

Stories of Courage: Voices from the Journey

True accounts from students who fled violence and began again — shared as sacred invitations to listen, learn, and love.

At our Seeds of Exchange event, *The Welcome Table*, on October 18, we gathered with our dear friends from Hope Has No Borders and their founder, Andrea Ryall.

The day after our gathering, a soul sister named Nadia, who attended the event and serves as a principal at a local Denver school, reached out and shared something extraordinary.

She offered a collection of stories written by her students—children who have fled their home countries due to violence or insecurity in search of safe haven and a fresh start here in the United States. For their privacy and protection, their names have been removed; to honor their voices, we've not edited any of their words.

With Nadia's blessing, I asked if I could share these stories with our Seeds community.

I invite you to take a Place of Pause (a PoP) as you read.
Notice what stirs in your heart—what might be *meant for you* in their words.

We are also hosting a clothing drive for the children at Nadia's school.
To learn more or get involved, reach out to us [via email](#).

Read more about [The Welcome Table Seeds Fall gathering](#) on our blog.

Student #1

What challenge have you faced?

The challenge I had to face was... crossing a river was the hardest part.

It happened in the Darien jungle. My mom and I were approaching a place, and I slipped from my mom's arms. The person who rescued me was someone I didn't know who was with us, but thanks to him, I was safe. I felt like I was going to drown. We saw anacondas swimming by in the river, the size of a person and fat.

I saw a red and black snake enter a tent and kill a little girl. When the mother tried to defend her, it bit her too.

We slept in a tent, and at night we heard animal sounds near the tent. I felt like I was going to be eaten.

What had happened was that it had rained a lot that day and the entire jungle was flooding because there was a lot of mud on the jungle path.

What did you learn from that experience?

What I learned from this experience was that at any moment something can surprise you or happen to you.

Student #2

What challenge have you faced?

My challenge was to cross the Darien jungle, and to pass through so many countries without papers, afraid of being sent back.

And the hardest and most difficult thing of all is leaving your country to emigrate to another for a better life, without knowing when things will be better in your country and when you'll return, knowing that you have to leave everything behind.

My mom made a very risky decision by sending me to people I didn't know.

The Darien is a place where you see dead people, people dying by jumping into the river. People have to choose between crossing the very high mountains or crossing the river, and they think they can swim across. They don't understand that it's very deep, and it's hard to know that families are drowning, to know that there are people who can't get out, and children who are left without parents.

We had to cross a river that had too much current and while crossing it I was drowning, thank God some boys grabbed me and I was able to cross, after that moment I became terrified of crossing the water and every time I saw a river I started to cry, we were left without food and without water because I threw it away when the current almost took me, I got scalded from crossing so much river and it was such a horrible pain that I fainted and I just wanted to stay there but I had to continue so much that when I left the jungle I was left with a scar,

What did you learn from that experience?

What I learned was that we are stronger than we think, that we have to fight for our dreams and we don't have to give up.

Student #3

My journey in the jungle:

(Punctuation added to this story - otherwise, words are as written by the student.)

One day my mom told me, "Daughter, let's go to the USA, because here we are bad economically." So she got the money to come.

On November 21 we left our house to take a bus to Colombia. Then we took another bus to Medellin, Colombia. We stayed two days at my cousin's house. Then we took another bus that took us to a part of Colombia called Bajo Chiquito. There we waited three hours, and a boat came to pick us up, because where we had to go was by motorcycle for one more hour.

There we had to stay sleeping. We set up the tent, and my mom, at the stove, made food—instant soup. The next day we woke up at 5 in the morning. That day, which was November 27, was my mom's birthday. My mom bought me food, and it was 7 in the morning. We waited three hours and then started walking through the jungle.

There were a lot of people. The first day we walked until it got dark. I was very tired; my whole body hurt. The next day we woke up at 6 in the morning and we started to pray. We ate panela to have more strength. We started to walk, and after like five hours of walking, we saw a deceased person. All of us who were walking got very scared and started walking again until nightfall. We fell asleep.

The next day we stopped at 6 in the morning and we started to pray again, and we walked again. There was a river that was very high. Then there was an Haitian who was helping people cross. I was going to cross, and there was a rope, so I was holding onto the rope, but I couldn't hold on anymore and I let go, and the river was drowning me. My mom was crying and so was I. Then the Haitian came in and saved me, and I got out, and my mom started to cry and so did I. Then they let me go again and I could cross, and then my mom passed.

We stayed there until the next day, and again we started walking for about four hours. Finally, the torture of the jungle was over. We were in Panama, and we took a bus to Costa Rica. There we stayed at the house of a very good man.

After four days, we walked through an orange grove, and I fell and sprained my foot. We finished passing the orange grove and we passed by a place called Pajaro Negro. There we walked for about four more hours, and it was early in the morning, and again I sprained my foot. After that, we walked on the highway, and then a bus picked us up to Honduras.

There we stayed for one month in a shelter, and then we went to Guatemala. There in Guatemala I stayed for four months. Then in Mexico I stayed for nine days, and then I turned myself in to immigration. I stayed for eight days, and they released me in Texas. Then we took a plane to Denver, Colorado.

Student #4

What challenge have you faced?

Things are difficult in Venezuela. Getting basic resources like food and medicine is very difficult. And yes, I know Venezuela is rich in many things, but the government grab everything for them. Things are so difficult in Venezuela that my mom made the decision to leave the country.

The Darien jungle is a terrifying place for many of us. There are many rivers with great force and wild animals such as Crocodiles Snakes Jaguars and Monkeys mountains of very large stones and very dangerous cliffs.

Thank God I didn't see any deaths, but I did encounter a large, black Jaguar one night when we were camping in the jungle. At dawn, a large, black jaguar surprised us and passed by our tent. We were all surprised, but thank God it just went into the river.

We also had to go up and down a mountain that I had never seen as big and dangerous as that one.

What did you learn from that experience?

That we can overcome any barrier with God's help

With a positive mindset, determination, effort, and always keeping in mind that I can do it. And I do everything with the help of God.