

## *Testimony of Jacqueline Marroquin Hernandez*



It has not been easy for me to write my testimony. I have never actually done it before, but I will try to summarize the first years of my life.

My mother was 15 years old when I was born; my father was 10 years older than she was. I grew up in a loving but not perfect home. I was just a girl when we went to the Catholic Church; I remember that when I entered the church there was a cross with Christ crucified and it was very painful to see Him like this. Every year, when we celebrated Easter in the month of April, I hoped that that

year people would change their minds and not crucify Jesus.

My parents worked a lot, and my younger brother and I spent time with my grandmother and an aunt. I could not conceive my life without my grandmother; she gave us all her love, she was a very wise woman and she cooked deliciously. She was a wonderful woman.

We had to live through the Civil War of the 80s in my country, El Salvador, and we also experienced some earthquakes. My brother and I attended school in the mornings and many times when we left school, we had to face shootings between the army and terrorist groups. We had to hide where we could or simply drop to the ground asking God that no bullet would touch us; when they had stopped attacking each other, all the civilians that had been left in the middle of the confrontation (including us), had to run away and flee from the area, but in doing so, many times we had to pass over dead people and sometimes over their innards. Our shoes, socks and legs would be covered with blood almost every day, and this was just one of many things we had to see. My younger brother suddenly stopped talking and he looked lost and sad; my parents decided to take us out of school and we lost a year of study like many of our classmates.

From a very young age I had to live and see a lot of cruelty and injustice. The first 9 years of school my brother and I went to a private school. I had very good teachers with the exception of one teacher who punished and hit me frequently. She embedded her nails in my ears, piercing them and making them bleed, but in my last year at that school I rebelled. I no longer allowed that teacher to abuse or mistreat me and I told her everything that I had always wanted to tell her. In the school, that type of disrespect was not accepted, so they decided to expel me from school. I did not understand why my parents didn't do anything to stop the mistreatment of that teacher towards me, and I

even came to think that I deserved it. As a punishment, my mother enrolled me in a National Institute which didn't have a very good reputation. It was said that there were young people there with poor behaviors. I met many good and bad young people and I realized that they were only the product of broken homes and many of them had been abused by their own families or close friends. Most of them only wanted to forget and escape the reality they had to live in. The academic teaching there was very good. I got very involved in cultural activities and sports, and I realized that it wasn't as bad as most people had said.

Since I was a small child, I had wanted to be a great gymnast. I wanted to be like the Olympic winner Nadia Comaneci and I begged my father to enroll me in gymnastics, but my father had already enrolled us in Judo classes. The war, the mistreatment of my teacher in school and the imposition of my father towards judo classes made me a bitter, withdrawn and silent girl. I stopped being happy, loving and funny. I began to isolate myself and I looked for the darkest and loneliest places in the house; sometimes I even committed the disrespect of talking back to my father.

I was about 8 years old when I managed to get my father to enroll me in gymnastic lessons. I demanded a lot of myself. I trained from 5 to 6 hours a day because my goal was to be part of the national gymnastics team of my country, but just one day before the exam I suffered a fall from the balance beam, leaving me unconscious. When I woke up I was in a clinic without being able to move, sore and quite swollen on my spine and left leg. The doctors said that it was impossible for me to return to the gym and that I could not do my exam. I continued suffering from much pain throughout my body, but the strongest pain were located in my back and my left leg because of the way in which my body impacted on the balance beam. I was under the treatment of many doctors and specialists for several years, but the only thing they did was inject me and prescribe me pills for pain.

The years went by and when I turned 14 years old, my grandmother got very sick and a few months later she passed away. I was devastated. I saw her as my first mother. Shortly after my grandmother's death, my parents began to talk about getting divorced. The following year was the year in which I would celebrate my desired 15 years. Every young girl dreams of a fairytale *quinceañera* party and a royal looking dress, and I was no exception. That was the year I was finishing my 9th grade.

At 16 years of age, I went to school at the National Institute and that was the last year that my parents were together. The pain in my spine and my leg increased much more; my father or mother had to inject me every day on my arms and on my buttocks which were full of bruises from so many injections. I could not wear short sleeved blouses

because I felt ashamed that people would see my arms full of bruises. Sometimes the pain was so strong that I passed out.

That same year in high school I met my first boyfriend. I was in my freshman year and he was in his senior year. They called him *The Olympian*; he was the best in all the sports he did including gymnastics, and he was also an excellent student. I had permission from my parents to go out with him and he was also an evangelical Christian; it was the only thing that I did not like about him. He spoke a lot about God, but I did not like to listen to him because I thought that God did not love me enough because I had had to live through many unpleasant things.

The pain in my body increased. I never told anyone that I wanted to die; in fact, I never expressed it other than indirectly. If I thought about it, I often wanted to close my eyes and not wake up anymore; that way I would no longer feel anything. Every night I would wake up with very strong pains and my father would take me to the living room; he would turn on the television where there was only boxing. I would ask my father, "How can these men hit so hard causing so much pain and bruises while being healthy?" It was my way of seeing things due to the illness situation that I was experiencing. When the pain crises would appear, I could feel that I was about to faint and I would tell my father with these words: "Dad, give me your arms because I'm going to go; please, Daddy, hold tight and don't let me go. I can't hold on anymore. I am scared, Dad." I intertwined my arms with my father's.

He lifted weights and had very strong arms and made me feel very safe. In fact, I have always felt safe in my father's arms. I became addicted to pain pills. I would take from 50 to 60 pills a day, use bandages from the neck to my hip and other bandages on my left leg. I had many good teachers, but there was one who gave me physical education, which was very demanding, and my body did not perform enough to be able to do all the exercise that my teacher demanded. My teacher humiliated me in front of all my classmates. They made fun of me. He called me "*mummy*" for the amount of bandages on my body and called me any nickname that occurred to him, and it seemed that he enjoyed making fun of me.

Something else was happening to my left leg. It was losing a lot of weight and it was also lengthening because I had 4 discs out of place from my spine. That was causing a deformity in my body. I did not live a normal adolescence. I felt ugly, I felt useless, I felt that I was a burden to my parents, and I was very embarrassed not to be as cute as the other girls my age, but my boyfriend did not seem to mind. He kept talking to me of a God who loved me but I did not understand how that God would allow me to be feeling so much pain.

My parents got separated at the end of that year and quickly went through the divorce process. Three more years passed and I started university. I already presented a very evident deformity in my body. We consulted with another doctor and he ordered me to get blood work, x-rays and many more examinations. In the x-ray the deformity in my spine and femur could be clearly seen. After many studies, the final diagnosis was bone cancer. The doctors said that they had to amputate the left leg because the cancer had originated in the femur and that they could not do chemotherapy because I was in the final stage of the cancer. If my parents wanted to keep me alive for a few days, maybe months, then the amputation had to be done immediately.

There was a doctor from the group who said that it was a very strong decision and he needed my parents to agree. My father was unreasonable and out of control; my mother was, too, but she is a woman who, no matter how bad she feels, she looks for alternatives. She said, "I will not allow my daughter to have an amputation; I will look for more options. I will consult with specialists and, if necessary, take my daughter to another country and have them put a bionic leg on her." My mother also looked for naturopathic doctors who prescribed me teas and nutritious meals; they performed acupuncture on me and also took me to a woman who was doing some kind of massage, but my condition was getting worse. Every day, I lost an incredible amount of weight; I was almost a skeleton. I only had my skin attached to my bones, and I stayed in bed. My whole body had a horrible smell of medication.

In the middle of so many treatments my boyfriend asked me to marry him. Immediately, I said no, I knew he loved me a lot and it didn't surprise me that he asked me to marry him. I was about to die and he had a whole life ahead of him. Everyone was crying and I asked everyone to leave me alone. I don't know how I was able to get up but I did it, and I did something terrible at that moment— I said to God, "If You really exist, heal me. I give You 10 minutes to do it and if You don't, it's because You don't exist. I only give You 10 minutes and if You don't, I am going to invoke satan. I'm sure he will not say no. It is important to give my soul to the devil. I know that he exists because I have been able to feel him and see that evil does exist."

I had not reached the 10 minutes when I passed out. When I woke up I was in my bed. My father had seen me lying on the floor and had taken me to bed.

