollipop, that never fails with children, I thought.

The appointment was at ten in the morning and we would be together for an hour. I took a deep breath and rang the bell at the shelter. A guard opened me up and asked for my identification card to register me. A nurse that was waiting for me moved me into a small room. I took a seat. “In a moment we will bring Victor”, he told me.

In the center was a round children’s table with four chairs. The room had mirrors, so I assumed that on the other side we would be observed by the DIF’s psychologist and the psychologist who was caring for the boy in the shelter.

I heard the door opening. I saw my boy come in, he looked at me and smiled as he walked towards me. He was very short for his age, his complexion was yellow and he had many spots on his face, in addition to a huge scratch on his forehead. He was wearing a blue sweater and, underneath, a dress shirt. He was very combed, in the front he had his hair up, he was no longer hairless as in the photo. His head looked bigger than his body due to his extreme thinness. Being in front of me, he said hello to me and said to me:

-Are you going to take me to my mom?

-I do not understand you – I felt a dagger in my heart.

-That if you are going to take me to my mom, because I miss her very much.

I had listened well, he expected to see his mom, he did not know that I was going to adopt him. I smiled and said to him:

-I come to visit you. Look, I brought you a gift. Close your eyes – I put the bag on his little hands, he opened his eyes and took out the pillow –. I hope you like it.

He hugged it.

-Yes, I like it. Its name is going to be Jessica, because it is a girl.

He reached into the bag again without letting go of his sheep.

-A clown lollipop! – he yelled gladly –, and a Surprise Kinder! – I could not believe how something so simple made my son happy.

He unwrapped his lollipop and enjoyed it. He was very curious and asked me questions. What do you like to do? What is your favorite food? Have you seen the sea? When he finished his sweets, we assembled the car that was in the chocolate and then we started playing “game of tag” in that small space. He laughed enjoying it because I could not reach him, at the end he told me: “Do not feel bad, you can’t reach me because you are wearing heels”. “You are absolutely right”, I replied.

The visit time finished. A nurse came for the boy and behind came the DIF psychologist. “That is all for now, I will contact you to notify you about the next visit”. We said goodbye and I left there, I got to know that little person who would live with me! Already in the car, I felt disoriented. Why did he think I would take him to his mother? Aren’t psychologists supposed to prepare them to accept adoption? Didn’t he know? And why did he miss his mom? I did not understand it, maybe she was a good mother and due to some mistake they had taken him away from her, I did not want a child in exchange for the suffering of another mother.

AMBULATORY CENTERS OF PREVENTION AND ATTENTION IN AIDS.

Johana is a young woman, talented, intelligent and eager to change the world, she had just finished her career in Social Work. She is my niece, although my love for her is that of a mother. I told her that in about a month they would give me the child to me and that I felt lost regarding his illness. She indicated to me that there were two specialized places in the city, that I should go directly there to clarify the doubts I had.

I entered to the institution for the first time. There were no people in the waiting room. A young lady came up to me and asked me if I needed help.

-I do not know if you can help me – I said –, I am going to adopt a boy with HIV and I feel lost. I have read on the internet, but there it does not say what special care I should have.

She smiled, she took my arm, and ushered me into an office.

-I am a psychologist here, maybe I know your son, what is his name?

-Victor – I replied.

-I don't believe it!, I do know him. They bring him to his medical appointment every month. He will charm you – she smiled excitedly –. I can't believe it!, I am glad, it is tremendous. Do not worry, tell me, what doubts do you have?

-I do not know. Can any GP check him up?, is there any specialty?, what special care does he need?, where do I get the medicine?

And so, thousands of questions popped into my head.

-He is a child like any other and needs the same care, you just have to keep an eye on his medications, give them to him at the right time, a good diet, hygiene and lots of love. You can continue attending Victor here, the medical service and the medicine are free. Any pediatrician can check him up, there is no specialty. I recommend that you apply for the *Seguro Popular*, which is what is going to be asked for when you have changed his surnames; meanwhile, he has the mother's policy and it is current. I do not recommend taking him to IMSS, there it is more likely to suffer from discrimination. If for some reason he needs to be hospitalized, it would be at the Children's Hospital, which has very good doctors. Really, ma'am, what happiness that you are going to take care of that beautiful boy.

We talked for a while longer and I said goodbye more calmed. Without knowing it, I already knew to which hospital I would have to take him.

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

They called me on Monday the 10th to notify me that the visit would not be in the shelter, that I could take him out for three hours. He was already waiting for me. As soon as he saw me, he hugged me and said to me: “Let’s go, I am ready”. It was cold, he was wearing a red jacket that was a little too big for him, some old sneakers, gray pants, a navy blue sweater, and underneath, a shirt between pink and lilac. I took him by the hand and we went out of the shelter. He turned to see me and looking into my eyes he asked me:

-Do you adopt me?

-Of course I do – I answered a little surprised by the question.

As Ms. Nuñez had told me, one of the things why the adoption was urgent, was because the shelter did not have a school. That is why I had already spoken to the principal of the primary where I worked to tell her that I would adopt a seven-year-old minor who was not attending school. She said that, as soon as I had the opportunity, to take him in order to do an exam and thus justify the first two-month period, so that he would not miss another school year. At the age of seven, he already should be in second grade.

He did not ask where we were going, he watched everything through the window and, now and then, he told me things and plunged back into what was happening around him. We arrived to school, he was intimidated and was hiding behind me. We went straight to the first grade A classroom. The children were heading toward the dining room. The

teacher approached and said to him, come in, in a moment I will take you with your mommy.

I went to the dining room to wait for him. About twenty minutes later the professor entered with him by the hand. It was lunchtime, so all my mates were there. When he got to the table where I was, I told them: "Let me introduce you to my son!". Everyone said hello to him kindly, although they looked at me surprised. He told me:

-The food smells great, can we eat?

We all laughed. We said goodbye to my mates and left school.

-Do they give lunch in this school daily?

-Yes – I replied, squeezing his small hand –, and soon you will be here. Do you want to go eat pizza?

-Can we eat pizza?

-Sure we can, let's go.

We were leaving school when Lolita called me:

-How's it going?, I can't wait to meet him.

-Do I pick you up?, we are going to eat pizza.

-Okay – Lolita replied.

She was five minutes from the school where I worked, so I arrived quickly. I asked my son:

-Victor, does it bother you if someone joins us?

-No – he replied.

Lolita got into the car and said hello to him. Smiling, he said:

-How pretty my aunt is! – and we let out a laugh.

-Yes, I am your aunt and I really wanted to meet you – said Lolita.

We got to the pizzas. We decided to eat from the buffet. Actually, he was a stranger, I did not know what he liked.

Although we had been told in the course that adopted children eat a lot, Victor surprised me. He got up for more food over and over again. It was an exaggeration what he ate. He could not even play on the machines because he spent all

time eating. Before we left, Lolita took a photo of us with her cell phone. Our first photo together! When we returned to the shelter, he was greeted by the psychologist and a nurse. They asked me:

-Has the boy already eaten?

Yes, actually, I hope he doesn't get sick.

The nurse confirmed to him that she kept a plate for him anyway. Victor told her: "Yes, I want it! Can you give it to me?" I was stunned, was he still going to eat more? I hoped he wouldn't suffer from indigestion. He ran inside the shelter. He did not turn to say goodbye to me.

