



# GERARDO'S STORY

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*Keywords: Mexico, DACA*

*Gerardo migrated to the United States from Mexico with his family when he was a child. In 2012 DACA was created and Gerardo and his siblings all applied and received DACA, which changed their lives.*

I was born in a small, peaceful town in Mexico. I started working at an early age to help provide for the family. My mom used to make chicharrónes (fried pork rinds) and I would sell them at school. I also helped my grandpa in the cornfields. It was hard work. By the time I was nine years old, violence had started breaking out in our town. Our area was perfect for drug trafficking since there were a lot of pine trees and it was easy to hide. My dad was a police officer and the Sinaloa Cartel (an international organized crime syndicate) approached him. They told him he had to either help them or leave. There were some patrols watching our house and we were scared.

My parents decided to immigrate to the US to flee the violence. I was impressed that my dad knew some English and found a job right away. Being in LA was like being in another world. It was so beautiful and different. I was excited the first time I saw a limousine and tall buildings. I started to go to school. I'm a pretty social person and would talk with everyone in Spanish. They would laugh at me and I didn't understand why. I finally realized they didn't speak Spanish!

Another uncle promised my dad a janitorial job and an apartment in Northern California. We started with 13 people in a two-bedroom apartment. I went to school in East Oakland. In high school, I took a carpentry course; I was pretty skilled and when I graduated, I was offered several good jobs. But I wasn't able to take any of those jobs because I was undocumented.

I felt very disappointed and unwanted in the US. I had worked so hard, but couldn't access any of the opportunities that were





available to other recent graduates. My self-esteem went way down, but my mom motivated me and I started to attend community college. I had always wanted to be a police officer, so I took criminal justice classes. A teacher who also worked for the police department encouraged me to take a police officer course. I got really excited about that. But then I couldn't do it because I didn't have a social security number.

In 2012, I remember Obama speaking about DACA on the news, saying that people who have been here since childhood and have graduated from high school will be able to work legally. My siblings and I all applied for DACA. My life changed: I started thinking differently. I felt secure and able to provide for my family. I did have mixed feelings when I received the DACA card with my picture. Although I was happy to work legally, I was also angry because this one little card meant I could now belong in this society. All of the missed opportunities were never coming back.

***When I got DACA, my life completely changed. My confidence grew and I started dreaming. I now have a good job with benefits and can take care of my daughters.***

After a while, my grandma in Mexico got really sick. I went to see a lawyer to find out if I could travel to see her. He said he would charge me \$5,000, which I couldn't afford. However, he mentioned "Advance Parole." I did some research online but I didn't understand the details. Some friends told me about East Bay Sanctuary Covenant and I got an appointment with Shiori.

***I have no words to describe my gratitude for Santuario and what you are doing to help so many people.***

Shiori helped me apply for Advance Parole. I got approved in two months and went to be with my grandma. Perhaps more importantly, Santuario helped me to see the world differently. With Advance Parole, Shiori said I would be able to leave the country and return legally. I was so scared, but my wife (who is a US citizen) traveled with me and supported me the whole time. When we went to my hometown, it felt so unsafe because of the cartel. There are tons of crosses and burned cars in the road where people have died. It's like you're driving through a war zone. I was so glad to see my grandma. But at that moment,



I realized, “I’m proud of where I’m from, but I’m an American.”

I’m really happy to be a fully legal person with a green card thanks to Sanctuary. The future for me looks really bright. I’m better able to protect my family and to take care of them economically. My three siblings are still waiting to see what will happen with DACA.

“Sanctuary” means so much for so many people. You never know what people are going through. Just because a person was not born here doesn’t mean they are less valuable. Unfortunately, a lot of other countries are not able to take care of their own citizens due to corruption and violence. Sanctuary has reminded me that helping others is priceless; it makes you feel like a human. Sanctuary has motivated me to share my story with other people; it can change the way people feel and think about immigrants. I hope it will help other people realize that you don’t know someone’s story until you ask and listen.

## **DACA Context**

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a U.S. immigration policy created in 2012 that provides temporary relief from deportation and work authorization to certain young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. DACA has enabled almost 800,000 eligible young adults to work lawfully, attend school, and plan their lives without the constant threat of deportation, usually to an unfamiliar country. Unlike federal legislation, however, DACA does not provide permanent legal status and must be renewed every two years. In 2017, the Trump administration rescinded the 2012 DACA memorandum and announced a “wind down” of DACA. On January 9, 2018, a federal judge blocked the administration’s termination of DACA.