

Examples of Perimigration Trauma: 2 Stories

Lilliam

Lilliam (all names have been changed) is a 30-year old, Columbian born, married mother of 4, who is a documented, US citizen. She has lived in the United States/Wisconsin since she was 10. She was granted her citizenship when she was 18. She has worked at the same retailer since she was 18, and has been steadily promoted and currently works as a store manager. She is also attempting to take college-level courses when she is able to continue her education.

Pre-migration: Lilliam's father left for America when Lilliam was 3. She says she has "no real memory of him from before we came to be with him in Wisconsin." In Columbia, before her father came to the states (on a Visa), her family was considered middle-class. They owned their own home and Lilliam and her brother attended private school. But, due to her father's perceived status (In Columbia, specifically in the 80's, having a "Spanish sounding" last name equated one with status/money), he and his family began to receive threats (of extortion, potential kidnapping, etc.). At first, he didn't take the threats seriously, but after the murder of his secretary, and the subsequent disappearance and murder of his brother, his family decided he had to leave. Lilliam knew nothing of this at the time, only that the family sold their home and moved in with her grandparents, and her father left. She also speaks of "never seeing my mom. She worked all the time after my dad left, so my other family members raised me."

Transit: When Lilliam and her family came to Wisconsin, she thought it was just for a short trip. She had no idea they were leaving for good. "I had all my friends, and my family there. I had no idea we weren't coming back...and I remember it was in November, and when we got to the airport, it was so cold! I remember exactly what I was wearing, and how cold I was."

Settlement: Once Lilliam was reunited with her father ("I had no idea it was him, he just looked like some old man!") he took the family to his apartment, which was a sparsely furnished apartment. Lilliam felt "overwhelmed...everything was so different. In Columbia we lived in a house with all my family...here we didn't know anyone." As well, Lilliam and her brother were immediately told that they had a younger brother, due to a long-term affair their father had during his 6 years away from the family. This was a large issue in the family, though Lilliam's mother insisted they treat and accept this younger sibling as family.

Acculturation: Lilliam speaks often of her feeling "torn between two places" and two cultures. She still has close relationships with her family in Columbia, and laments her inability to see them more often. She also was immediately thrown into the public school system, and during her time in school, ESL programs were only starting to be implemented, and weren't quite

effective. Her writing and reading ability in Spanish and English are both compromised due to this, though her speaking ability in both languages is impeccable. As well, once she had an even small command on English, she was enlisted in being an interpreter for the family during their appointments and exchanges, which caused a strange power differential in her relationship with her parents. As well, she speaks of the “cultural values and traditions” of Columbia conflicting with America, which she feels caused deep rifts in her family, which are hard to reconcile. Finally, she speaks of her own resilience, and all the other issues she’s faced during her time in the states. While she has accomplished so much, she also struggles in her intimate relationships, and still tries to unravel the tapestry off all the attachment disruptions she’s had in her life.

Inez

Inez is a 29 year-old mother of 3. She is unmarried, but has a long-term on-again-off-again relationship with her two younger children’s father. She is undocumented, and is not currently eligible for any type of Visa or Immigration status. She works full-time and lives with her brother (who came to the states after she did, along with her sister) and her children. She is working on getting her GED with hopes it will allow her more employment opportunities. She discloses that she has “a lot of anger inside of me. And sadness. Sometimes I cannot get out of bed. Sometimes I just want to disappear. But I have to keep going for my children. But sometimes it’s too much.”

Pre-migration: Inez has disclosed a significant amount of trauma during her formative years, including intense poverty, physical and emotional abuse from her immediate family, as well as sexual abuse suffered from an extended family member. She became pregnant at 16 and decided, after having her baby, that she would join her baby’s father in Wisconsin, as he had promised he would help take care of them. She also states, “I didn’t want to have what happened to me happen to her [my daughter]...I wanted her to have a chance at a better life. I wanted her to go to school...to be able to be someone.”

Transit: Inez left her infant in the care of family and headed out with a “family friend” who acted as a coyote for her to bring her and a small group to the border. She was 17. She spent about 2 weeks on the journey, mostly through the desert to the Texas border. There was very little food or water. When they arrived at the border they were discovered and detained by Border Patrol. Inez described the situation as “scary...they were yelling at swearing at us...calling us cockroaches and mother f***ers...they shoved me, but I saw them beat some of the other women in our group...I was scared they might beat me, but they didn’t. we went into a concrete room for a few hours...there wasn’t water or a bathroom...it was hot...but then they

just let us go and told us to go home...but then me and a couple other people just ran and ran and we made it. They didn't come after us...so then we were there."

Settlement: When Inez arrived to Madison, she was not greeted how she had anticipated. Her baby's father was living in a small apartment with 4 other men, and had developed a drinking problem. "He would work and then go get drunk then come back to the apartment and we would fight...he would hit me...but I didn't know anyone, so I couldn't do anything." Inez found work as soon as she was able, and quickly began working 3 jobs, for a total of 75-80 hours a week. she was able to separate from her baby's father and move in with some other women from one of her jobs after a few months. She then proceeded to save as much money as she was able in order to pay for a coyote to bring her daughter to her. After almost 2 years, she had saved the \$7500 required to do so, and then brought over her daughter, who was then almost 3.

Acculturation: Inez says that being in America "is hard...I don't belong here...but I can't go home...I don't belong anywhere...and [my older daughter] doesn't have the same rights that my two other kids have...I want her to have the same opportunities...it's hard. And I miss my family." Inez has her brother and sister here, which helps, but she often feels alone and that she has no real friends. As well, she often has to send money home, as her parents are older and suffer from a variety of medical concerns. As well, there have been threats from the local mafia on other family member's lives. She expresses a deep sadness that she cannot go back to Mexico. As well, Inez has had significant systems involvement in her life, due to CPS taking her oldest daughter for almost a year when she was 7. Inez struggled with her own significant PTSD and acculturative stress in parenting, and states that "I made some mistakes...I was too hard on [my oldest daughter]...I couldn't handle everything...I was also being abused, and didn't have anyone.." as well, one of the contributing factors to CPS involvement was Inez using a traditional remedy when her daughter was sick, that resulted in a burn that the school thought was maltreatment. Inez says, "I have learned a lot...about how to be a better parent, and how to do better for my children...but it is also so hard. I am so alone here."