Friday, November 21, 2014

We had our visit scheduled on November 19, however, Ms. Nunez contacted me to tell me that the delivery would take place on November 21 at nine in the morning. That I should make arrangements to welcome him and to buy him clothes. Everything was happening very fast! I was not ready, I could not buy him clothes, he was very small for his age and I did not know which size would fit him best. I would focus on preparing his bedroom.

That weekend I was helped in painting his room and put some toys. My older sister, despite her comments when I told her that I would already have him at home, was excited. She bought him clothes and asked me that, as soon as they give him to me, to take him so she could meet him.

At nine o'clock in the morning I arrived at the offices of DIF, where the delivery would take place. Ms. Nuñez greeted me and asked me to wait a few minutes while they arrived with him, since they had gone to pick him up at the shelter.

I was very nervous. I did not know how to be a mother, until then I understood the enormous responsibility that I had acquired. That piece of life was going to depend entirely on

me. At ten o'clock, Ms. Nuñez left her office and made me go in: "We are going to do the paperwork while they arrive with the minor". She gave me a letter to read. She started with the reading, when they entered with Victor. He came to me and said: "I am ready mommy, let's go home!". I was stunned, I had always dreamed that someone would tell me mom, and now that a child was doing it, it did not have much echo, on the contrary, it confused me a little. "We are going to carry out some procedures and then we leave", I said to him.

I read the letter in which the Procurator ship for the Defense of the Minor of Chihuahua State was placing the minor in my temporary custody. "For now it is temporary. According to the minor's attachment to you, the permanent will be processed, in which you then will be able to change the surnames", Ms. Nuñez explained.

I was given a medical report indicating that the minor had HIV, that he was under treatment and that he was coming out of pneumonia. It was also explained that he had language problems. It also indicated the date of appointments with the pulmonologist and pediatrician. To the pulmonologist we had to go to the Children's Hospital, and with the pediatrician to the Ambulatory Center for Prevention and Care of AIDS and ITS (CAPASITS).

The nurse who brought Victor gave me a bag of the medications and told me at what time I should give them to him. "These are because of his illness, and these are what the pulmonologist gave him", she said. Good God!, I am going to give all that to this poor little creature, I thought. "It is important that you do not miss any medical appointment", Ms. Nuñez had told me. "Due to his illness, if he does not go to the appointments, it is taken as an omission of care and we are notified from the hospital". I did not understand if she told me in a threatening tone, or to inform me about the consequences. The boy seemed desperate to get out of there, he was pulling on my arm and saying: "Let's go home now".

They explained to me that I could not get him out of the city without first telling them, and that every two months, for a year, DIF would summon us. Then, every six months for two years in order to follow up on the adoption. We left after half past twelve. We were both starving. I, because I was nervous, had only had a coffee for breakfast.

I headed to a buffet restaurant. As soon as we entered, he wanted everything, the same thing happened to us as in the pizza, he ate, ate and ate. The only way I got him to stop was by telling him that we would still have dinner that day, and that dinner was also very tasty. When we were leaving we took our second photo. His gaze on that photo is sad, lost, full of fear and confused. He was wearing a sky blue shirt, a sky-blue striped navy sweater, blue dress pants, and black shoes. The shoes were too big for him, they were size twenty-three and he was size twenty, he looked like he was wearing skis. On the contrary, the clothes were too small and worn-out.

We went to a shopping mall to buy shoes for him so he could take off those horrible ones that hurt his feet and that he had to drag while walking. Everything was strange, he was not choosing, he said to me: “Whatever you want is fine”, unlike my nephews, who were very demanding even with the brands. We bought some pairs of shoes and changes of clothes for at least a week. As soon as we left the store, we went to change his clothes and shoes in the toilets.

My sister was already calling me to take him to her house. It was five in the afternoon. She had already told my siblings and they were waiting for us at her house with pizzas. Before arriving to my sister’s house, I told him that we were going to visit his aunt, because he was eager to meet her new nephew, and that, in turn, he would meet his uncles and his cousins.

My brother-in-law opened the door for us. Victor, as if he knew him, greeted him saying: “Hello, uncle”. My brother-in-law stayed still, stunned, watching how he entered his house so naturally. My sister came out to welcome him. He approached

to her and said: “Hi, Auntie, I am Victor, your new nephew”. She hugged him, kissed him on the cheek, and then she took him by the hand. “Come in, the whole family is waiting for you”. In the same way, he said hello to everyone in a natural way.

We were with them for a while, although it is hard to believe, he ate again. The whole family welcomed him very well, thank God. Victor, although nervous, looked happy. That day my nephew gave him a stuffed dog, which he named Toño, and a soccer ball.

We finally got to the house. “Home, sweet home”, he said to me, with a big smile. We got all the bags out from the car, he was eager to go in.

-What a big house!, is it mine? – he asked me.

-Of course, Victor, it is your house.

He walked slowly observing everything. At the end we went to his bedroom.

-Here is your bedroom.

He dropped himself onto the bed.

-Is it just for me? – he asked me.

-Everything in here is yours.

-Also those toys? And the skateboard?

-Yes, all.

We were both exhausted. I showed him his bathroom.

-You are going to take a shower, do you need help?

-I am grown-up now, mommy, at the shelter I used to take a shower by myself.

-Well, I am going to be here. If you need something, you scream to me.

After putting him to bed and tucking him in, I went to my bedroom. I was tired and started thinking about the details of what happened. Also, I was worried, I did not know if Victor could sleep in a strange place. Finally exhaustion overcame me and I fell asleep. That first night was uneasy, I woke up constantly and I peeked into his bedroom to see if he was okay.

Fortunately, the next day was Saturday and we were able to get up later.

RESPECT

During the first year, coexistence was very difficult. Every day he was sent to the school office. He first bit down on the computer teacher and then he stood under a table, crying and kicking uncontrollably. He fell asleep the rest of the classes, until I went to pick him up at the exit. The next day he did not obey the Physical Education teacher, he did not follow the instructions, and when the teacher took him by the arm to take him to the Office, he threw himself on the ground again, throwing a tantrum. When the teacher notified about the loud screams he was throwing out and that were scaring his classmates, the school's principal tried to control him, but the boy kicked her. He did not understand anything that had to do with authority.

The homework teacher was very strict. On one occasion when he wanted to throw a tantrum, she did not allow him. As he is very intelligent, he told her that he was adopted, that way she had certain consideration on him and she left him alone. Until he broke the plastic box where she carried her material.

I have been very responsible since I was a child, therefore I did not understand him. How could he do that every day? Any wrong thing he made had consequences, but nothing seemed to work. Sometimes he would get hit and he would not tell me what had happened to him. On one occasion the blow was quite hard, but, as much as I insisted, he did not say a word.

Once, after arriving from school, I told him that what he had done would have consequences, that he was going to give me what he had in his piggy bank in order to buy another box for the homework teacher, because he, on purpose, had broken hers. He started screaming with all his might that it was not fair. I was trying to be calm, but it was very difficult. He threw himself on the floor and started kicking the refrigerator. I tried to lift him up, but he cried and screamed more. He was getting me out of control. I would have liked to hit him or lift him by the hair to make him cry for something real. I took as deep a breath as I could and went up to my bedroom. I told him that he could not go up until he had written three pages of: “I must respect adults”.

