

HONDURAS

Raul's Story



INTERVIEWS BY ANNA SAELI

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Where Does Raul's Story Start?







CHAPTER 1

Who Am I?

My name is Raul. I'm from Honduras. I'm 17. I came to the U.S. when I was 11.

In Honduras, I lived in a house in the city of La Ceiba. I lived with my grandmother and my two uncles. My mom went to the U.S. four years before I did. My dad was in the military in Honduras. The house my grandmother had was big. It had a big yard. There were coconut, lychee, **cacao**, and paterna fruit trees.

Honduras is a tough place to live because there aren't many opportunities there. A lot of violence

occurs. People can't find jobs. The **gangs** have a lot of power. They may kill you for almost anything.

Sample



CHAPTER 2

How My Story Started

Before I came to the U.S., the gangs killed my grandpa. A week after, they killed my cousin. One of my aunts bought a new house in the **neighborhood**. It was really nice. But the gangs didn't like her, so they killed my cousin. A week later, they threw a rock with a note in it through my aunt's window. The note gave her one week to leave the house. If not, they would kill her. She had to leave the country. She's here in America now. But she lost her house and everything.

My family talked about moving to the U.S. when I was very young. They wanted to move for a better life. There was no chance for a good life in Honduras.

That's why my mom left for America when I was 7 years old. One or two months after my grandpa died, my dad decided it was time for the rest of us to go. He told me one week before our first attempt to get to the U.S.

Sample



CHAPTER 3

How I Came to the U.S.

I tried two times to get to the U.S. The first time I didn't make it. First, we had to go in a bus. It took us to the **border** of Guatemala and Honduras. There was this **checkpoint**. We couldn't go through it, so we had to walk a couple of miles around it. Then a **coyote** picked us up. We got on a bus. A coyote is like a guide. You pay the coyote to take you to the border. The coyote decides everything. It's hard because you don't really know anyone. You can't go anywhere. After you get to a place, you can't go out. We stayed in a room for three or four days. We didn't know what was going on outside.

When the coyote said it was time, we had to get everything and leave. From there, we moved to Mexico. In Mexico, we had to take a truck. There were like a hundred people in the back, and there wasn't any air. It was a lot of hours inside without stopping. People were passing out. The driver didn't want to stop. There were kids in there, and I could see them passing out. It was horrible.

On our way, the driver decided to stop because the coyote called him, saying that the people couldn't take it anymore. We stopped and went to the woods and hid there. A whole night passed. The next day, we waited for someone to pick us up again. Then we went to a hotel and waited for another truck.

At the hotel, I remember seeing a pregnant lady. She was about to give birth and couldn't go on. She stayed at the hotel. The coyote left her there. If you can't continue anymore, the coyotes say it's not their problem. That was hard for me because I wanted to help. But if you help, then you're going to suffer too. You don't know anyone there. We had to keep going. The lady was pregnant, and we had to leave her.

We got to another checkpoint. Then we had to stop

and walk around it. We had to walk at around 3 a.m. I remember I didn't have good walking shoes. I was just wearing some sandals. In Mexico, there are a lot of **cactuses**.

We had to walk for four or five miles to get around the checkpoint. I think someone saw us walking and snitched on us. **Immigration agents** were waiting for us with dogs. We ran. I fell into a cactus. A lot of the spikes stuck in me. But I didn't feel it at first because I was scared.

I was running and kept going. My dad was there too. We kept going until we lost them. Then we found a hole in the ground and stayed inside it for one hour or so. We waited until the sunrise. When it was daylight, we walked to this store. They sold coffee and food after the checkpoint. We went there to get coffee and eat something.

My dad and I were covered in mud. We had on backpacks and were all muddy. People saw us. They knew we were trying to cross the border. Someone called the cops, and the police came and got us. After that, we stayed in a minivan from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. Then the police put us in jail. We stayed

in jail for one month, and then they sent us back to Honduras.

Three or four months later, we tried again. This time we made it. I didn't want to try it again. But I was young, so I didn't have much of a choice.

This time it was the same thing, but I knew what to expect. We didn't have to walk around the checkpoint. We paid more, so we got around the checkpoint in trucks. When we were in the trucks, I don't know if it was the police or drug traffickers that were chasing us. The lady that was driving the truck was scared. We were going very fast. They were coming after us. The place where we were driving didn't have any trees. When the truck was going, there was a lot of dust. We couldn't really see the people behind us. There were eight people in our truck. One was laying down, the next one was on top of the first one, and so on. The woman was driving very fast, so I think we lost them for a little bit.

We got to a river, and there was this little boat. We got on it, and then it just took off. After that, we crossed a big river. Then we got to this old house. When we got there, there were members from a gang.

It was hard because there were a lot of people we didn't know. But you could see the immigrants and gang members there. They had no heart.

If gang members ask you for money, and you don't have it, they give you a choice to call your family to send them money. If you don't, they hurt you. Then they call your parents or your family and hurt people in front of you. They tell you what's going to happen to you if you don't do this or do that. It was hard. I never saw someone get killed, but I saw a person get hurt with a gun in the face. I just wanted to leave.

The good thing is that my family had the money, so they sent the gang the money. The gang members let us go. But it was hard because I knew that there were some people left behind who were going to die there.

From there, we went in the truck to Piedras Negras, which means the black rocks, in Mexico. That city is on the border with the U.S. We were still with the gang members. I think they were protecting us after we paid them. There were four of them with AKs, these big guns. They took us to another place, and we had to pay another man, like \$3,000–5,000.

My family didn't have all the money, but they asked someone else to let them borrow the money. Back in Honduras, the coyote had told us it was going to be around \$10,000. But they always lie. They tell you an amount of money. Then you have to pay twice that when you're in Mexico.

The next day, they took us to the river that separates Mexico and the U.S. There were immigration trucks on the other side. We had to swim the river. It's hard. People say there are crocodiles in there. If you don't know how to swim, it's your problem. The current is very strong.

My dad put me on his back, and then he started swimming. We got to the other side. There were people from immigration, so they picked us up and asked for our names. We had to give them everything, like our money, phones, and chains. But they gave everything back to us later.



WELCOME NEWCOMERS

Stories

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Colombia

Ghana

Guatemala

Honduras

India

Iran

Iraq

Jamaica

Mexico

Micronesia

Palestine

Russia

Sri Lanka

Turkey

Ukraine

Venezuela



IRAQ

Ali's Story



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Where Does Ali's Story Start?







CHAPTER 1

Who Am I?

My name is Ali. I'm 20 years old and from Iraq. I was 12 when I came to the U.S.

In Iraq, I lived with my mom, dad, and **siblings** in Najaf. I have four brothers and one sister. At first, we lived with my grandma. All her children and grandchildren lived in one big house. It had three rooms, but I think there were six different families living there. It was fun, because there were 20 kids running around a small house. Then one day we moved out.

After that, I lived with my parents and siblings. To this day, we all live together. It is common to have big

families in Iraq. Extended families often live together. I don't know why, but part of it is that the dad and mom will eventually get old. If you have many siblings, there are more kids to help take care of parents when they're old. They can take turns staying with each child.

Our neighborhood in Iraq was kind of nice. My siblings and friends would all walk to school together. After school, we would all go outside and play soccer in the streets. Every time that a car came by, we would run away from it. I learned to ride a bike with my friends as well. Growing up, I always stayed in the same area.

We would play with the sand all the time. Loads of sand would pile up. We would get up on the hill and play with the sand. My family built a garden. My friends and I would hang out in the garden and play Arab games and stuff like that.

I lived in Iraq for 12 years. There were bad times and stuff that I went through. But there were some good times, like seeing my **extended family** and being around them all the time. It was a community, and that's what I liked. I do remember a little part of the war with the U.S. That was just **chaos**.



CHAPTER 2

How My Story Started

The story of us deciding to move to America started with my dad. He wanted to run away from Iraq when he was 18. But his dad caught him at the border. Still, he had the goal of coming to America. There were gangs and some people wanted to kill him, so he tried to run away. Eventually, the idea of him coming to America died out because he got busy with life. Then the war in Iraq started. He got nervous and wanted to come to the U.S. again.

One night, I remember our cousins showed up to our house. They were talking about it being their last day in Iraq. The next day they would leave for

America. We thought it was a joke, but they ended up leaving. A while later, we called them. They were in Tennessee. My mother started speaking to them about schools and what life was like in the U.S. They told my mom that life is better for the kids and our future.

That made my dad decide to take moving seriously. It was 2010 when our first relatives made it to America. From 2010 to 2014 or 2015, we kept making applications to come to the U.S. Finally, we got accepted. I didn't know what to expect because I'd only seen the U.S. in movies. I always wanted to ride a bus to school. You know, the yellow school bus. Mostly, I couldn't believe it. I didn't **comprehend** myself being here. My family was excited.

I was one of the good kids in school. Nobody believed me when I said I was going to come to America. Then one day I showed up, and I gave my books away. My books had all the notes. I had everything, all the gold basically. That's when the other students believed me. They said, "Ali's giving his books away. Well, he's serious about leaving Iraq."

My mom was rushing to sell everything in our house. All her kids tried to help. It was kind of a

rush when we actually decided to come. Everything happened quickly. We were blessed. I just remember going to extended family members and saying, “Bye.”

Sample

Sample



CHAPTER 3

How I Came to the U.S.

The day we headed on the bus from Iraq to the airport, it was like a funeral. We had a lot of family members outside. Everybody was crying. I felt like a **celebrity** too. It was hard to walk onto the bus because everybody wanted to hug and kiss me.

Everybody was worried. They worried for my dad that his kids were going to get loose, basically not be religious. Some thought his kids would be going to clubs because in the Middle East, America is known as a party life. As a Muslim, there are a lot of sins in the U.S. It's easy to sin here. A lot of people thought moving was the worst decision

my dad could ever make. He was doubted a lot. Other people were happy for us because they knew what America was like. They knew it wasn't an opportunity that everybody gets. Feelings were mixed between they're happy for us, or they're sad for us, or they're worried for us.

My dad had a lot of **pressure** from his peers and my grandma. When we got to America, a lot of that pressure was put on us. Now us kids have to make something out of ourselves. Otherwise, he's going to look like a loser to his friends and family. For the longest time, I hated it because as much as we chose to come here, we kids didn't make that choice. That was our parents' decision. They say, "Be good for us. You need to reach a certain level. We brought you because it's better for you." I always say, "I understand, but life goes on. Just because you brought us here to be better does not mean we're going to be better."

It's a lot of pressure. I do see their point. They say, "I left my friends. I left my parents. I left this and this." It's hard for me to comprehend right now.

But eventually, in the future, when I have kids, then I feel like I'll understand. I'll have something I'm willing to **sacrifice** everything for.

Sample



WELCOME NEWCOMERS

Stories

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Ghana

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Honduras

India

Iran

Iraq

Jamaica

Mexico

Micronesia

Palestine

Russia

Sri Lanka

Turkey

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