

Estafania shared her testimony at St. Joseph Church in October 2017. This is her story.

I was born on Jan. 12, 1998 in Tequisquiapan, Queretaro, Mx. My parents are from Tecozautla, Hidalgo, and that is where I lived for a little over a year.

In May of 1999, my parents made the decision to cross the border in search for better opportunities and a better life for me. The story of our crossing is pretty new to me - I had never heard the full story until recently. Plus I was only a year and a half when I crossed the US border, so I will try to be as accurate as I can be.

We left at around 5pm and traveled throughout the day to Agua Prieta, which is located in Sonora, a state right on the border of the Mexico and Arizona. When we arrived to Agua Prieta, we stayed in a house where many others were staying; they were getting ready to cross the border as well. The next morning, 20 of us made our way out to the desert. We were given directions and were told that we would be walking for 4 hours, then more. We began our journey through the desert, 4 hours turned into 6, and we continued walking into the night. My mom ended up carrying me some of the way, but eventually gave up and didn't want to continue the journey anymore. My dad did not let her give up and started carrying me and my mom. I was the only kid in the group and everyone took turns carrying me through the desert. Morning came and we finally arrived to our destination. We had walked for about 12 hours straight. We then waited/hid until the time that the vans were supposed to pick us up. One van came and took half of the group. The other van never showed up. We waited and waited, throughout the day and throughout the night. The night was cold and the only way we could stay warm was by bundling up like penguins. The morning came and still no van. We were lacking water and food. We made the decision to turn ourselves in. Border patrol got us and sent us back to Agua Prieta. Dad was really frustrated and talked to someone at the house we stayed at. That same day in the afternoon, another guy took us, it was less walking and we got the "line" in about 30 minutes. Despite being exhausted we all still took the journey. Once we crossed the border, we waited and hid until we saw the car that came to pick us up. The car took us to the house of the guy that my dad had hired and from there we made our way to York, PA. There begins my life in the United States. When we arrived to York, PA we stayed at my aunt's house for several years until we got our own place.

At the age of 4, I started going to a school called Logos Academy. I knew some English, but with the help of my teachers and being put in an ESL program, I was able to thrive in the English language. Not to brag, but I wasn't in the ESL for long and I knew of other kids who were born in the US who stayed in the program much longer than I.

I had a pretty great childhood - Soccer Sundays, trips to Disney, and all those fun things you do with families, but that all ended at the age of 7. My parents separated and my mom, my recently born sister, and I moved into my aunt's house. It was one of the saddest days of my life. I remember vividly packing my things and leaving, but that day has helped me mold me into the person I am today. I helped raise my sister and became fairly independent and responsible. My mom is my hero because, despite of her status, she was able to keep us moving forward. She learned how to drive and did a 30- 40 min commute to work every day at 4am to provide for me and my sister. We never needed anything – we always had food in our bellies, a roof over our heads, clothes, and a paid education. I truly hope one day to be as courageous and as strong as her.

Years passed by and my sister traveled to Mexico for the 1st time. I was in 6th grade at the time and I remember asking my mom how come I wasn't able to go to Mexico with my sister. She said that it was a complicated situation, that I didn't have papers, and that if I went I wouldn't be able to come back. I was upset, because I don't remember Mexico at all nor do I remember my grandparents. I still didn't fully understand what "not having papers" meant. It didn't really hit me what "not having papers" meant until I was in 9th grade. In history, we were studying American government. My history teacher, Mrs. Murray, had proposed to sign us up to go visit the White House. I remember that being the coolest opportunity ever, but when I got the permission slip to sign up, it had asked for a Social Security number or passport number. I had neither. I asked my mom if there was anything else I can do about it, and with great grief she told me no. So, I talked to Mrs. Murray after class one day and explained my situation. I believe that she is the first person outside of my family that I told that I did not have papers. I was nervous and embarrassed for I had never told anyone about my status, but she seemed trustworthy. I had never ever dared to open my mouth about it – I feared judgment, hate, and for exposing myself and my parents to deportation.

Months later, my class got approved to go to the White House and I didn't go. I called in sick that day from school and that same day I thought about what other opportunities I would be missing out on due to my status – driver's license, buying a car, getting a job, traveling, and most importantly, going to college. I knew at that time that I wanted to go to college to pursue a career in the medical field and give back to my community, but most importantly for my parents. I was in disbelief that all I have ever dreamed of would not be possible. By the end of that school year, DACA was approved. DACA stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and is a program instilled by the Obama administration to give dreamers between the ages of 15-30yo the chance to obtain work authorization, drivers license, and a SSN, while being safe from deportation for 2 years plus renewals. I remember going home and turning on the TV and my mom telling me what was going on. We both watched Obama sign the executive bill. It was unbelievable. With DACA, I would now be able to fulfill my dream of going to college. I was so happy that finally something was being doing done for us Dreamers and I couldn't wait to turn 15 years old.

Once I turned 15, Mrs. Murray helped me to apply for DACA. It was a lot of paperwork, proof of residency since my entrance to the US and affidavits, and proof that I never left the US, and that I was enrolled in school. Once everything was gathered, we turned my application in and a few months later I was sent for biometrics for a background check and to get my fingerprints in the system. In October 2013, I received a big envelope in the mail and in it had my first-ever EAD card! It was one of the happiest days of my life. My mom and I cried tears of joy, that finally I was able to pursue a better life and be safe from deportation. My mom said that as long as you're good, you have some sort of security; it does not matter what happens to me.

During my senior year of high school, I got my driver's permit, my first job, and applied for colleges. I got many acceptance letters. The spring semester of my senior year, I received my financial packets and estimates of what I was going to pay per year. None came back less than \$15,000. I couldn't afford it. It was kind of sad because I had close to perfect GPA – 3.9 and was going to graduate as Valedictorian from my class. My grades qualified for the top scholarships for every school, but I could not receive them because of my status. I applied to Harrisburg Area Community College weeks before graduation. This was the best decision of my life and I am still currently enrolled.

I work 30-40 hours a week to pay for college, buy a car, and pay my bills/necessities. Ever since I started working, I have not had to ask my parents for money. Everything I own is due to my hard work.

People think that we steal jobs, but I'm pretty sure I got all the jobs I've ever gotten the same way anyone else does. I've applied and interviewed for every job I've had. Employers can definitely not hire me, but they do. So how am I stealing jobs? How are we stealing jobs? We got them fair and square.

People think that we live off of the system, but we don't. We actually contribute to the American system more than you imagine. We pay taxes, but do not qualify for Welfare, Medicaid, or Social Security and get close to nothing back when filing taxes. So how are we a harm to America? We are all just trying to pursue the American dream, just like any of you.

This is my home and this is all I know. We will continue to fight. Our parents – my parents – didn't leave everything they had back home and didn't sacrifice their security for me to do nothing. Day by day, my parents and I live in fear of deportation. My parents are the reason why I am here and have been able to succeed in everything I've done.

I do have to say, I'm so grateful for all the support I have received throughout the years and the past few months. This has shown that in Christ's kingdom, there is no differentiation; we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. The teaching of loving and serving one another has definitely been held true in my situation. I hope that through my story, I have been able to spread awareness for us Dreamers and that my story is one of the hundreds of thousands of stories that are out there. Many may be similar to mine – some lighter, some heavier.

Now ask yourself this: how far would you go in order to give your family, especially your kids, a better life?