

## Juan Carlos Mayorga

Juan Carlos was the director of the Pulsera Project in Nicaragua from 2010-2014  
He wrote the following story in 2011.

### Introduction

Before I begin to tell you my story, I want all of you who will read it to know that everything said here is a reality that Nicaraguan children face. I hope that you all understand everything in my story and that you are able to identify with me as well. My name is Juan Carlos Mayorga García, I am 23 years old, 1.67 meters tall, with dark brown eyes, dark hair, and a dark complexion. When I was born, I didn't have this name, my name was Carlos Eduardo Mayorga Traminio. But with this story you will be able to understand everything, since my birth. You must be asking yourselves: your birth? Yes, remember that we always have our older siblings to tell us what we don't know when we are born.

### Part 1

When my mother gave birth to me, I was born with the hardship of being malnourished. The first thing the doctor said to my mother was that I wasn't going to survive. According to my brothers, I was born malnourished because my mother had issues with my father and tried many times to abort me. On one of these attempts she almost managed to do so and was forced to give birth to me. After giving birth to me, my mother left the hospital; the only person that stayed was my father. They kept me in an incubator for almost nine months. When I was ready to leave, my father took me to a family who he was friendly with and I stayed there until I turned three years old.

This is where the more difficult part of my life begins. One day my father and I were riding around on his bike. I was sitting on the back part and, as always, an accident happened - I got my foot stuck in the spokes of the back wheel of the bicycle. The only place that was close by was the house my mother lived in with my siblings. I was bleeding, I'll never forget that pain; my dad had no choice but to bring me to that place. The first thing I did was look around at everything. There was a girl that was identical to me, she was my sister and her name is Carmen Termino. There were some children smaller than me, my younger siblings, I counted eight in total. Yes, I had eight siblings! Everyone asked my dad what I was doing there.

When my mom saw me, she began fighting with my dad. She asked him if I were the son he had with another woman. My mom believed that my dad would go out to go see another woman, when he would actually go see me. That same day, my dad left the house. I wanted to go with him. My sister said that I was crying like a little girl, (she always teases me about this). I stayed in the corner where the door meets the wall, and one of my older sisters (because I had four sisters and five brothers with me) cleaned out my injury. At night, my mom brought me outside; not one of the kids could do anything. I remember they were all sleeping, and that was the first night I spent on the street.

My sister, Carmen, used to give me food through the window. That's what every day was like. She knew that I was her brother. My dad talked about her and of two more siblings that were also his children (my younger siblings). The rest were already older and were children of different fathers. My mother used to always kick me out of the house at night. After one month my sister would open the door for me; I used to come in and sleep secretly. The next day, I would leave or hide under the bed so that my mother wouldn't beat me. I was only relaxed when my mother left to go work at the market. I remember that she had a stretch of street where she would sell vegetables.

One year later, my mother realized that I was actually her son who she had left behind in the hospital. I was already four years old. She would no longer take me outside to sleep, but I never saw my dad again. My sister used to tell me that he would come back, but that didn't happen.

In time, my siblings started leaving and it was because my mom had a new boyfriend. He was a very bad person (all children think this way when that person isn't your father). My siblings didn't like him, and they decided to go live on the streets. José Francisco, one of my older brothers (who today only has one year left to graduate from medical school), was the first to go. We didn't see him around the house anymore.

My mom only gave money to men, which is typical for a Nicaraguan woman. We would eat sometimes and other times we wouldn't. Another one of siblings decided to go work and he fed us. He was the oldest out of all of us, his name is Sebastian. Today, he is serving his fifteenth year in jail for trafficking drugs. This year is his last. I haven't seen him since I was five years old, which is when all of my older siblings left home.