I turned on the television so as not to listen to him; he was screaming more. I turned up all the volume and I cried in frustration. After about half an hour he got tired. As I no longer heard him cry, I went downstairs, supposedly in order to check that he had made the writing exercise. In reality, I just wanted to know if he was okay. He hadn't done anything, and so I told him he could not go to sleep until he finished. I felt I was unfair, but I did not know how to make him understand that our actions in life have consequences. I went back up and told him that in ten minutes I would go down, the writing exercise should be ready.

When I came down, he still had not finished. His eyes were swollen from crying so much. He said to me in a soft voice:

-Mommy, I am tired, can I go to sleep?

-No – I replied annoyed –, until you are done.

How could I be so wicked with that little piece who already looked tired? But he had to learn.

YOU ARE NOT MY MOTHER!

Another day of complaints. He had hurt a girl with a pencil and he pulled down another girl's pants. What is wrong with him, my God?, why does he do that? We got home and I started talking to him. When he saw that I was upset, he started crying and cornered himself in the corner of the room. He looked like a scared little animal, I felt tenderness for him, I wanted to hug him. I was about to approach him, when he yelled at me:

-You will give me consequences!

-I do not give them to you, you earn them with your behaviour.

-I do not love you! – he yelled at me over and over.

I was sitting on an armchair.

-That's too bad, I do love you. And that is why I must correct you.

-Do not tell me what to do!, you are not my mother!

I felt my heart break into pieces. That helpless little boy hated me, I thought. I did not show him that he had hurt me. I approached him, took him by the face with my hands, forcing him to watch me, and said to him:

-I am your mother and do not ever tell me otherwise. I did not give birth to you, but God brought you to me and that is enough. It is the first and last time I tolerate you making that comment. Was I clear, right?

I released his tearful face. He only shook his head as a sign that he understood. Until now, he has never said it again.

CHRISTMAS POSADA

Thank God December holidays were coming. I got him ready for his Christmas posada. It was the last day of school. Special food had been prepared for them, gifts, piñatas and sweets. He did not understand what was going to happen, but he was going there happy. That day I did not have to work, so I went to drop him off and would pick him up at noon, when the event was over.

I got there an hour early. I did not know what the reason was, but I did not feel calm. Since I worked at school, I entered without a problem. The reunion was in the gym. The children were excited because Santa was there. Everything there was a Christmas atmosphere and happiness. Victor, where was he? I could not see him anywhere.

I asked a coordinator and he said he was at the Principal's office. The school secretary was the only one in the office, everyone else were enjoying the party. Victor was at a desk, drawing. When he saw me, he got up and said: "Let's go already!". I signed a sheet in which it was recorded that he had been given to me.

We got in the car. "What happened?, why weren't you at the party?, and your sweets?". He let go of crying and kicked the car seat. He told me to return him to the shelter, that everyone loved him there, that no one at school liked him, neither the children nor the adults nor I liked him. That he was happier at the shelter. I felt very sad. As a mother I was a failure, I could not make that little person happy. I sat in front of him to speak to him:

-I do love you very much – tears rolled down my cheeks – . I can't take you to the shelter because the first day we were together I promised you that whatever happened, I would never leave you, remember?

He hugged me and we both cried for a while. We wiped away the tears.

-Mommy, I am hungry!

-Are we going to eat some delicious gorditas? – I asked.
-Yes – he smiled, wiping away his tears.

CLASSROOM CLASSMATES

First, second and part of third grade, were very difficult for him. He had no friends, he said that the children did not like him. “I do not blame them – I said to him –, at the meetings the teachers say that you bother them”. He liked to offend them by telling them their flaws: big belly, he said to a chubby girl; four eyes, to a child with eye-glasses; disgusting pig, to one who ate the snot. And so to each one.

On one occasion, he told a teacher that he was adopted and that he had been in a shelter, but he spoke about it in front of all his classmates. From then on, a little classmate named Carol, kept bothering him. She would tell him that I was not his mother, that I was his stepmother, that he did not deserve to be in that school, and a series of other nonsense, with the intention of hurting and embarrassing him.

There were days when he said he hated that pesky girl. I told him to ignore her, that although she was so small, she had a very black heart. Since he has been with me, I have insisted that he must respect girls and that he must not hit them, even if they are annoying, that it is best to get away from them before having problems. But with Carol it did not work, he told me she wanted to hit him. One day she threw the color box at him and he broke it. The teacher put her to help him hand out notebooks, and she used to throw it at my child, that is why the notebook was broken. Another time, Carol kicked him, and

when Victor ran behind her to hit her, the teacher punished him without recess.

This was the last thing I tolerated. I went to speak very annoyed with the teacher and I told him that if he did not control that girl, I would speak directly to the principal. That my son was not just any brat, and that if one day he hit the girl, I did not want him to call me or impose consequences on him because he was not controlling them in the classroom. That it was his responsibility to maintain a healthy and respectful environment within the classroom. The strangest thing is that, despite the problems he had with that girl, he liked her.

In a conversation with him, I told him that it was not a good idea to talk about personal things, because not all people are good and can take advantage of that to hurt us. That being adopted was not a bad thing, nor was it a secret, but that was only of interest to us.

Marco was another of his classmates. He was very violent. His parents were divorcing and he showed his anger by hitting the others. Everyone in the room was afraid of him, even Victor. Many of the blows with which he sometimes arrived were made by Marco. Nevertheless, he never said that to me.

On one occasion we were arriving to school and the children were lining up on the esplanade. Victor said goodbye and ran to get in line. I was on my way to the offices when I heard him cry. Marco had him on the ground and was kicking him. A teacher came and took him off him. I saw no more, I went to the office full of courage and indignation.

The principal spoke to me later and told me that the child had been suspended for a few days, that they did not know the reason why he had done that, to forgive him because he had problems at home, etc. The truth is that I was not listening to her, her apologies and punishments, to me, as a mother, were not enough. That day, upon arriving to the office, I hugged him very tight. He started crying and asked

me: “Are you going to give me consequences?”. “Not this time”, I replied.

When we got home, I said to him: “I do not want you to fight or bother your classmates, you must respect them, but they have no right to hit you nor offend you either. If I see Marco hit you again and you do not stop him, I am going to beat you up. You are a child, one day you will have to defend a family and you cannot let anyone mistreat you. So, if he comes close to hitting you, you are going to clench your fist and you are going to hit him. You are going to tell him not to mess with you again”.

Since Victor was a battered child, he was used to being beaten, he did not even put his hands in. Oddly enough, it was as if he even needed it or enjoyed it. Obviously he did not do what I asked him to do.

When he went into third grade, I used my influences with the school secretary and said to her: “Please, do not leave Victor in the same classroom as Marco and Carol”. Third grade was already much calmer. He was happy to have friends and did not let anyone beat him; I had to register him in a self-defense course for a few months, because I did not want my son to be violent, but neither did I want him to let himself being beaten up.

I have told him that, as a child of God, he is just as important as others. We have worked a lot on his self-esteem, since, as a victim of violence, he lacked it. Now he is a more self-assured child. Every day I tell him that he is a loved and important child and he does not need to misbehave to get my attention.

Now, when he has to come at recess for something, he comes with classmates and says to them: “She is my mom”. He already has many friends and is happier.

