

A Journey of Hope and Family

By Briana Michelle Garcia-Chazaro

Most people define a journey by the miles traveled; I define it by the challenges overcome. My own path of facing challenges and seeking new experiences began when I was just a child. Throughout my journey, I learned that even when life gets rough, you should never give up.

I didn't have much when I was a child—not a house where I could feel safe or a family that was there when I needed them. It was just my big sister and me, but we were separated. We couldn't see each other. I couldn't even catch a glimpse of her face.

Everything that a normal childhood is supposed to look like took a completely different turn. My birth mother had my sister and me, but when I was just one year old, she decided to give up her role as our mother and took us to an orphanage. I don't remember how that night felt, but I remember seeing a woman carrying me away and separating me from my sister. I blinked, and the doors were closed.

I was left with nothing—not a mom and not even my sister.

I don't remember much of what happened because I was so young, but as I grew older, more memories of that place began to return. The building was orange, like the actual fruit, and it had two sections. One part was for older children, ages five to eighteen, and the other was for babies and children up to five years old.

I was in the building for the younger children. There were babies crying, kids getting angry at each other, and workers taking care of the children—or at least trying to. The workers knew me because, even when I was only three years old, I helped take care of the babies. I fed them, changed their clothes, and played with them. I took on the role of a mother when their real mothers couldn't be there.

The rooms were large, with many beds next to each other. At night, when the lights were turned off, children cried because there wasn't a mother to read them a book or give them a goodnight kiss. They simply cried themselves to sleep.

When I turned five years old, they moved me to the building for the older children, where I was finally able to see my sister again. She was seven years old. I don't know what journey she went through while being by herself, but she still had a brave face.

When I moved into the building, she showed me where she slept and introduced me to the group of friends she spent time with every day. One thing we always did was pray together that one day we would be the lucky children chosen to be adopted and have a real family—one that would take care of us and make us feel like we were worth something.

Little did we know that God had heard all of our prayers and would make them come true.

One day, a worker grabbed my sister and me by the hand and took us to a part of the building I had never seen before. It was a red room with a white door, and there were toys scattered on the floor. A man and a woman were standing there.

I was afraid to look at them. Not only were they strangers, but I was also scared that I might become attached to them and that they would not become my parents. I was afraid of being left behind and going back to the beginning.

Days and months passed as we spent time with them, and I became more comfortable. The man and woman who had once been strangers slowly became my mom and dad.

My sister and I cried with happiness when they told us that we were finally being adopted. I was finally able to say "Mom" and "Dad." I was finally able to ask for a hug and cry in their arms. I was finally able to talk to them about my day. My sister and I were finally going to be loved.

I packed my things and said goodbye to the friends I had made during my journey. I told them, "No matter what, don't stop praying, and have faith that one day you will be loved."

I got into the car that would take me to my new home. As we left, I cried—not because I was sad, but because of everything I had gone through without having someone to hold me on my hardest days. I thought about how much my sister and I had prayed every night simply to be loved by a mom and dad who would take care of us in the way we hadn't been cared for when we were babies.

I thought my journey had finished, but in reality, it had only just begun.

Journeys are more than just miles traveled. They leave you with a message and teach you something about yourself and others. My journey taught me that even after experiencing loss and loneliness, hope can lead you to a place where you finally feel loved and where you truly belong.

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