

## Patricia's Story

Patricia worked cleaning rooms at a local motel. She was a single mother of three small children and her wages supported them and her mother back in El Salvador. Patricia was a hard working woman who went to church every Sunday. She had many friends in her neighborhood. She loved to cook for them on Sundays when they all came back from mass. Her laugh was contagious.

One morning while entering one of the motel rooms, she saw a man inside. She apologized and said she would return. The man rapidly locked the door behind her, pulled a knife and told her to undress. Patricia thought of her children and told herself she was going to survive for them. While raping her, the man told her that he had been watching her for a while. He said he knew where she lived and even mentioned the church where she went regularly. He also said he knew she didn't have any papers. If Patricia went to the police, he would report her to immigration.

After he left, Patricia cleaned the bedroom and without saying a word went home. For days she thought about what happened. She was not able to sleep, had to call work and tell them she wasn't feeling well, and stopped eating. Her friends noticed the change and began to ask what was wrong. Patricia was ashamed and kept going over what happened blaming herself. Finally, she confided in her next-door neighbor, Elena, who had been the sister she never had. Elena, told her she needed to go to the police because that man was going to rape other women or perhaps come back to harm Patricia again. After much convincing, Patricia and Elena went to the police station to make a report.

This was the first of many visits to the police station. Because so many days had pass, the officer taking the report was skeptical and unwelcoming. He interrogated Patricia and made her feel she had committed a crime. Elena had to interpret for Patricia. Patricia did not feel comfortable about describing exactly to Elena what the man did to her. On the second interview, there was a Spanish speaking female officer and Patricia gave more details. Still, Patricia felt they didn't believe her and were testing her. She described the man and looked at photos. She pointed at one of the photos telling them that was the man who raped her.

Elena found out about a local victim services center and took Patricia there. Patricia was still having trouble sleeping. She lost her job and stopped going to church. At the center she was given food, they referred her for counseling, and for immigration assistance. The immigration attorney requested a certification to apply for a U visa. The police department refused to issue one claiming she was not credible. They claimed that Patricia had waited too long to report the crime, her story changed as time passed, and the man she identified was someone who had an alibi on the day of the rape.

What would you have done to assist Patricia through this process? What can you do now to assist her?