CAN YOU BUY ME A DRESS?

We went out to a shopping mall to buy him formal clothing. In a few days my sister would celebrate her twenty-five years of marriage and the celebration would take place where she got married for the first time, in Irapuato, Guanajuato. We, the family, agreed on renting a bus and going to the wedding and spending Christmas there, although perhaps we wanted to escape from the city. It was the first Christmas without my parents, the previous two we had spent them one mourning and the other one in the hospital.

We went to the store Cimaco, since Victor and Michelle would be the page-boys in the church. I was entertained looking for a suit for him and by the side were the clothes for ladies. When I turned to see if he liked the suit, I saw him looking at a very striking pink evening dress, full of sequins and with many glitters. I went towards him and took him by the hand.

-Don't get apart from me, Victor – I said to him.

-Mommy, can you buy me this dress?”.

I could not believe it. What was wrong with my boy?, did he want a dress?, is it that he liked dressing as a girl?, was he gay?, or what the hell was going on?

-No – I told him very seriously – you are a boy, choose something on this side.

He got angry; when he gets angry he makes to me a few trumpets and does not turn to see me, he turns his back on me. I ignored him. I continued my search for the suit, but in reality my thoughts were far from the store. “Had he been raped? It was most likely, that is why he has that behavior”, I thought. God, help me!, I do not know what to do!

I did not buy clothes and we went home. When we finished eating, his anger was gone. I talked to him:

-Victor, do you know that whatever happens I will never leave you?

-I asked him.

He nodded with his little head.

-You can tell me anything, I am your mother and I will understand you. Why did you want that dress? Do you like dresses?

-You are going to get mad if I tell you, mommy – he said embarrassed and looking to the ground.

-No, you can tell me anything.

-Yes, I like them. When I lived with my aunt, her daughter used to put me on her dresses, I liked it. Once in the shelter I also put on a princess dress.

-What did the people at the shelter tell you?

-Not to wear it again because it was for girls. I also like to makeup myself. Dennis, my classmate, put some lipstick on my lips, do you remember that I came out with lipstick? I told you that she put it on me by force, but I let her.

-And what did the children in your classroom do when they saw you with lipstick?

-They laughed at me a lot.

-How did you feel about that?

-Sad.

-Look, son, you are not to blame for what happened before, but God made you as boy, and very handsome, so you have to dress and behave like one. Your cousin should not have dressed you in her clothes. And you do not look well with makeup, not even Dennis, because she is young and it is not time for her to use make up. Now tell me, did someone hurt you before arriving to the shelter or in the shelter?, that is, did someone touch any of your private parts?

No, he replied. Do not ask me anymore, mommy, I am embarrassed.

-Well, I only want you to know that if someone did it, it was not right. It is not correct and that person can go to jail, nobody has the right to touch your private parts.

Today I know that he had no identity. When they dressed him up as a girl at his aunt's house, it was to laugh at him for a while. He did it to feel loved at that moment, about they making fun of him, he assumed it as affection because they never paid attention to him.

OUR FIRST CHRISTMAS

We spent it in a place where we did not belong. That night I remembered Christmas times that I had spent with my parents. Each one was special. I remember that when someone wanted to go on a trip with friends, my dad said that Christmas should be among family, while traveling could be done at any time of the year. The preparations started months in advance, selecting what we were going to have for dinner. Who would buy the things to make the tamales?, who would be in charge of helping to put the Nativity?, and so we planned every detail.

Christmas, for us, began with mass at nine o'clock at night. They all came to church very handsome accompanied by their children. The priest, at the end of mass, blessed each family, one by one. When we passed, we laughed because the hallway filled up, even when we gathered as much as we could.

At home we started with the posada, the baby Jesus was lulled, then we sang Christmas carols while we lit colored candles and Bengal lights. Later, to break the piñata! and, finally, we got together for dinner. My father made a prayer

thanking God for the blessings received and we especially asked for my siblings who for some reason were not there with us. We made a toast at twelve o'clock sharp, and after shouting: Merry Christmas!, we all hugged.

Grandparents always had a gift for children, even if it was simple. Seeing their faces when opening them made us happy.

What beautiful Christmas times! And now we are here, in this city in which we do not belong and where nobody cares about us. I cried bitterly until I fell asleep. It was the third saddest Christmas of my life. I missed my parents. Even though it sometimes seemed like I had gotten over it, at times I got depressed again. Sometimes I forgot that I was already a mother and that I had to make a little piece happy, regardless of how I felt.

We returned to *Juaritos* to spend the New Year. Because we had not been there, Santa did not come to any family house, but we told the children that the Three Wise Men would come. On January 5, Victor left his shoe very shined, accompanied by a glass of milk and cookies.

The next morning he found three gifts and a letter that had been left for him. I was about to read it to him, but, to my surprise, he began to read it with great difficulty. I could not believe it, he had been a month or so in school, and he was already reading! I was happy and hugged him, I told him that he was a very intelligent boy and that we were going to read every day until he learned well.

The sister of my friend Lolita sent me a message, it was an animated video. I showed it to him, he was excited, he could not believe it. Santa knew his name, he had the book of his life that the elves had helped him search for, and had sent him a message. How did Santa know my phone number? I think that was the best gift he received.

THE FAMILY

Lolita, my friend, has a small family. She is the oldest of three siblings, followed by Veronica, and the youngest, José. Veronica has a sixteen-year-old son named Israel; and Tita, who is the head of the family.

When Victor came into my life, they adopted him as if he was truly part of their family. Tita is his grandmother, Lolita and Veronica are his aunts, and Jose and Israel are his cousins. Each of them is an important part of Victor's life.

He accuses me of everything with Lolita, he feels protected, and he likes to talk to her about what is happening to him. Despite the fact that Lolita is not very affectionate, she is the one to whom he follows the most. He likes Veronica to spoil him, she is very loving, she likes to have him hugged when they are watching television and she is always attentive to what he wants or what he likes. Jose is an intelligent young man, he is an example to Victor, he talks with him about planets and dinosaurs, which are subjects that interest him. Israel is a young man with skills for art, specifically painting; Victor likes to see his paintings and says that one day he will also paint like that. Besides, with him he practices the few words he knows in English, he plays chess or Tourist, since he is very patient with him.

Tita is the most special in his life. She pampers him, gives him advice, prays for him, cooks delicious meals for him which Victor enjoys very much and, if it was for her, she would want to have him at her house all the time. When she gets sick, Victor suffers a lot, because a great fondness has truly happened between them. In each important event, my siblings and Lolita's family must be there to make him feel complete and happy.

I have understood that it does not matter who has your same blood, the important thing is who makes you happy and who is with you at all times, that is your true family. Victor is happy to have two families, very different, but he enjoys each one. At Christmas we have dinner with Lolita's family, we give each other gifts and we leave and head rushing to my siblings, who would already be calling us on the phone for not having arrived. Now my son had two families who love him, and I know they will be with him at all times. Victor is such a special boy that he immediately earned the love of everyone.

January 2015

We had the first follow-up appointment on DIF. The parking lot was two blocks from the offices. We were walking, when he asked me:

-Is that a hotel?

It was a hotel very close to downtown, dirty and old, it did not look pleasant and much less hygienic, besides, from what I could see, it was not suitable for families, since they charged per hour.