The next day my boyfriend returned to my house and told me he loved me. He did not care that I was about to die; he took me in his arms and hugged me trembling and crying. Suddenly he placed me in front of him and he said, "I want you to accompany me to a house of prayer; it is not a church." He had invited me to church many times and he insisted that I accompany him, but I never wanted to because of the fact that I did not believe in God. I told him I have never wanted to be part of those crazy "*hallelujah*"

people, but I knew that I didn't have much time and I said, "Yes, but you know I have no strength; I can no longer get up." He spoke to my parents. My mother dressed me and he took me in his arms to the car. Before entering the house of prayer, I told him what I had said to his "God" and the request that I was also going to make to Satan but my disappointment had been great because I had realized that the devil did not want me because I was still sick. I also told him when we entered, "I do not want anyone to touch me, speak to me, or look at me and I do not want them to tell me to accept your God because he does not exist. I have never been worth anything to anyone. I have only been a mistake in this life, and please do not allow those crazy people to come near me. I am here only for you." He only listened to me and we entered the house of prayer. I felt a very strong rejection in me. I did not want to be there, but something unusual happened: despite the fact that he was carrying me in his arms, nobody looked at me in a strange way. He laid me down in an armchair and he sat next to me. The hostess was an older woman and she began reading the Bible. She read Psalm 139: 13-18, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You."

The lady started talking about God's love for our lives, then she got up and started walking towards me. I had never heard those verses from the Bible in my life. My grandmother read the Bible a lot, but we did not, and something unexpected happened. I felt like something very big and heavy broke into many pieces inside me. The lady stood in front of me and the other people only had their eyes closed praying. The lady asked with her look if she could put her hands on me and I indicated with my head, "Yes." I was able to understand that it was not necessary to say a single word. I remember that she began to pray for me. She brought her hands to my left leg and said that God was going to perform an operation. I felt as if my leg had been injected and with my hands, I removed her hands but she had nothing. I felt the pain of a needle and then something very hot in my leg and I didn't know anything more. My boyfriend later told me that I had passed out. When I woke up I was at home in my room in my pajamas, and it was the morning of the next day. There was a pleasant aroma characteristic of some big dolls that I loved which would be gifted to me every December and on my birthday. I thought that someone had brought me a doll, and what was strange was that my body did not hurt and I felt well rested as if I had slept for months. I got up, something I could not previously do, and I began to look for the doll because the smell was very strong. I reacted at last: I saw myself standing up and I stepped in front of the mirror and I could not believe it! There was no pain in my whole body! Then I

took my arms to my nose to smell them and I realized that the smell of the new doll came from my skin, and the smell of medicine was no longer on me.

I quickly got dressed and asked my father to take me to the stadium to run. When my dad saw me he started crying. He couldn't believe it; he thought I was saying goodbye to him. Some people say that when another is about to die they do strange things. My father was very athletic and he had instilled in us the importance of sports. My father hugged me and told me, "Yes, my girl, we will leave right now." Leaving my room, I looked at my house and I saw it differently. I saw all the furniture and all the rooms. I saw everything differently in the same way as we went to the stadium: the sky, the trees, the birds, the flowers, the sun, the wind in my face. Everything that I had seen for all my life was now so different; I could appreciate now the beauty that God had created for us and that we so often do not see or appreciate.

We arrived at the stadium and I began to run slowly, I was enjoying and feeling my life as I had never done before. I could see the beautiful sky and felt it closer to me. I felt grateful but at the same time very ashamed and repentant for everything I had done and said against God. I thanked and thanked God; my dad saw me laughing and crying at the same time. I didn't say anything to my dad; I just asked him to take me to my boyfriend's house. When my boyfriend saw me he hugged me, started crying and he thanked God because God had done a miracle in me. I had heard the word miracle before but I had never believed or experienced a miracle, and I realized that God had given me a great gift of living and feeling His great healing power. Despite what I was experiencing, I didn't want my family to realize what was happening to me because I had been the rebel and the misbehaving one of the family. What I have told you, have been the strongest things that I have experienced. More situations in my life were not so strong but they contributed to my rebellion. At that time I did not want my family to notice because I thought they were going to laugh at me. I had expressed myself very badly about the people who believed in God and I was already part of them.

My parents took me to the hospital two days later. When the doctors saw me and examined me, they said that I was not the same teenager. They sent me to get an x-ray immediately, and to the surprise of all, the x-rays from a previous week and the one they had just done were not the same. My spinal bones were completely straight and all my spinal discs were in perfect position. The x-ray of my femur showed a small lump in the bone and it could be seen as a complete crack in the bone, but at the same time, over the same crack, tissue from the same bone had been sealing what looked like a brake.

