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## ESTHER'S STORY A LIFE MARKED BY PAIN, TRANSFORMED BY FAITH



For a long time, Esther wanted to share her story, but fear held her back. Her life had been marked by physical pain, countless surgeries, and moments when she came dangerously close to death. It wasn't until she felt safe speaking with an Oblate priest that she finally said, "I'm ready to speak."

From a young age, Esther worked doing heavy labor. Over time, one hernia after another appeared, leading to multiple surgeries. Twice she fell into a coma. Many times, she woke up with deep wounds and pain that seemed endless. There were days when she could barely walk, yet she was told the same thing over and over: "It's normal. It will go away."

Until one early morning, her body could take no more. She got up to go to the bathroom, and all that was heard was a loud thud. Her children found her on the floor, unconscious, her eyes open. They rushed her to the hospital, where they received devastating news: "Take her home to die. There is nothing more we can do."

Her family refused to give up. They searched for another option and managed to get her admitted to a private hospital. Esther arrived in critical condition tubes everywhere, with a tracheotomy, her life barely sustained by machines. Doctors told the family to prepare for the worst.

While her body lay open in surgery, Esther experienced something she will never forget. She saw herself standing next to her hospital bed, looking at her own body. Then she began walking along a strange path, surrounded by enormous leaves and green plants she had never seen before. Suddenly, the scenes changed: war, dead bodies, lifeless animals... white ducks lying on the ground. Everything felt dark, confusing, and painful.

In the distance, she saw a circle of light bright, almost irresistible. Something was pulling her toward it, but just as she was about to enter, a force pulled her back.

Then everything changed again. She found herself in a long, dark room with chairs along the walls. There, completely alone, sat her youngest daughter, crying. Her tears were so large they looked like pearls hitting the floor. Esther didn't understand what was happening she only knew one thing: she did not want to leave her child alone.

Suddenly, the door opened. A person dressed in white, barefoot and radiant, walked toward her. He took her hand and gently said: "You will be healed. You will be okay."

At that very moment, her heart stopped. Doctors rushed in, performed CPR, fought to bring her back... and she returned. From that moment on, her condition began to stabilize. For Esther, there is no doubt: that person was God.

When she woke up, her voice had been affected. There are words she still cannot pronounce to this day. People made fun of her which was very hurtful. Once, while giving a workshop to teenagers, they laughed at her. Later came yet another surgery that left her with a large hernia. Many people assumed she was pregnant and gave her baby blankets and clothes. Esther never got angry but she was hurt. She stopped going out, shut herself inside her home, turned off the lights. She felt broken.



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Until someone invited her to the Search Retreat.

She arrived afraid thinking she wouldn't be able to speak well, fearing she would be mocked again. But from the moment she walked in, she felt something different: peace. She went to confession in tears, listened to the talks, and allowed herself to be embraced. The Way of the Cross touched her deeply. The Blessed Sacrament completed the transformation of her heart.

That weekend, a new Esther was born.

Today, Esther, a 59 year old , lives with joy. She serves youth, adults, and the elderly. She feels accepted, respected, and loved. Her children noticed the change immediately:

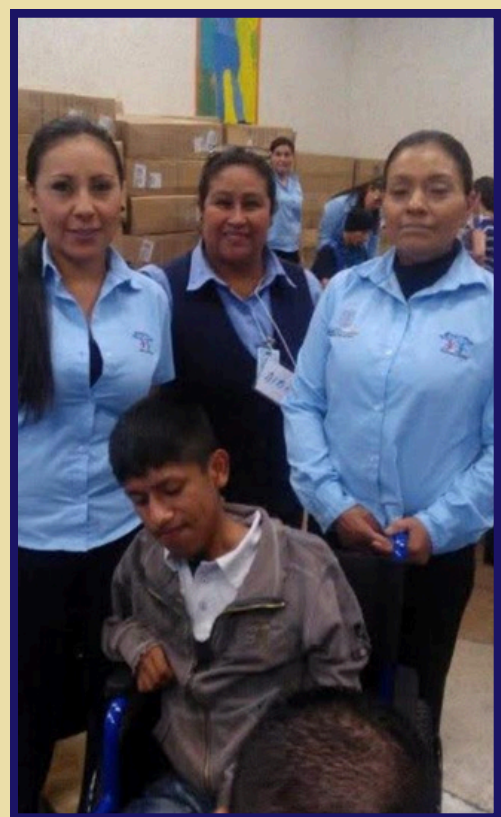
*"Mom, since you went to that retreat, you changed. You came back to life."*

One day, after hearing her testimony, Don Raúl, a 70-year-old grandfather, was deeply moved. He pulled out a toy he had kept for months -a Transformer- and gave it away, saying he wanted a child to have it so that one day it might transform lives, just as Esther now does with her own.

She sums it up this way:

*"I was reborn. I am new. Christ transformed me. Never lose faith. If you are invited to a retreat, go. God is there."*

Thank you for supporting persons like Esther in the Oblate Mission in Tijuana who have experienced healing and transformation in their lives.



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# SMILES THAT COME HOME



Today we want to share the story of Aide, a young woman who grew up learning that serving others is not an option, but a responsibility. It is not something extraordinary, but a way of life that responds to God's call and is lived out through service to one's neighbor. Aide was only 8 years old when she began to get involved in different church ministries—catechism, choir, and as she grew older, youth groups and Search movement—eventually becoming the director of Youth Search retreat #11. Without realizing it, a conviction was being planted that would mark her entire life: faith is shown through actions, and love of neighbor is lived through service.

From a young age, she knew her vocation: she wanted to become a dentist. The path was not easy. The door did not open the first time, and she was not accepted into the program. Studying at a private school was too expensive. She waited, persevered, prepared herself even more, and tried again the following year—and she was accepted. Thanks to the San Eugenio Scholarship Program, the tireless support of her family, and her own effort and perseverance, Aide completed her professional training, reaffirming her desire to place her talents at the service of others.

As she advanced in her years of formation, Aide understood that her vocation was not limited to a professional title. She began providing free dental care to people with limited resources, and on more than one occasion, she personally covered the costs so that patients could receive care. She did not do it for recognition, but out of conviction. For her, serving is a concrete way of giving thanks for everything she has received.

In this spirit of service, and once she graduated, the program “Smiles That Come Home” was born—a project that emerged from recognizing a reality that often goes unnoticed: there are people who cannot travel to a dental office (the sick, the elderly, or those confined to bed). In response to this need, Aide decided to go out to meet them, bringing dignified, professional, and humane dental care directly to their homes.



With the support of generous donors, her own resources, and personal effort, she began visiting patients before going to her formal job or after returning from it, even when exhaustion set in. Each visit not only relieved physical dental pain, but also restored peace, offered listening, and provided companionship to those who felt forgotten. Later, an opportunity arose to set up a space next to one of our mission chapels to establish Sunny Smile Dental, a community clinic that primarily operates on weekends or before and after her workday. From there, Aide provides low-cost care and dedicates the earnings to sustaining and strengthening the Smiles That Come Home program.

Everything has been built step by step: equipment, supplies, and simple adaptations, always with the same goal—to offer quality, close, and dignified service. Today, each appointment represents relief, dignity, and hope for people who cannot ask for help on their own.

The support of donors has been a seed that today is being transformed into health, well-being, and accompaniment for those who need it most. To continue investing in projects like this is to continue betting on a community that cares, accompanies, and transforms lives.

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