-Have you been to a hotel, Victor?

-Yes – he replied, lowering his gaze.

-With whom did you go?

-With my mom Ana, my real mother.

-Did you go on vacations?

-No, mommy, she used to go there to meet men to do...you know what! She would lock me in the bathroom, I lay down on the floor and fell asleep. My mom was a liar, because when we got home she used to tell me not to say anything to Ramon.

Ramon was the man his mother lived with.

-I never want to go to a hotel anymore, mommy.

-Victor, I often stayed in a hotel when I was traveling with my parents and our house was far away. So, since we needed a place to sleep and bathe to continue the fun, we stayed in a hotel. When we travel together we are going to stay in a hotel and you are going to like it, they have a television, and you are going to have your bed and I, mine.

-Mommy, would you take me to the sea? I want to get to know the sea.

-Yes, Victor, we will soon travel to the beach to see the sea.

My head was not ready for so much information. How could his mother do that to him? I imagined him asleep on the cold bathroom floor of a horrendous hotel.

We arrived at the offices of DIF. Our conversation was over.

After Victor entered with the psychologist and she asked him a series of questions about how he was doing in his new home, it was my turn to go in.

I went directly to the psychologist and asked her: "Is there a note or information in the child's file that indicates whether he was a victim of sexual abuse?". She replied that she did not know, in addition that, from the beginning of the process they had clarified that they would not give us any information. I could not believe it! I needed to know what had happened to my son in order to help him, but because of his policies they could not tell me. It does not seem fair to me that you adopt a child and cannot know anything about his history;

and even more when they are older, since, in any case, one finds out, but it is difficult to know what is part of their imagination and what really happened.

The psychologist asked me what made me suppose that. I did not answer her, I told her that I wanted to be sure that he had not been hurt. If she did not give me information, neither would I.

I left annoyed from there. I would have liked that, at the following appointments, my car to be magical and appear in front of the offices of DIF without having to go through that hotel that brought back so bad memories to my son.

HIS BIRTHDAY NUMBER EIGHT

My sister called me so that we could go to her house after going out from school. She had bought a cake for Victor and wanted to give him a gift. Plus, they were going to take him for a ride somewhere fun for him. His Tita also called me, they wanted to celebrate and buy him a cake, Veronica had already ordered it.

Now what was I going to do? To whom I tell to change the celebration to be another day would be upset. Neither of them had told me their intentions. I was his mom and I also had plans. I called his Tita, I apologized to her and asked her if we could pass it on for the next day. She did not like it, but accepted.

We arrived to my sister's house. The cake was already on the table and the dining room full of balloons. My sister, her husband and my two nephews, Johana and Martin, both young, we sang *Las Mañanitas* to him. He blew on the candle on the cake making a wish. They gave him the gifts: a toy, clothes and shoes. He took off his uniform and wore for the first time his clothes. We all went to play at Moyland, an amusement park in a shopping mall. He was happy, until then I had not seen him so happy. That way was the first day of his birthday celebrations.

The next day was Saturday. Tita came to the house with her whole family and two of my siblings with theirs. We cut the cake, they gave him the gifts and then we started dancing. Again his face was lit with happiness.

On Sunday it was my turn to celebrate him, so we went for breakfast to a restaurant and then to an amusement park. Three days my boy celebrated his birthday. God compensated him for all that there was no celebration.

HATE

It was Sunday, we were having breakfast calmly at home. Suddenly his eyes became full of tears.

-What's the matter, Victor?

-I miss my mom, my real mom.

I took his hand and, in the softest voice I could, I said to him:

-I understand you, I am a grown up and I also miss my mom a lot.

-Don't you get mad?

-Of course not, she is your mom, and a mother is the most important thing in our life.

He put his thin little hands to his face and began to cry, it was a cry of sadness. It seemed that his pain was so much that he would drown. I told him it was okay to cry, that tears cleanse our soul.

-What is it that you miss the most? – I asked him.

-I am worried about her, I do not know where she is, what if the police took her away?, or what if Ramon hits her? – he sobbed even more –. And I cannot do anything!

I felt so sorry that at his young age he had so much concern.

-You can do something – I said, smiling –, do you know that God listens to children's prayers because they are his favorites? If you ask Him for your mom, He will take care of her wherever she is. Right now that I take you to mass, you can stay and pray, do you want me to go with you?

He turned around surprised with his face full of tears:

-Do you want to pray for my mom?

-If you don't want to, no.

-Yes, I want to, mommy.

Already calmer, he started talking to me.

-One day, my mom had not arrived from work, the sun was up and she had not returned. Ramon was angry and was walking around the room saying many rude things. After a while my mom came in. She was beaten, her clothes were covered in blood, and she was disheveled. She told Ramon that, in the bathroom of the bar where she worked, she had been beaten by two women because they thought she was going out with their men. Ramon got even angrier. He said to me: "Lock yourself in the bathroom, Victor". I ran to hug my mom, but he pulled me by the arm, took off his belt and locked me up. He hit my mom. I only heard the screams and wanted to open the door, but I couldn't. My mom was crying while he was beating her – he covered his face again with his little hands –. I could not defend her, mommy!, I let him hit her! I should have gone running to call the police, but I did not know that they could help us – his face changed completely –: I hate him, mommy!, I hate Ramon!

SCARS

My son has many scars, in his heart and on his small body. Fortunately, with his growth the visible ones are getting

smaller, and I have faith that the ones in his heart will also disappear over time. On his head he has several small scars, under his right eye and on his chin as well.

It called my attention that they were almost the same measure, every time I asked him: “What happened to you?”, he said that he did not remember.

It was my mom’s second mourning anniversary and we went to mass. Inside Church is the niche where we deposited her ashes. Every time I go, I remember every moment of her departure. At the end of mass we all approached the niche and my siblings talked about their experiences with her. I stood up as if they had given me a picket and I told them: “I am leaving, sorry, I am not ready for these talks yet”.

We came out of Church and a few meters ahead I stopped, tears were not letting me see. It was beginning to get dark and I was crying inconsolably, I felt his little hands hugging me, his little eyes were also full of tears. I drew strength, I wiped away my tears, and said: “Don’t you worry, I am fine!”. In those moments I forgot that I had that little piece, that I had stopped being a daughter and I was now a mother. I had to be fine for him. We arrived home, it was cold. I asked him:

-Shall we drink a hot chocolate with bread?

He turned to see me smiling.

-Of course, mommy – I touched his little face to caress him, my fingers touched that scar under his eye:

-Don’t you remember what happened to you? – I asked.

-My mom hit me, do you want me to tell you about it?

I do not know if he did it to make me forget my sadness or because he needed to unburden himself.

-As you want, I do not want to pressure you, if you want to talk to me, I listen to you.

-I was happy. Ramon went out, he was going to collect some money. My mom told him to bring her a bottle of ice cream. I imagined a happy afternoon, only with my mom:

“Surely we are going to spend it playing Nintendo”. My mom bought it, but Ramon never let us use it. My mom turned it on, I approached, smiling, and asked her for a control to play, but she turned around angrily and said to me: “I am going to play by myself, now that Ramon is not around, I want to be calm, so get lost from my sight”. I felt sad, but I stayed by her side to see how she played. Then I asked her: “Which flavor did you order the ice cream? She turned around and said: “It is not of your business! Who told you that I am going to give you?”, and she kept playing entertained. I cried because I felt sad, she always had fun with Ramon and she never played with me. I got angry, I threw myself to the ground, I threw a tantrum and shouted at her: “I want to play and I want ice cream!”. You already know how I become when I get angry, mommy.