It was then that my hell started again. Things got serious, and I turned into, as some say, the ugly duckling. Everything that happened, if something broke or if one of my younger siblings cried, was my fault. My mom put all the blame on me, even when her boyfriend didn't come home. That was a problem for me, but it was my reality. Always, every day, she used to hit me with a *tajona* or "whip" (the thing they use to hit horses so they can herd them) or with a stick that she used to keep close to her bed. I was already five years old. One day, I hid the stick on her because each time she hit me with it my entire body was left hurting and this pain didn't let me sleep at night. Well the day that I hid it was a very bad day for me. My mother realized and knew it had been me, because everyone else, the younger ones, had no reason to do it. When I told my mother where the stick was, I quickly ran towards the door and didn't return until nighttime, when I got hungry. I already knew what I had waiting for me. My sister was there and I was happy that she was, but when I felt someone pull my hair back, it was my mom with the stick. She dragged me to her room and started to beat my feet. She told me that she'd cut them off for having ran away from her. She held herself back because the splinters from the stick had penetrated my left foot so deeply that it had reached the bone, and I remember a lot of blood came out. I still have those scars on both feet; I didn't walk for 2 months. My mom got pregnant, and it was then that I was able to rest a bit considering that she could no longer beat me with the same amount of force.

## Part II

My sister, Carmen, who was a year older than I, went around selling tortillas on the streets. My sister had already made a plan, and it was that we would go live in the streets of Managua. We waited three more weeks, until I was able to walk again. In the Mercado Oriental (Eastern Market), which is the largest market in Nicaragua, I remember that we begged each person for one *córdoba*, and that was the way we collected money everyday so that we could eat. When we didn't get any money, there was a lady who had a dining hall. At the end of the day my sister washed her dishes, and I the pots or pans, and she gave us leftovers. Nighttime was the difficult part. It was very cold and I often got sick easily. I was scared for my sister, considering that she was already a "woman" and there were many men that raped children. But there were women, and I remember one who would always protect us. She was a gangster and a prostitute; she sometimes gave us a place to sleep. At Christmas time, we used to go beg from house to house and they sometimes gave us toys, or better, a lot of food. I used to think about my younger siblings. We left them things with a lady who was my mother's neighbor. But she didn't give these things to them; she took them for herself. One time in the Mercado Oriental (because that was our house, our home) I stole a toy for myself, it was a whistle, but the owner had already seen me motion to steal it. When I went to steal it, he grabbed me and hit me very hard over the head with a rock and split it open. I still have that "chicote" (whiplash) as we call it, and it gives me a lot of headaches. This happened when I was almost six years old.

On Sundays, my sister and I, and some other street friends always waited for a man outside of the church that was close to the neighborhood where I lived. Only people that had money went to that church, and they all arrived there with their cars. The man was a good man, but was very fat. He was so fat that it was difficult for him to walk. At mass' end, he used to give ten *córdobas* to all of us children who would wait for him outside. For us, that was a lot of money. One day, I said, "If I enter that church, will I come out like that man, very fat and with a lot of money?" I let go of my sister's hand and went to the rear of the church. There was a big gate with large pointed sticks on it, but I didn't stop there. I entered, there were a lot of people, and I sat down in one of the seats as if I were one of them. I was all dirty and barefoot, and little by little, I got closer to the man. When I went to go to touch him, one of the security guards (who always beat the children when they got inside the church) grabbed me and kicked me out of the church. Nobody in the church did anything, they only watched. Since then, I hated them all. I ran towards the big gate and because I was running so fast one of the large pointed sticks got lodged in the bottom of my right foot. I screamed and because of my cries of pain people came out to help me. Human beings don't act until there is a dead or injured person. All of that happened to me, that one time.

I was ten years old and already feeling like a big kid when I begged for a *córdoba* at traffic lights. I said that I was going to protect my sister but it wasn't like that, they always beat me up and she protected me. We spent birthdays on the streets. When you are a kid you always imagine things; when I was very hungry I imagined that the clouds were all foods. That day I was hungry, it was noon, and at that time all the traffic lights had lines full of vehicles. It's dangerous because there are a lot of vehicles, but I didn't hold myself back. So, I approached one of the vehicles, it was a big truck, and a woman popped her head out of the window and gave me ten *córdobas*, I was happy. But when the wheels of the truck started turning, they were so big that they ran over my feet. I screamed like crazy, and thank God, it was only a scare – since the shoes I was wearing were too big, nothing happened to me. My sister hit me this time for giving her such a scare.

