

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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Open doors-----Open hearts

Brenda Harris
Secretary

Derrick's Story

During my immigration class I encountered many eye opening experiences that I plan to share with you from time to time. This is the abbreviated version of Derrick's story it is edited to fit the format of this newsletter.

My name is Derrick, I am from Honduras and my descendants are from Africa. I came to the U.S. to escape violence. I was in the military in Honduras but when I got out a lot of ex-military were getting killed by gangs. I would try to find work but because of the color of my skin it was very hard. I came to the US to work and help my family. I knew it was a dangerous journey because I had heard stories of others who had taken the trip. However, we are forced to take these risks and to risk our life. The authorities can easily single me out as a non-Mexican and the persecution starts. I rode the train. I didn't know some people would lose a limb on the train and others wanted to kidnap you. I tried to stay away from immigration, escape kidnappers, and avoid the police because they would rob us. There were always robbers and kidnappings. They would take us, force us to call people in Honduras for money and if they didn't pay, then they would kill you. Thank God, they didn't take our lives, just our food and our money.

Of the 300-400 black people on the train, I was the only one to make it to the border. When I got to the border some people took me and tricked me. They locked me up in a house. They were armed and identified themselves as the mafia. They told me I had to cross into the U.S. with this bag. We walked for days. My body was giving up on me. We got to a point where they told me to wait while they went to look for water. It was then that I escaped. I started walking a lot. I walked the whole day by myself and found a road. I asked for rides but they called Border Patrol. When I saw BP coming toward me I ran back into the desert. The cold was killing me. I found water and drank it until there was no more room. I saw lights in the distance and I started walking toward them. I saw a sign that said 45 miles, then another that read 30 miles, then another one that said 45 miles. Now that I am here, I realize that was the speed limit. Around 3am I started knocking on doors asking people for help. People would ignore me, so I looked for clothing because I was so cold.

I spotted a small house and I realized that it was a dog house. I took the dog out and I stayed there. I was worried so I decided to leave. A lady was getting into her car and as soon as she saw me, she ran back into her house. I sat on her porch and just started crying. When she saw me, and saw that I was sad, she came out. She said "do you have a problem?" I said "yes, I have a lot of problems." She said "it's ok." She went in and came back out with a phone in her hand. I thought she was calling immigration but she called No More Deaths. The volunteer spoke Spanish and described what they do and told me I could get food and rest. I stayed in the clinic for five days. When I left I walked all day. I got to one of the last mountains and I saw Tucson. I decided to relax there before going into the city. I was close to the checkpoint and tripped sensors and was spotted on camera. I couldn't run anymore and they got me.

They put me in a detention center. I remembered Michael, a No More Deaths volunteer, gave me his phone number, but I was ashamed to ask him for help. After 6 months of detention the bond was set at \$12,000. Michael contacted a bond agency that required 20% and raised funds on Facebook. When they called me to leave I started crying in front of everyone. The agency put an ankle monitor on me and it would be removed when they got the \$12K. I have to pay a fee of \$450 a month that has nothing to do with the \$12K. I have now had the ankle monitor on for two years. I owe them back fees of \$6K on top of the \$12K. I was able to get out of the detention center just to be forced to pay constantly. I have been trying to do everything by the books and it only seems to be worse. Sometimes I contemplate taking the monitor off but that would create immigration problems and I would be breaking the law. I am forced to spend two hours a day connected to a charger. I have tried to be the best person I can be. I go to church, I look for work. I am not happy. I thought the US would have more opportunities and less discrimination. That was my dream but now I am living in a nightmare. I don't understand how the US can treat me this way when the US is a nation of immigrants. I am at risk of being deported even after paying the debt. I filed for asylum but the court denied me. My lawyer is appealing and I was able to get a work permit.

In Christian love,

George Harris