

## **Life Story of María Crisol Morejón Cumatzil**

My name is María Crisol Morejón Cumatzil. I am 17 years old, almost 18. I was born on July 30 1998. I have finished sixth grade. I am writing my life story as I remember it.

In the first place, I have a united family with 6 people: my father, my mother, two sisters, a brother and me. I am the oldest daughter of my parents. I remember my life when I was 10 years old. At that time, I developed a cyst on my left hand. My parents took me to the San Pedro de Bethancourt Hospital in Antigua Guatemala, and because of the cyst, they operated on me.

When I was 11 years old, my youngest brother became gravely ill and my mother had to take him to the hospital because he was so sick. He was hospitalized for almost a month, and my mother stayed with him to take care of him. My father traveled from morning to evening. Because I was the oldest, I had to stay with my brothers and sisters to take care of them, and do the housework. My sisters didn't want to eat food prepared by anyone but me. Meanwhile, I took care of my brothers and sisters and didn't go to school for a semester. I didn't take my exams because I became very sad that my mother and my father were not there with me. That semester was lost, but the following semester I was able to catch up and so I didn't miss the entire grade. I was almost at the point of losing the entire year, but thanks to God and to my parents supporting me, I didn't lose it. When I was 12 years old I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It was a marvelous year, without any difficulty, and I was very happy.

When I was 13 years old, I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Of course, it cost me a little to complete the grade. It wasn't because of bad grades but rather because I had to pay something to the school and my parents had few resources. At the end of the year, I had to have special clothing and my parents had no money. It cost a little to complete my grade. My dreams were to continue studying to become a nurse or a doctor, but because my parents had few resources, I didn't have the opportunity to continue studying, although they wanted me to do so. My parents were orphans. My mother is an orphan without a mother or father. Her parents died from illness. My father is an orphan without a father because his father was killed due to violence. My parents were still very young and had to work a lot in order to live. They never had the opportunity to study. This is what they have told me. So, when I finished sixth grade instead of studying, I began working for people cleaning, cooking and sweeping. I had to do all the housework I could to help my parents and brothers and sisters. I bought my clothing and shoes. My father's salary to maintain all of us was very small. That was what my life was like until the age of 15, and then I began to get sick. We went to see the doctor who was on a medical team that had come to the village where I live. Being sick, and because they didn't charge much money, I went for a consultation. I told the doctor that I had a little lump about the size of a bean on my left breast. The doctor told me that it was nothing serious and that it was a "natural" part of my development. He prescribed some pills and some liquid medicine. After 10 months, I realized that the lump was bigger. I went to see a person who cured with medicinal plants. She told me that I had a serious illness. At that time, I was running a high fever and had chills, a headache and vomiting. She told me that I needed treatment, and that with this treatment, I would get better. Yes, the headache, vomiting and chills got better, but the lump kept on growing more and more. We had little money, but with my illness, I went to the Health Center. They didn't give me any medicine. They told me that I needed to go to the hospital of Chimaltenango, but they didn't give me a referral to that hospital. They told me to go and explain my illness to any doctor that I encountered at the hospital. The doctors would know where to send me. With pain and fever, they didn't even help me. My mother, who accompanied me, didn't