One day however, when we were asleep, my mom found us and dragged us home. We already knew that she was looking for us and that our older brother was looking for us too; I didn't want to go back to my sister's house. That day, my mom tied us up and began to beat us, really badly. She wanted to burn my sister's feet for having taken me to the streets. I was very scared because I didn't know what was going to become of me. Just at that moment, my brother arrived and took us away with him. The next day, he told us that there was a lady who had a very nice children's project, and that she would come to take us with her that afternoon, I was very happy. My sadness left when we saw her – it was the same lady who ran over my shoes. I let my sister know whom the lady was. Her name, which I will never forget, is Zelinda Asunta, the director of Los Quinchos.

### Part III

I said goodbye to my sister and brother. She was going to be adopted by a lady, but I didn't know anything other than that. (The problem was that I wasn't able to be with my sister because the project was only for boys. They had a project for girls; I will let you how my sister made out later). To my surprise, when I arrived at the project, one of my older brothers was there, Jose Francisco, who I call Chepe. I felt happy, and I continued to feel this way. They sent me to a school and ever since the first grade I was the best student, my grades were only 90s and 100s. I learned many things: to dance, to make bracelets, and to make hammocks. I always liked being the best. I was eight years old. Then one of my younger siblings arrived at Los Quinchos. His name is Enrique but I call him "Tata" because he always stuttered when he spoke.

For me, Zelinda became a mother figure. She taught me many good things, and in that way, I went on learning to love people and went back to believing in them. When I turned nine years old, I was given the opportunity to go to Italy. I was very excited, imagine a street boy traveling abroad– it was an illusion for me. The preparations for me to go were made, but my mom got wind of what was going on. Therefore, she conjured up a plan to stop me from going. She planned on telling us that she was going to die and used my sister so that I would go with her and not travel. One night, I

prepared my suitcases and ran away with my sister to go see my mother. But when I arrived, my mother was well, and my sister was crying because my mom stole the space that my older brother had left for her. She took us by force and brought us to Bluefields on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast.

My mother and her whole family were born in that area, but she didn't love them because my uncles and aunts would tell her not to mistreat her children and she didn't like that. As time went on, my mom fell ill and wasn't able to get out of bed. I left with a man, a friend of my mom's, to go work. This man liked to drink a lot, and one day he obligated me to drink with him (if not, he would throw me to the sharks). I was scared and had to do it, I didn't have a choice, and at the age of nine I tasted my first drink. Many things happened. My mom, provided that she had something to eat, would lend me out to men who had farms so that I would go work for them, and she would give them royalties. One time, a man had me carry sacks full of charcoal, which would get into my eyes and almost made me lose my sight. I would often be up to two days, maximum, without food. My sister and I would always manage, but one day my sister disappeared and I didn't see her again. My mom was already dying. I was ten years old going on eleven.

My mom and two other younger siblings of mine lived in the house. One of my older sisters didn't love me; she was a bad person as well, like my mother. She had a son named Marcos, he was two years old, and I loved him very much. In time, I went to go work for a woman who sold vegetables at that city's market. I had to bring the food from the house to the market everyday, from Monday to Sunday. I used to sell from seven until eight at night, which is when I would go back to the house. I began to save a *córdoba* here and there, because I wanted to search for my sister (since I had been told that she had gone back to where she was, Los Quinchos). Well, my mom found my savings and even though she was sick, she beat me again. That was the last time she did that to me. I was filled with rage and resentment; there are things that hurt much more than all of this, to people like me, and to many others.

