



*The job of the police should be to protect the people who live here—to help us...*



Testimonies from immigrant families whose lives have been changed by the policy of collaboration between the Philadelphia Police Department and Immigration Control and Enforcement



- *Juntos/ La Casa de los Soles*
- *New Sanctuary Movement*
- *Philadelphia Storytelling Project*



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## Guadalupe Hernández Testimony

My name is Guadalupe Hernández, and I'm forty years old. I have five children here in this country and one daughter in Mexico. I arrived in America in 1996. I left my country because of domestic violence, coming here supposedly to find refuge. I said to myself, "I'll go to the United States—there he won't chase me down, he won't find me. I'll bring my children and make a new life there."

My son was sixteen years old when he was arrested in January, 2007. There was this Mexican party and he had an older friend who was really plastered. My son tried to get him out of there, telling him, "You're stewed, I'm taking you home." His friend was really upset, and being drunk made him even more furious. They went over to Dickenson where it crosses Seventh, then his friend began slashing car tires. My son shouted for him to stop and tried to take away his switchblade. Then the neighbors saw them and called the police. There were witnesses who told the police that one person was running around stabbing the tires and the other person—my son—was shouting to stop. Then the police told my son that he was arrested, too, because he was an accomplice.

They told me he was arrested. I went to the police station, I think around Thirtieth Street, and I wasn't able to talk with him. I waited and waited, when I saw this person coming, all dressed up with a briefcase. He says, "Mrs. Guadalupe Hernández?" and I say, "Yes, that's me." He says, "Ahem, your documents." I tell him, "What kind of documents?" "Your papers." I say to him, "Look I don't have any, the only thing I have is documents from my country." "Do you know who I am?-- I'm from ICE." I tell him, "What have I done? Why did Immigration have to come? My son's not a delinquent." He says, "Everyone who ends up in jail has to go through ICE, they're interviewed by ICE. Listen: you and your son have an appointment tomorrow morning. If you don't go, ICE will be looking for you."

Then the next day we got up real early and went down to the Immigration office. They put us in a completely enclosed room, really isolated. And they asked me questions like when did I come to this country, how many times had Immigration caught me, and what brought me here from Mexico. I said, "My husband hit me all the time, he beat me. That's why I came--I came to hide."

What is my situation with Immigration now? Well, I'm a little hopeful, because I think that the judge won't be so hard-hearted to send me to my country. My fear is that the father of my children will look for me there, he'll kill me. In the case of my son, he left the police station with a clean record. He wasn't found guilty, because there were witnesses. When my son went to court the judge said he was innocent.

When all this happened, my children became frightened. If somebody knocked on the door real loud, they said, "Don't open it, mama, don't open it!"—because they thought that it might be Immigration coming to arrest us. They didn't even want to go out in the morning to go to school, because they were afraid that the police or ICE were outside waiting for them to leave. They said that Immigration was going to send us back to Mexico. My two older sons began to drink a lot. And the little one, who's seven years old, didn't talk about anything else in school, he told his teacher that he was going back to Mexico and Mexico was very poor. He didn't know if he was going to survive or not. The one who was arrested had a girlfriend, but the relationship between the two of them was destroyed because of his problems with Immigration. So he even ached more. He got involved in drinking, and I haven't been able to pull him out of it. As a mother it's too hard, too hard—to see your children suffer, and have all of this on your mind.

As far as my trust in the police—with what has happened, we're afraid to call the police. We're afraid because they're going to turn us over to Immigration. But now, personally, I don't have fear of the police. Fear is what conquered me. Now I can confront them without papers, I am not afraid of them, because the most difficult times have already passed. Fear makes us cowards. It's fear that kills us.