know what to do. Thinking and thinking, my mother remembered the day that my brother had gotten sick and she had taken him to the clinic of Hombres y Mujeres en Acción, and he was helped. They had treated him well, and we could afford it. So, she took me to that place and I was treated very well, and charged very little money. I met Dr. María José Alvarado. She examined me and she gave me “hope” to keep on going. She gave me an injection for the pain and fever and sent me to a laboratory where they would do a mammary pathology (biopsy) to find out what I had. I went the same day for the exam and then returned to the doctor at the clinic. The diagnosis was a large juvenile fibroadenoma, and not an abscess. Dr. María José read the diagnosis and gave me a referral to send me to the Social Service Hospital of Santo Hermano Pedro in Antigua Guatemala. The next day we went to the hospital. They accepted me and I was seen by a female doctor who told me that what I had was very serious and asked me to make an appointment as soon as possible. Sadly, they gave me an appointment more than two months from that day because they were busy until that time and couldn’t take care of me. Because I was so ill and they couldn’t take me, the doctor gave me another emergency referral to the Pedro Bethancourt National Hospital in Antigua Guatemala. When I got there, they told me that I was seriously ill, but they had too many patients and they couldn’t take care of me at that moment. They gave me medicine for the pain and sent me home with my mother. I was tired and in anguish, without the desire to eat anything. The next day I returned to the hospital. We left the house at 4 am to get to the hospital by 6:30. We took a number and they did all my paper work. Because in that hospital I had been operated on once before for a cyst on my left hand, it didn’t cost me anything to enter the hospital. They sent me to the Gynecological Clinic where they examined my left breast and the pathology report that Dr. María José Alvarado had ordered. They told me that it was very rare for someone my age to have such a large tumor and they told me that they needed to do many more tests to really see what it was. They did test after test, and again told me it was very strange for someone my age to have such a large tumor. They had never seen anything like it before. None of the doctors really figured out what I had. I was truly desperate, not just me, but my mother and father and the rest of my family too. We didn’t know what to do in the meantime. The pain was getting worse and the tumor kept growing. In the hospital they did a biopsy that was very painful because they inserted needles of varying sizes into my breast to see if there was liquid inside my breast. Because nothing came out, they had to open my breast to remove a small part of the tumor to see if it was benign or malignant. They took 10 stitches afterward. It was so painful for me that I can’t even describe the pain. It wasn’t just painful for me, but for my mother and my entire family, as they saw how badly I was suffering. Later, I returned to the hospital again to see the results of the biopsy. The doctors told me that the small part that they had taken during the biopsy was not sufficient to detect what the tumor had inside of it. They told me that they would have to perform another biopsy, and that they would have to open up my breast again to remove more in order to find out what I had. However, for this biopsy, the hospital didn’t have proper instruments to remove it. They were going to give me a referral for this hospital, but there was no surgeon that could remove it. I would have to go to another laboratory for the biopsy that was going to charge us many Quetzales. We didn’t even have money to eat because we had already spent so much. Thanks to my cousins, they lent me money so that I could go on seeking a cure. I kept trying to get better, but I had no desire to live. It would have been better if I hadn’t even been born. We did receive the results from the laboratory and we took them to the hospital so they could read the results. The doctors told me what it was. Unfortunately, they told me that they would have to remove my complete left breast, but that they couldn’t do it because the tumor was attached to my nipple and was very large. The worst was not this news, but the fact that they couldn’t do the operation in that

hospital because it would require special instruments that they didn't have, and that there was no surgeon who could perform the operation. They referred me to another hospital that was the INCAN, one that is near Roosevelt in the Capital. The operation was very expensive and we didn't have the money. But as God has said, Hope is the last thing that dies. That's how my illness was with me. The doctors discussed what they were going to do with me if I stayed in that hospital, or I could go to another hospital because we didn't have much money to pay for the operation.

Just at that moment, there was a specialist, a surgeon at the Bethancourt Hospital in Antigua Guatemala who told me that he would operate on me in that hospital, and that he was going to do almost the impossible to save me. Then they transferred me to another clinic in the same hospital in Antigua. It was the clinic where they perform female surgery.

For me and my family, this was very difficult. I felt especially bad for my mother because she had accompanied me everywhere that I went. My mother said that it was impossible to go through all that I was going through because she was the one who had brought me into this world, without any difficulty. What I was going through was not fair. I had no desire to live. That's how I felt and then the moment came on January 19, 2016 when they removed my left breast. They put me in the hospital on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, women's surgery, bed 12 on January 14, 2016. That day I cried so much that I had no more tears. The tears came because I was going to be without my breast and was thinking about what could happen to me.