One day, a fatal accident happened. I remember that I came home hungry. It was nine at night; my nephew was hungry too and was crying a lot. I had a headache; I lit the fire and I put a pot or pan over it to heat up some oil. The boy came close to me to touch my feet and I pushed him away, I was very angry. I know I was wrong. He fell over and into to the table, moving the pot of heating oil. It fell on his head. I ran desperately to look for help; my nephew was burning before my eyes. He died the next day. My family still blames me. I fled from my house for about 6 months. My sister, the child's mom, searched for me to kill me. That changed my entire life; I already had the mindset of a twenty-year-old adult.

Then one day, Zelinda came to Bluefields with my sister and brother to take me away from there, and I was happy from the moment I saw them. This is how I came back to Los Quinchos. To my surprise, they told me that my sister, Carmen, had been the founder of the new project for women, Las Yahoskas de Los Quinchos, and that made me very happy.

## Part IV

With my sister close, I began to study and do many other things again. I finished elementary school, and in 2005 they offered to send me to Italy again, and yes, I went. I was already fifteen or sixteen years old. My sister left Los Quinchos, she left to go live with a boyfriend and I continued down my path. Later, I returned to Los Quinchos and they gave me the opportunity to have a job, I wasn't a child anymore; I was more of an adult and was already working. I began high school, I was the president of the entire class where I studied; I did many things. I didn't know anything else about my family only that my siblings were close by. I graduated high school in 2008, and started to look at universities to see where I could get a scholarship, but it was very difficult. As time passed, I met many good people, like my new brothers who grew up with me in the project. I went two years without studying, but in time, I continued to do so.

I became the director of Los Quinchos' right hand; although, there were already things that I didn't like. One day I met Christopher Crane and his wife Susan. I had already met them, but I never dealt with them; I always stayed out of the way. I began communicating with these good people when Zelinda decided to leave myself and two others in charge of Los Quinchos. They helped us so much and continue to help us along with many other friends from the United States. It was then that it was decided in a meeting that for the year 2010 myself and another "Quincho" would be in charge of the Pulsera Project within Los Quinchos, working with the children. Everything worked out well, but I had problems with the director of the Project Los Quinchos and decided to leave them to search for a life of my own. This is where my story with Los Quinchos ends.

Later, I found myself unemployed due to the difficulty in finding a job in this country. In October of 2010, I received an email from Chris telling me to launch a small project with the guys that are already out of Los Quinchos. I decide to do it with five guys, and later with ten. When it became a group of twenty people, the small Pulsera Project was launched, but it was very grand in purpose. We have dreams and goals to change the ideology that people have towards the world, and our purpose is to value life. Those involved in the Project today are offering a big helping hand, a hand that I can use to help many of my brothers and many children who still face the cruel reality that I faced. I hope that you identify with my message. Please, help me help; I know that we can do it.

## Conclusion

To conclude my story, thanks to all of you. Today, they have made me the General Director of the Pulsera Project. You have no idea how happy it makes me to work towards helping many others; and I can do so through the responsibility they have put in my hands. Today, I temporarily live in the Pulsera Project's house. You all have given me a scholarship so that I can study English at the Ave Maria University. Today,

there are twenty-one of us youths that work on the Pulsera Project. I continue to fight for a different world each day of my life. I hope that you have liked my story. So long friends, and seriously, many thanks, and not just from me but from many other people as well.

### Juan Carlos' Story

#### Comprehension Questions:

1. What is happening in the story? Describe the person who is speaking, Juan Carlos, and what is happening to him.
2. What does Juan Carlos want to communicate in his story? What is the message he wants to offer?
3. How do you relate to the story? Can you talk about a similar personal experience...an experience in which you were in a similar situation?
4. Can you imagine what Juan Carlos was thinking when he wrote his story? Do you think it was difficult for him to write it? Why do you think he did it?

#### Reflection Questions:

1. What did you imagine you'd be when you were a child?
2. What were your problems when you were a child? How did you overcome these problems?
3. Was there a person in your life that taught you to live a better life? Who was it and what did he/she do to help you?