I nodded, wow did I know!

-My mother got up, took one of her shoes and started hitting me with the heel, a very pointy one because they were the ones she wore to go to work. When she got tired of hitting me, I felt hot near my eye and on my head, it was blood. She only said to me: “Have you already lost the desire to throw a tantrum?” I did not say more to her, I stood in a corner crying. She went back to playing on the Nintendo. When Ramon arrived, he saw me and asked her: “Why did you hit him?”. She replied: “He is a spoiled brat, I can’t stand him anymore”. They both laughed and kept playing. That was what happened to me, that is why I have that scar, it was with the heel of my mom’s shoe.

-It is time to sleep, we will continue our talk later.

After he brushed his teeth, I went to make sure he was well covered. I got close to him to kiss him and he said:

-I love you, mommy, a little, but I love you – I felt a lump in my throat. I replied to him:

-Well, I love you very much.

What a difficult situation my little piece had been through! I cannot even imagine how it feels to see that your

own mother doesn't care about you. She had not healed him after seeing his wounds. How insensitive she was!, and he worried about her, she did not deserve his prayers.

I had beautiful memories of my mother. I started crying again until I fell asleep.

HOW HE GOT TO THE SHELTER

On a cold Thursday of winter, Lolita had invited us to have a coffee with bread at Cafe Unico. We ran in, because the cold penetrated to the bones. The place was small, but cozy; Lolita was already there.

-Ready for a hot chocolate? – she asked Victor.

-You know, auntie, I am too glutton – he answered.

The three of us laughed, I began to see him more confident and easy going. We were ordering, when people started going up to the top of the café.

-What is going on? – we asked the waiter.

-Today a German film is being screened, if you want to go upstairs, I will take your order there.

When we left the café, at the end of the film, Victor told me:

-That movie made me sad, it reminded me of the last day I saw my mom.

-Do you want us to talk about it? – I asked him.

-The last night I was with my mom, she was getting pretty to go to work. She liked to wear tight pants and red high heels. She is so pretty... Ramon yelled at her that she would be late for work. They left without saying goodbye to me. Every night they kept me locked up, I turned on all the lights because I was scared, then I would watch TV or play on the Nintendo until I fell asleep.

“When they arrived in the morning, my mom told me to put my clothes and toys in a plastic bag. We left the room and took a taxi. We arrived to a house that I did not know. She told the taxi driver to wait for her. She knocked at the door and a friend came out, she left me there. She did not say goodbye to me, she just went back to the taxi and left.

My mom’s friend let me into her house. It smelled horrible!, disgusting!, it smelled like feet! She lived there with her husband, she gave me a book and some colors to draw. I was on an armchair, I did not lower my feet because there were many big cockroaches, I was afraid that they would climb on me.

Then she told me to cover my eyes with the book. I pretended to have them covered, but I saw what they were doing, they were injecting themselves blood, first the woman and then the man. I did not know what happened next, because I fell asleep.

The next day I went out to the street with the woman. Since my mom left me, I had not eaten and I was very hungry. We saw a patrol, the woman was scared when she saw the policemen approaching us. She told them that I was not her

son, that she had not hit me, that my mother had entrusted me with her, but that she did not want any problems, but that they should take me because she could not take care of me. It was because I still had my shirt stained with blood, I did not have a lot of clothes and I hardly every bathed.

The policemen asked me if I was hungry. I said yes. They bought me some juice and some cookies and they put us inside the patrol. The woman was also hungry, she took away from me almost all my cookies, she only gave me two. They took me to the offices where I was delivered to you. From there, two gentlemen took me to the shelter, they told me that I would only be a few days while they found my mother. That is why, when I saw you the first time, I thought they had already found my mom.”

How had a movie brought up his memories?, painful memories of the day his mother left him, I thought.

FINAL ADOPTION

I was summoned to the attorney’s office for the Defense of the Minor and the Family of the state DIF. Ms. Nuñez told me that I had to convince the Council to grant me the final adoption, this implied that I could start the trial to change his last names and get him the laser visa. We had missed two family trips because Victor did not have a visa. We both urgently needed it. Also, he no longer wanted to have his old surnames.

The appointment was at eleven in the morning. I asked for permission to not take him to school and take the opportunity to get to know another city. I must say that my son had no idea about time nor space. We departed the bus station

at five in the morning. Lolita accompanied us to stay with the boy while I was at the appointment. For him everything was new, the bus had a screen in front of the seat where you could play or watch movies. He was fascinated, playing, he did not want us to arrive. It took five hours to get to the Central of Chihuahua. From there we took a taxi to the offices and we arrived at half past ten in the morning. There were several people in the waiting room. I saw a husband and wife coming out hugging each other and the woman was crying; I was getting very nervous. What was going on inside in order to get out like that? They are not going to take my son away from me, do not even think about it. He is already used to being with me and we have had a hard time getting here.

At one in the afternoon they made me go into a large room with an oval table. There were between ten and twelve people. They asked me to sit at the head of the table so that everyone could observe me. They introduced themselves, they held important positions within DIF, or so it seemed to me, because of the designations they had. Finally, a licentiate who led the meeting told me:

-We took the task of reviewing your file. Tell us, why do you want to adopt Victor?

-Because I am his mother, the one who God destined to take care of him, guide him, love him, and protect him. My son, since he was in his mother's womb, he had this already written in the book of his life. I will not allow anything to separate us, he has already suffered a lot to get to this moment, he needs to start living like all children, study, have fun, feel loved and be happy.

-How are you doing with his illness? – another licentiate asked me.

-Thank God, Victor is very well, the pulmonologist has already discharged him, and we are working so that the HIV replicas decrease until they are undetectable – I replied very serious and confident.

-How do you know that the minor is happy with you? – a young lady asked me.

-You can ask the boy. He is in the waiting room.

They all looked at each other. I must say that my legs were shaking, but, according to me, I was not showing it.

-We would very much like to meet him – a licentiate said –, can you call him to meet him in person?

I went for Victor, who was already fed up and very hungry.

-They are going to ask you some questions. Do not be nervous, it is just a procedure, I will be there with you.

We went in. He was hiding behind me.

-Say hi, Victor, these people want to meet you.

He sat next to me and they asked him:

-Who is she?

-My mom.

-Do you love her very much?

-Yes, she takes care of me, she feeds me, she takes me to the doctor and to the restaurant. I really like going to the restaurant; with her I am happy.

-Would you like to stay and live with her, or would you rather return to the shelter?

He stood up scared and hugged me.

-Do not let them take me!

-Do not be scared, they will never separate us. Just answer, please.

-She is my mommy and I want to always be with her.

-We are glad you love her and that you feel happy – they said to him.

The licentiate who led the board got up and said to me:

-When I see cases like yours, I feel happy and fulfilled with my work. I think there are no more questions, it was clear to all of us. Does anyone want to ask something else?

Nobody answered.

-Can I give you two a hug?

-Of course you can – I replied.