January 15, 2016 was another day, and that same day I met new people who were next to me. I realized that these people were worse off than me. Some were losing a hand or a foot, or even two feet. I began to think that what they were going to take from me was dangerous because my left breast was on top of my heart. It was more dangerous than all of the things that these other people had wrong with them. However, I realized that what was happening to me would not be seen because it wasn't my foot or my hand that they were removing. At least I could work afterward and would be able to walk, and to persevere, as my parents had taught me to do. That's when I decided to thank God for what was happening to me on January 16, 2016. Although you may not believe me, I woke up believing that nothing was happening to me and I began to help the others the best I could. These people loved me so much and told me that everything would turn out okay for me. This gave me a lot strength to persevere. On January 17, 2016 I did the same thing as the day before. I had so much desire to live and so much energy that it seemed that I had no pain. The doctors continued to examine my blood in preparation for my operation. January 18, 2016 I was a little nervous because the next day was my operation and I was a little fearful. January 19, 2016 was the day of the operation, and the nurses took me down to the first floor to the operating room at 9:30 am. That day was the most painful day of my life, not just for me, but for my family also because they knew that I would either live or die. The doctor had told us what could happen, but to not lose hope. And so it was for my family and me because we had a lot of faith and hope in God, and in the doctors, that all would turn out well. My mother tells me that they finished operating on me at 12:00 pm because the doctor came out of the operating room to the waiting room to tell my mother that the operation was over. He also told her that I was close to dying, but it didn't happen thanks to God. The doctor also told her they just needed to wait and see how I reacted to all of the anesthesia because I was still under its affects. The hours passed and by the 2:00 pm visiting hours, I still didn't feel anything. I couldn't speak, see or even move. My mother, father, an aunt and a cousin were there with me at the time, and they tell me that I was crying a lot of the time although I didn't remember it. After visiting hours I was left alone, and still unconscious. It was now 3 pm and the hours

continued to pass. The nurses began to worry because I hadn't awakened and it was 5 pm. The nurses began to give me small electric shocks to try to awaken me, and then I began to react a little bit. Afterward they gave me an injection for pain because I was beginning to feel it. About 6 pm, the kind nurses fed me gelatin, and by 7:00 pm I was still waking up. They gave me another shot so that I could sleep until morning. On January 20<sup>th</sup> I was feeling good and I realized that now I was still alive and that God had given me another chance to live. If God gave me this opportunity, then it was for me to be a better person in every way, even in how I do things. I also realized that I had a tube that they had inserted to remove the fluid that was draining from the operation. At about 8 am, the surgeon that operated on me came to check on me and see how everything turned out. When he removed the bandage that he had put on me, I began to shake because I didn't want to see how it looked, and I imagined that there was gauze stuck on top. Actually, there was not even one drop of blood. The doctor was totally surprised because it seemed like he had operated on me a week ago and not yesterday. The operation went fine and it left me feeling very happy, but at the same time, a little sad because I was missing a breast. This was my new life that I had to face. I went to bathe and began to cry because, in spite of all that had happened in my life, I was alive for a day and a night. I was fine, although I had a little pain. My family came to see me at visiting hours. They seemed better because I told them that the doctor had been in to see me that morning and told me that everything was fine after the operation and that tomorrow I would be going home. The nurses kept giving me shots for pain and also something to relax me that came through a tube that went directly into my veins. On January 21, 2016 I woke up very hungry because I was next to a window where the scent of the chorizo and meat was coming in through the window from outside of the hospital. My breakfast soon arrived, but it wasn't meat or chorizo. It was gelatin and vegetables. Because I was so hungry, I ate everything that they had brought to me. The surgeon that operated on me arrived and said that there was very little fluid left in the bag and that the wound was beginning to heal and that I could go home. I felt so happy and began to think that I had been in this place not for a bad reason, but for a good one. I met people that I didn't know before, nurses, doctors and many more, but above all I realized that God exists and that hope is the last thing to die. I didn't lose hope and didn't die, and because of this, I am telling my life story now.

At the moment that they removed the tube, my mother arrived very happy to take me home because at this moment she had to pay for the operation. At the time, there was not even cotton in the hospital because all of the national hospitals were in an economic medical crisis. In spite of all of this, I was alive and at my mother's side, which was the most important thing to her and to the rest of my family. Afterward I went outside of the hospital and I saw very clearly and realized that it is so marvelous to wake up every day and see the light of the sun. It is the greatest gift that God gives to each one of us. And now mankind is destroying it with so much contamination.

I was given an appointment to return in 8 days, and then we went home to be with my family. After 8 days had passed I went back to the hospital and they told me that everything was fine since the operation. They took out my staples where the skin had healed, but left a few of them, telling me that those places needed to heal more before they could remove them. They also told me that I needed to find a doctor that had a special tool to take out the rest of the staples. Then we went back home again. My mother said that we had to wait until everything had healed, and that we could then go back to see Dr. María José Alvarado, the doctor who had given me the referral to go to the hospital.

