

Marlen Moreno - I was born in Nacozari, Mexico in 1984. My parents brought me to the United States when I was only 13 years old. We were searching for a better life and we found it in Tucson, Arizona. Despite being born in Mexico, I don't consider myself Mexican. I have been living in this country for over thirteen years. The United States is my country and Arizona is my home.

My parents have always told me to value education. I remember them telling me that they came to the United States, "the country of opportunity," so I could live a better life than they did. I never took their sacrifice for granted. In 2002, I became the first and only member of my family to graduate from high school. I was proud of my achievements but scared that I could not go any further. My goal is to become a pre-school teacher, because I believe education is the key to success.

I was forced to put them aside my dream of becoming a teacher and worked as an assistant cleaning houses and a maid in a hotel. This was not what I wanted to do with my life, but I was thankful for any job I was able to get.

In 2007, my first son was born, Freddy Alan. Thanks to him, I came to know what it means to be a mother. I never knew I could be this happy or love someone as much as I love him. I went back to work soon after his birth because I wanted to provide him with everything he deserved. And on March 28, 2008, my son and I were awakened by a loud bang on our door. Before I could fully figure out what was happening, ten heavily armed deputies came into my house and arrested me because I am undocumented. I was taken to jail and held without bail.

I was detained for over four months. When I was finally released and allowed to reunite with my son I realized how much I had missed. My son had turned one and he had learned how to walk. It pains me to know that I never saw his first crawl, the first time he sat up, learned to play, his first bites of real food, or when he took his first steps. But what pains me the most is the fact that he didn't recognize me, his own mother. It still brings tears to my eyes knowing my own son didn't know who I was. It took us months to come back together, like we had been before we were separated.

In 2009, I met my husband and we married. He came into my life at a time when I needed him the most. He provided the support and love that I needed, and I will never forget that. In November of 2009, I had my second son, Leobardo Jr. My husband is a Lawful Permanent Resident and both of my sons are citizens. I am the only person in my family who is undocumented, but I still cannot legalize my status.

For the past year I have been fighting my deportation but now I am at the end of that fight and I am being told I must leave the United States by August 8th. I cannot think about being separated from my husband and my sons. I don't want to think about going back to Mexico, a place I don't consider my home.

I consider myself an American. This is where my husband and my children are and I don't want to be separated from them. I want to continue living my life in this country and I want to contribute back. I am not a criminal. I am a wife, a mother, a daughter. I am a human being.