

Blessed Are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth

Val Twanmoh

The first thing that struck me when I met Sofia was the sense of warmth and calm she carried with her and the obvious love and sense of responsibility that she felt for Gabriela, her younger sister. The way they told their stories to me with quiet strength and humble resolve belied the nightmare that pushed Gabriela to leave her home in Honduras and make the dangerous journey north to reunite with Sofia in Baltimore. It struck me then that, despite their outward appearance as two young women who were meek, they were far from being weak.

In my role as director of the Esperanza Center, I don't often have the opportunity to provide direct service to our immigrant clients. When our legal services team asked if I would help provide representation for one of the unaccompanied children who needed counsel, I was pleased to reengage the twenty years of legal practice that I had previously "retired," and so I

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represented Sofia and Gabriela in the state court proceedings seeking to have Sofia appointed the legal guardian for Gabriela—the first step in Gabriela’s quest for a green card that would allow her to stay in the United States under her sister’s care.

In Honduras, Sofia and Gabriela lived with their mother, two brothers, and Sofia’s two daughters in a small two-bedroom house made of cement blocks. As the oldest of the four, in a household with no father and a mother who was too old to obtain work in Honduras, Sofia provided most of the income for the family from her work in a clothing factory, but it was barely enough for the family to survive. At the age of twenty-five, she left for the United States to find better work to support the family. She found a job in a restaurant in Baltimore and was able to send money home to help pay for school for the children and put food on their table. A year later, her oldest brother left to find work, and shortly thereafter the younger brother and Sofia’s oldest daughter followed.

With no men left in the household, Gabriela, her mother, and her cousin became targets for the gangs in their town. Gang members would come and, when they found Gabriela or her cousin, they would beat them with machetes. Gabriela and her cousin have scars from the cuts left by the machete swords. Her mother would report the beatings to the police, but nothing was done.