Everyone got up and hugged us congratulating us. Then, the licentiate who was leading told me:

-From our side it is everything. In Juarez they will contact you to start the final adoption trial. Once more, I congratulate you. Both of you are special, and you are right: God had already chosen you to be a mother and son.

When we left the room, Victor asked me:

-Why did we come with these people?

-It is only a procedure, remember? I will be able to change your surnames. Let's go eat because our guts are already making a lot of noise.

Lolita was in the waiting room, very nervous. As soon as she saw us, she wanted to know:

-What happened?

-They are going to give me my mom's surnames! I am going to have a visa to go to El Paso! – Victor replied to her.

-We have to celebrate! – Lolita said.

We went to Chihuahua downtown, we ate, we went for a walk and we returned. The next day I had to work and Victor had to go to school.

HIV (INFORMATION FROM INFOSIDA)

Particularly, HIV attacks and destroys CD4 lymphocytes, which are a type of cells that are part of the immune system and are responsible for the manufacture of antibodies to fight infections caused by these external agents. When it finds a CD4, the virus attaches to the cell's membrane and fuses its capsid with the cell's membrane, so that it can now introduce its genetic material so this cell takes care of reproducing (multiply) it. Once replication has started, it goes into the blood and spreads throughout the body, infecting other cells that they will also use to multiply their genetic material.

When this multiplication occurs, there are copies of the virus circulating through the blood (the number of copies of the virus is what is known as *viral load*) and the amount of CD4 cells in the body is reduced, which ends up causing an immune deficiency.

HIV drugs prevent the virus from reproducing (replicate), reducing the viral load. By having less concentration of HIV in the body, the immune system has a better chance to recover and, although the virus is not completely eliminated from the body, the immune system is strong enough to fight infections and certain types of cancer related to HIV.

As a mother, what I know is that I must keep my boy with a viral load below forty, which means that the virus is controlled and almost undetectable. In December 2014 we had the first appointment. They told me that the previous viral load was 39,000 copies, this meant that the virus was highly replicated and that it could catch a virus or bacteria quickly, because his defenses were very low.

In March 2015 it had dropped considerably to 2,400 replicates of viral load, in August 2015 it dropped to 900; in December 2015 it dropped to 400 replicates and, by then, he had gained weight and had grown a bit more. We were happy to know that the virus would not be able to defeat us. Nevertheless, all of 2017, instead of continuing to drop, it remained at 900 replicates.

The pediatrician told me that I was not giving him the medicine as I should, that maybe I was forgetting or I was missing the right time. She said it to me in a rude and very annoying way. I answered that I was the most interested about my son being well, that an alarm is always set up in my cell phone that does not stop sounding at the time that the medicine must be given, in addition to the fact that the boy is always with me, he does not stay in nursery nor with anyone else. Anyway, the doctor did not believe me and she sent us to the hospital psychologist, because in her opinion I was being negligent.

The psychologist is the first person I met in that institution, before the boy was given to me. She was the one who attended me and who gave me guidance in this regard. She made the boy come in and then me. She told me that she did not see any omission of care on my part, that perhaps some medication was not working for him or, at least, not the expected one. She made an appointment for me with the director of the hospital, since she could not help me anymore.

The director explained to me that there was a test that was very expensive, but that she was going to do everything

possible to get approval and to have it done to him. It is called genotype and, from what she explained to me, it determines exactly which drug the virus became resistant to. She got the approval and they did it on September 5. The results would be ready up to six weeks later.

On October 27, 2017 we went to the appointment. The results were already on the record and, indeed, there are two drugs to which the virus had already become immune. Now we just have to wait for the change of medicine and the next analysis to see if it works well. I have faith that soon it will be so and my boy will be even better.

It brought me great relief knowing that my son is going to take the correct medication that will actually keep the virus under control. Although he is not yet controlled, his physical condition is good. When he gets the flu, he has to be taken to the doctor immediately. Victor is not used to having someone being worried about him. When I take him to the doctor, he thanks me. He does not understand that the cuddling, when one is sick, are done by any mother. He thinks that I am doing something extraordinary only because at night I rub him *Vick VapoRub* and I give him his medicine.

LIMITS

In one occasion he was angry in his bedroom, he was screaming and crying as if he was being beaten up. I was outside the room, listening to him. I was afraid he could hurt himself. Then, I heard him saying: “It is not fair. I do not want to be here, I want my mom!”. I felt like I had been hit with a blow that made my legs bent. I sat down on the floor and started crying silently.

When I heard that he was calmer, I went to my room and asked God to give me a sign that I was doing the right thing. Victor was angry because that weekend he would not go out as a result of having hurt a schoolmate with a pencil. I opened the Bible, the page was Proverbs 13:24 which says: “The one who stops punishments, hates its son; and the one who loves him, corrects him early on”. I took a deep breath, “I have to be strong and correct him right now”, I thought.

As an adoptive mother you feel bad about putting punishments and rules, it is the most difficult thing, since they do not even know them and do not understand about limits. When I give to Victor “consequences”, I feel like an evil and despicable being because he has already suffered a lot, and I wish with all my heart that he be happy. But every time he commits a fault, I apply it to him. We get into conflict at that time, but since I carry out what I tell him, it has worked out for me. He does not repeat the same thing twice. This has given him tremendous growth as a person in little time.

When the storm passes, I tell him that there are always consequences for our actions, and that part of the responsibility is to assume them. If I go through with the car when the red

light is on at a stoplight, what happens? The consequences may be that I get hurt or that I hurt other people and go to jail, only for not respecting the traffic lights. There are limits that are for our safety and that of others. Victor is very intelligent and I know that he understands it, although at the time he brings out that strong character which he has.

THE UNION OF A MOTHER WITH HER SON

Victor lived with his mom for a few years and, still, he loves her with all his heart. She neglected him, mistreated him, exposed him to many dangers; however, he only thinks about when he will see her when he is a grown up and go look for her.

A few days ago he was acting very strange, he was annoyed by anything, he grumbled or felt sentimental. I told my sister that I did not see him well, his attitude was not the same as always. He is very joyful and I did not know what was happening to him. It was Wednesday, he had been like that all week and he entered the office reluctantly and annoyed. He sat down on the chair.

-Is everything okay?, how was your day? – I asked him.

-Fine, thank God.

On the computer I was listening to a song.

-Give me a few minutes, I am going to send an email and we leave – I told him.

Since he was not talking as it is usual for him, I looked up to see him. His hands were on his face and he was crying. I gave him his space for a moment, then I held out my arms, he approached to me and I hugged him tight.

-What happened? – I asked.

-That song reminded me of my mom. I miss her very much.

I hugged him for a while.

-When you are grown up and you go look for her, she will be happy to see you. You can invite her to lunch and she will be proud of you, of that little man in whom you will become.

We were in the office until he calmed down a bit.

On Friday we had an appointment in CAPASITS. When the nurse finished weighing him, she approached and said in my ear:

-The boy's mom showed up around here. Apparently, she will be coming for consultation, I cannot give you more information. Talk to the social worker.

-Indeed – the social worker told me –, the biological mother was registered into a rehabilitation center and she was brought from there. She has to process the Popular Insurance; before finishing the rehabilitation process, we, as an institution, cannot deny her the service. But don't worry, it's very likely she will not come. Either way, we will be on alert so that she does not come across with you two. The boy is doing very well and I think it would be catastrophic for him to see her right now. It would not bring him any benefit, on the contrary.