We waited until the wound had healed and then we went to the clinic of Hombres y Mujeres en Acción where Dr. María José Alvarado works. When we arrived, my mother told of all that had happened to me. The doctor was so surprised because she didn't think that they would remove my entire left breast. She was so kind and had so much consideration for our family's economic situation. She told us that she didn't have the necessary tool, but that she would ask some of her co-workers if they had it, or know someone who might have it. At the same time, I met the Founders of Hombres y Mujeres en Acción, Lois and Kenneth Werner. She told us that there were some breast cancer survivors, and that yes, one can go on living. She is going to support me in everything that she can, and certainly for me, Lois and Dr. María José are like angels to me that God put in my path. They have done everything they can to help me. They recommended Dr. Roca to me, and he took out the rest of my staples because he had the special tool necessary. He didn't charge me anything, and I went home.

I haven't told you that I had to go back to the hospital because they had given me an appointment to go back in three months because the tumor that they removed had to be sent to a pathology laboratory. Even though they had removed my left breast, they still didn't know exactly if what I had was benign or malignant. I was recuperating, but the days passed like water running through my hands until the moment I had to return to the hospital so that they could tell me exactly what I had. Thank God, they told me that it wasn't cancer and that the tumor was benign. They told me that everything was fine and that I didn't need any further treatment, and that I didn't have to come back to the hospital any more. So, as everyone knows, each beginning has an end, and mine at that moment was not about my life, but rather about my illness and not having to go back to the hospital unless I had pain or wanted to have a breast implant. I didn't have one because it would cost more than 7,000 Quetzales and we didn't have money to do that. During the passing of those three months I caught the flu, and not knowing which medicine to take because of having had such a recent operation, it was not possible to take just any medication. I returned to see Dr. María José Alvarado and I was lucky to see her again along with Lois, the founder of Hombres y Mujeres en Acción of San Martin Jilotepeque. Dr. María José gave me some cough syrups, and Lois, the founder, told me that she was ordering a prosthesis for me that can be taken off, and put inside a bra. A month later I went back to the office of Hombres y Mujeres en Acción to try out the prosthesis that they had given to me. Lois asked me if I was studying, and I told her no, because of our lack of money due to my illness. She asked me if I would like to continue my studies, and I told her "yes" very sincerely, because I had lost my dream of going back to school. I again began to feel my dream of returning to my studies. I had completed the 6<sup>th</sup> grade but all I could tell her was "yes" because I was without words to express to her the joy that I felt in my heart when Lois told me that she would give me a scholarship. It is my greatest desire to study because I want to be a graduate in nursing. Also, I want to study for my "bachillerato" in computers because I know nothing about them. I want to be able to help my parents economically, and to help others, just as Dr. María José Alvarado and Lois, the founder, are helping me. They have set a great example for me.

Lois told me that she needed to talk to the Licenciada (Social Worker) who works for Hombres y Mujeres en Acción. They told me that I needed to write my life story and make copies of my grades in school so that they could possibly give me a scholarship.

I hope that it will happen because it is my greatest dream to return to studying and work at the same time. We still owe money that we used when I was ill. It isn't very much now because my mother and my sister are paying on it. I also want to work and study at the same time to be able to earn my

transportation and buy my clothing, as well as to help my parents with things because we have so little. I would like to study “Básico” on the weekends and work the other days of the week.

I, María Crisol Morejón Cumatzil now excuse myself from you, knowing that you are going to read my life story, and I thank you for everything. It was difficult to write my life story because there were very difficult things to talk about and I didn't want to go back and re-live what had happened. With tears, I wrote my life story and now I don't want to write any more. I did it because I wanted to tell you that God does exist as well as good people who supported me and keep on doing so. I want to tell you that HOPE IS THE LAST THING TO DIE.

THE END

Institution: Hombres y Mujeres en Acción

Founders: Lois Werner and Kenneth Werner

My name is: María Crisol Morejón Cumatzil

Reason: Scholarship

Date:

Place: San Martin Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango