



MARIA'S STORY

Keywords: Mexico, LGBTQ+, Asylum

Maria is an intersex woman who faced horrific discrimination and violence in Mexico, eventually causing her to flee to the United States in her thirties. She now lives in the South Bay.

“I was born in Mexico, but the people of Mexico never loved or accepted me. In Mexico, all those who are LGBT are discriminated against. But it was worse for me because they did not see me as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. I knew that if I stayed in my family’s house they would also be attacked for having a strange thing like me. So I left my family. I didn’t want my family to suffer because of me.

I came to the United States because I had heard that it was a land of freedom and I thought there could also be security for me. One day while on the street in San Jose, a stranger gave me a paper with a phone number and told me: “In this place they can help you.” I was afraid, but the man did not attack me or say anything - he just turned and left. It took me a long time to gather the courage to call that number.

I finally called and it was Santuario – the place to whom I owe my life.

In the days before my interview at Santuario, I was insecure because I had never talked about my identity and what I had suffered in Mexico with anyone. When I arrived, I saw that I was with people who wanted to help me. It was a new feeling for me, as if I were safe for the first time in my life. I understood that this was my opportunity to ask for help, even though it hurt to talk about my past and remember everything that happened to me.

I was forced to be hidden from the age of 13 until age 37 when I received asylum. For 24 years, I was afraid. Since receiving asylum, I have started to feel better. Some days, I still feel insecure around people and worry that they might imagine what I am. It’s very





difficult to overcome this fear.

Little by little, I have been gaining confidence because here in the United States, I have discovered that people do not attack me. This is helping me to heal from the trauma that I experienced in Mexico.

A few months ago, my life took a tremendous turn: I was granted my permanent residency. I am very happy to finally have this legal status that will allow me to be safe for the long term and to fly free. I thank all the people who support the idea of Sanctuary. You are giving people like me another chance to live.

Now for the first time, I love my life. I have a very nice job as a supervisor at Tesla and I am pursuing my dream of becoming a motivational speaker. Every day, I open my arms to heaven and give thanks for being able to live in California. In 4 more years, I am looking forward to becoming a U.S. citizen and to fulfill my dream of being able to vote!

I am so excited and happy with my life that my mind is a little in shock. I do not know exactly how I will help others, but keep in mind that I am a sleeping giant who is about to wake up.”

ESPAÑOL:

Palabras clave: México, LGBTQ+, Asilo

María es una mujer intersexual que sufrió discriminación y violencia terribles en México, lo cual le obligó a huir a Estados Unidos cumplidos ya los treinta. A día de hoy vive en el sur de la Bahía.

“Nací en México, pero la gente allí nunca me aceptó ni me amó. En México se discrimina contra las personas LGBT, pero fue peor en mi caso porque no me veían como lesbiana, ni gay, ni bisexual o transgénero. Yo sabía que si me quedaba en casa de mi familia, a ellos también los atacarían por tenerme allí, así que dejé a mi familia porque no quería que sufrieran por mi culpa.

Vine a los Estados Unidos porque había oído que era una tierra de libertad y pensé que aquí podría encontrarme a salvo. Un día, yendo por la calle en San José, un desconocido me dio un número de teléfono y me dijo: “En este sitio te pueden ayudar.”





Me dio miedo, pero el hombre ni me atacó, ni me dijo nada malo; sólo se dio la vuelta y se fue. Me costó mucho tiempo encontrar el valor para llamar a ese número de teléfono.

Finalmente llamé, y era el Santuario – el lugar al que le debo la vida.

Durante los días anteriores a la entrevista en el Santuario me sentí insegura porque nunca había hablado con nadie de mi identidad, ni de todo lo que había sufrido en México. Cuando llegué, vi que estaba con gente que quería ayudarme. Fue una sensación nueva para mí, como si me hubiera sentido segura por primera vez en mi vida. Me di cuenta de que era mi oportunidad para pedir ayuda, a pesar de que me dolió hablar de mi pasado y acordarme de todo lo malo que me había pasado.

Me obligaron a vivir escondida desde los 13 hasta los 37 años, cuando me dieron el asilo. Viví con miedo durante 24 años. Desde que me concedieron el asilo, empecé a sentirme mejor. Algunos días aún me siento insegura entre la gente y me preocupa que se puedan imaginar lo que soy; es muy difícil superar ese miedo.

Poco a poco, he ido ganando seguridad porque aquí, en Estados Unidos, he descubierto que la gente no me ataca, lo cual me ayuda a superar el trauma que sufrí en México.

Mi vida dio un vuelco tremendo recientemente: me concedieron la residencia permanente. Estoy muy feliz de tener finalmente el estatus legal que me permitirá tener seguridad y volar libremente. Doy gracias a todas las personas que apoyan la idea del Santuario porque le están dando una oportunidad para vivir a gente como yo.

Ahora, por vez primera, me encanta mi vida. Tengo un buen trabajo como supervisora en Tesla y estoy intentando alcanzar mi sueño de convertirme en conferencista motivacional. Cada día alzo los brazos al cielo y doy gracias por poder vivir en California. ¡Estoy deseando convertirme en ciudadana americana en cuatro años más y así poder cumplir mi sueño de votar!

Estoy tan emocionada y feliz que mi mente sigue un poco en estado de shock. No sé exactamente cómo ayudaré a los demás, pero os aviso que soy un gigante dormido a punto de despertar.



EAST BAY
SANCTUARY
COVENANT



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The rights of LGBTQ+ people have grown stronger in Mexico since discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was outlawed in 2003. More than half of Mexico's 32 states recognize gay marriage and the nation's top court ruled that trans people have a legal right to change their gender identity on official documents. Still, legal advocates warn that increased visibility has exacerbated public misperceptions and false stereotypes about queer people and increased extreme violence towards LGBTQ+ people. 2019 was the deadliest year for LGBTQ+ people in Mexico in half a decade, according to Reuters.

In 2019, 117 lesbian, gay, bi and trans people were killed in Mexico, over a third of which were trans women. In a predominantly Catholic country, gay and trans people still experience social prejudice, and hate crimes due to homophobia and transphobia are "generally made invisible," according to Patricia Mercado, a Mexican senator.

Immigration judges in the United States give excessive weight to reports of minor societal advancements for gay communities in Mexico, without understanding the oppressive conditions most queer Mexicans still face. Consequently, without thoroughly examining the actual conditions, immigration judges are not able to assess asylum cases fully and accurately and many asylum applications are rejected.

SOURCES:

Lopez, Oscar. "[Mexico sees deadliest year for LGBT+ people in five years](#)," Reuters. May 15, 2020.
[Report on Human Rights Conditions for Transgender Women in Mexico](#). Transgender Law Center, Cornell University Law School. May 2016.