The following Sunday I was preparing breakfast when he came downstairs and said to me:

-Mommy, I dreamed about my mom Ana, sitting on a chair, that she was in a place to be cured. My aunt Lolita took me, I saw her and I ran to hug her very tight.

-That's good!, and how do you feel?

-Happy! – he answered.

I was impressed by the bond that exists between a mother and her child despite the distances. It was impossible that he would have heard me speak to the social worker. And days before, he was very uneasy and sentimental. From that day on, he remained being the same as always, optimistic and happy.

WHAT DO I EXPECT FROM MY SON?

I believe that sons and daughters, biological or adoptive, we are ungrateful to our parents. I do not expect anything from

him when he grows up, except that he be a good person; that he be a responsible and happy man. That is all I want. I cannot force him to love me, much less making him forget his mother nor foment any resentment in him. On the contrary, I have had to stop being selfish and learn that my love for him be enough for me. And tell him that his mom gave him a chance by giving him up for adoption, and that when he grows up, he can look for her. He, with his big smile, says to me: “I am only going to visit her and then I will come back to you”. Maybe it will be like that, maybe not. Either way, there is a stage when we, sons and daughters, abandon our parents to make our own life.

If he decides to go with her, I cannot stop him. I only want him to know that my heart will always receive him with that great love that I have for him.

One day he told me: “When I grow up and look for my mom, you are going to go with me so that she can meet you and thank you because you took care of me all the time”. I smile and think: “I don’t need her to thank me, only that she welcomes you as you expect and that she does not hurt you again”.

TO BE A FOSTER MOTHER

Normally us, women, decide when to become pregnant or, simply, children arrive due to carelessness. Society does not ask you to attend a course of School for Parents every Friday for three months, nor to justify financial solvency, much less to present witnesses that you are a person with morals, in addition to a series of requirements.

It does not matter if when you are about to be a mother you are twelve, sixteen, eighteen or thirty years old, but, to a foster mother, who has had to overcome the fact of not being a biological mother, who has undergone one or several painful fertility treatments, who has had to carry bad comments from acquaintances and family, who has problems with her partner and who should overcome the guilt she feels if she is the one with the medical problem, she yet must still justify to society that she deserves to be a mother. Ironies of life!

I always wanted to be a mother. Even though I did not know exactly what it meant, I wanted it. Sometimes I did not understand my mom. My older sister used to say to me: "When you become a mother, then you will understand!". Now that I am, I understand that one sees life from another perspective.

It is weird, but since I am a mother I have noticed changes in me: I have skills for crafts, cooking and other things I was never good at, plus a sixth sense that tells me when something is not right, even if I am at a distance. My selfishness has diminished a lot and an immense love has sprouted for that little being who calls me mom. I believe that these changes are given by God as a gift to strengthen you, because it is not easy to be a mother; it implies loving that little person with all the tenderness that I can give as a being.

It does not matter if he loves me or not, the love I feel for him is enough, but I must be honest: the first day I saw him I did not feel that, nor the first or second year. During the year and a half that the waiting lasted, I read a lot about adoption, and they said that it was complicated, but that the affection felt for sons and daughters was worth it. It did not happen so quickly to me and it is very difficult to bear, care for and tolerate someone if it is not for love.

HAPPINESS

Little by little, my son is filling his little head with pleasant memories: his Christmases, the gifts he receives from his uncles and his dear Tita. His birthdays and the fact that we spent celebrating it for several days. He has already that special sparkle in his look; when he tells me about what happened during the day, I observe him carefully. Sometimes I am not listening to him, I am just watching him; he is the little man of my dreams, he makes me happy with his presence, with his chat, with his laughter. I see him with affection, with that immense love of a mother which I never thought I would have. He is someone who I admire for his enthusiasm despite the difficult things he went through; he is a positive boy, he has the ease to adapt to the circumstances.

He is an example for me. Getting out from so much evil, so much filth and putting everything on his side to change and

improve, he is definitely a resilient child. In addition, he transmits with his joy, with his desire to live. He is a very handsome and vain boy, as well as romantic. I know that soon I will start with the problems of adolescence. My younger sister a few days ago spoke to me:

-I am going to ask God for you – she said to me.

-Please, ask Him to give me patience – I replied quickly.

We laughed, then she added:

-How your needs have changed! Before you used to tell me to ask God to give you a lot of money and now you want patience...

Today I thank God for every morning that I see him that he is well, that is enough for me to feel immensely blessed.

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

Today is our anniversary. Victor turns three years being with me and we always celebrate, since for both of us it is a very significant date. Until a few months ago I began to love him as a mother; now indeed my heart hurts when something happens to him. I can say that my son is a blessing in my life. I enjoy his laugh, his chat, because he talks like a parakeet, and I can see through his eyes.

He knows that he has a family that loves him and, most importantly, that his mommy will never leave him nor return him to the shelter no matter what. He begins to be more self-confident, he now decides his tastes in terms of clothing, food, music and activities.

Mi rey (my king), as I affectionately call him, is joyful, he likes music, singing and dancing a lot, he is independent in everything. He is very intelligent, has an explosive character and is stubborn, just like me. He is afraid of heights and bugs, whatever they are. He is a very noble little person despite his

past experiences. He is the son God intended for me; if I had given birth to him, he would not be so similar in character and so compatible with me.

I am amazed at the physical change and of habits he has had and it is all thanks to his effort, because he wants to be better every day. He had no language problems, rather no one took the time to correct him so that he would pronounce the words correctly and that was corrected in the first months. At school, his grades are not excellent, but they are good, eight or higher.

When we go out of school we put music in the car while we go to the house and he says to me: “It is time to sing, mommy!”, he has a surprising vitality. I am proud and I know that we still have many adventures to live. I want to see him married, with children and fulfilled in a job, but, above all, I want him to be happy.

Regarding his illness, he looks like a normal kid, he weighs and measures what he should. He never gets tired, he runs all day at school and, in the afternoon, he still wants to go out to the park or for a walk. Every month we go to his check up and to be given his medicine; he will begin to understand what kind of disease he has. I tell him that he must be a responsible person with others.

Has it been easy? The answer is no, on the contrary, it has been very difficult for both of us to adapt, but what father or mother can, even when their child is biological, to say that it is easy to raise and educate them? All I learned in the course was nothing by listening to their narrations of what happened. At first I hated his mother, I did not understand how she could have caused him so much damage. I do not understand, how could not she see how special he is? How can she live without him? After three years of knowing him I love him and I enjoy him very much. She does not know what a great blessing she lost.

Before, he inspired me tenderness, but he was someone I did not know, I did not know what he liked or irritated him, what hurt him, what made him happy or what made him feel sad. Every day I thank God for allowing me to be the mother of such a special person, I know I do not deserve this blessing, but He, in his infinite mercy, listened to my prayers and did not give me just anyone, he gave me the best. My son was like a little bird, small, hurt and without strength, he was fluttering with willingness, but in those conditions he was unable to lift the flight. Fortunately, little by little his wounds are healing, his wings are strengthened, he lifts them and moves them with great enthusiasm. He already feels freedom, he will fly soon and I hope he goes a long way.

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