

Witness I - Jamie

My name is Jaime. I am a Guatemalan citizen who came to the U.S looking for a better future for myself and my children. I remember growing up in Guatemala; I had to walk barefoot in the mountains because my parents were so poor that they could not afford to buy shoes for me and my siblings. There were days when I only got a small meal per day. We could not go to school or buy clothes since we could not afford that. We used to live in a small house made of palm tree, and I could only dream about getting a bigger house for my parents.

When I was 18 years old my father decided that I should get married because it was the only way of saving me from being forced to join the military. At that time the military was fighting against the guerrillas and was recruiting every person they could. If a person would not join he/she would be blamed for supporting the guerrillas. During the conflict in Guatemala I witnessed a lot of injustices which up until today I couldn't talk about because I feared for my safety. Time after time I saw people disappear because they would share what they saw. For fear of my safety, I have become a silent witness of a lot of injustices committed against indigenous people in Guatemala.

Through hard work my eight siblings and I built a "better" house for my parents. We were all happy because we were able to provide something better for our parents. Our joy did not last long because in 1998 the severe winds and rain of hurricane Mitch took away our pride along with our house. We spent two weeks without a dry place to sleep and only enough food to have one meal per day. During that time I could only think of when I was just a little boy without food, clothes, and shelter. I cannot forget the faces of my brothers and sisters; they would cry and constantly ask why God had forgotten about us.

I have four daughters who are sixteen, thirteen, nine, and three years old respectively. One of them is about to go blind. That was another reason why I came here; I wanted to work in order to be able to pay for her medicine. I looked for jobs in Guatemala, but I was unable to find employment. With a broken heart I left my home town and my family. I wanted to be safe and forget about all my traumas from childhood. So I decided to come to the U.S. Also, I did not want my children to go through what I lived through in Guatemala; I was hoping to bring them with me when I had enough money. But unfortunately it didn't work out. On May 12, 2008 my life fell apart along with my dreams. Now, here I am in Postville trying to put the pieces of my

life back together and hoping that President Obama will fulfill his promise of working for comprehensive immigration reform.