The doctors ran from one place to another, looking for all their files. They passed between them all my studies, examined me again and again, and they could not believe it. "We cannot accept it," they said. "It is not the same adolescent." They looked at my

parents, telling them over and over again that this was not possible. They did three more x-rays and they all came out the same. Clearly, everything was perfect. They sent for the man in charge of doing the x-rays to ask him if he had done those x-rays a week before and if I was the same teenager who had just had the three new x-rays. The radiologist told them, "I am just as surprised as you, but I want to tell you that I have been and am a friend of her parents." My parents had worked at the national hospital since before I was born and they knew each other and had become friends. The radiologist said, "I have known this girl since she was in her mother's womb and I have seen her grow. I can assure you that she is the same girl, and I am happy to see that these results are so different."

Then one by one, the group of doctors, despite everything, said, "We are going to do the amputation anyway." One of the doctors came out of the group and said, "I am very sorry for you, colleagues, but we are all facing a miracle of God. It is the only explanation that there is. The university teaches us medicine, but they don't teach us anything about the miracles of God, and much less to recognize and accept them." The doctor said to my parents, "If you give me permission, I want to do a biopsy. I want to send to analyze tissue from her bones and show my colleagues that she is healthy." From one week to the next, they could not believe what they were seeing. One week before, I was almost dying and unable to move, and at that moment I was standing there in front of them, healthy and full of life. The doctor did not do a biopsy. He did a follow-up surgery on my femur. The results took time but they came to the end, and everything was perfectly fine in me. I had no malignant cells. I was completely healthy and there was no cancer in me.

I began to read the Bible and began to realize how much God loved me. Ephesians 1: 4-7 "For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." We are a wonderful work created by God, interwoven by His hands. We are chosen, loved and redeemed by Jesus Christ

Today the concept of true beauty is quite difficult to understand. True beauty is not in the outward appearance. How many of us have ever thought that we have been a mistake? I am sure that most of us have, but we have been created and designed by God. There is no mistake; in these verses from His word, He clearly expresses His love and care for each one of us.

(Psalm 139: 13-16) "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your

eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.”

(Psalm 139: 17-18) “How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.” When by my ignorance, I abusively challenged God, giving Him a time limit to heal me, He was there with me. I passed out and woke up the next day and He was there with me. He always was, but I could not realize it because I was drowning in my pain and my problems. Since then, every day I tell Him, “I wake up and I'm still with You.”

At some point in our lives, we have complained about our parents. God's word tells us in Ephesians 6:1-3, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth.” It does not say honor your father and mother if they are good parents. He tells us to honor them no matter how good or bad they are. I was very angry and resentful towards my mother for getting divorced and getting remarried so soon. It was a very hard process, but I managed to understand and respect my parents' decisions. I thank God every day for their lives and I feel very blessed because I still have them alive. Even in the distance that separates us, my heart is with them and I am in the heart of each of my parents. They tell me that even when I turn 80 years of age, I will still be their girl, and even though I am already a woman and have given them three grandchildren, I still feel like their baby.

I am very thankful to God for His love and mercy in my life. He got me up when there was almost no life in me and He has allowed me to create more life. I have three wonderful children who were born from me, a woman who many years ago seemed like a corpse. There is a scar from the tracking surgery that my doctor did on my femur; my mother wanted me to have plastic surgery to remove the scar. She thought at that time, “My daughter is very young and she will be embarrassed to show her scar when she wears shorts.” But I told him that I did not want to have it removed because my scar is the most beautiful seal that I have on my body of the love of God in my life. I see it every day and I thank my Father God for His infinite love toward me. With time, I understood that God allowed me to live all these things because He was preparing me for a series of tests that in the future I would have to face that would be much harder than these. I really had no idea how hard they could be, but I can tell you that if we cling to God any trials or burdens that come into our lives we can overcome. —not alone— because in our



strength we can do nothing (Philippians 4:13) “I can do everything in Christ who strengthens me.”

In those long nights of pain when my father and I watched boxing, I could observe many hits, some that leave marks and others not. The same happens in our lives, because many of the hits that we receive in life leave us marked forever and others are softer. The key is not to give up. We always have to continue fighting as good children of God. I learned when to link my arms with those of my father and I asked him not to let go because I was going to. It is the same with God, many times we let go and we wonder away from His ways; but His arms are always there to hold us and not let us go because He is our Father and He loves us.