

## **Autobiography of Rafael Josue Duran Guillen**

(Translated by Leslie Schuld from Spanish Original)

My name is Rafael Josue Duran Guillen. I was born October 14, 1991 in the municipality of San Rafael Cedros. At that time, it was not common for the women who were pregnant to be taken to a hospital to give birth and they looked for women who were dedicated midwives to help them. So that is how I was born in my home located in the village of Cerro Colorado, one of the villages that make up San Rafael Cedros.

I am a young man, tall, beige skin, black hair and brown eyes. Our family is made up of 10 children – 5 sons and 5 daughters. There were 6 boys, but my brother died when he was 18 years old. It was an irreparable loss. He died due to an accident. He worked loading sugar cane trucks and when the truck returned it had an accident which resulted in his death. It is worth mentioning that I am the second to last of the 11 children. I have a good relationship with my brothers and my sisters and we try to get along. Thanks to God, we don't have any rivalry or other types of conflicts among us. We know how to communicate and when there is a difference we dialogue and try to resolve the difference before it escalates into a bigger problem. My father has always been dedicated to agricultural work. Our food and nourishment depends on the cultivation of corn, beans, sugar cane and on occasion rice. My mother has always been dedicated to work at home as a housewife and has been the pillar of the family. My parents have always made sure we had everything we needed. There were very difficult times in the place where I grew up and they had to search for work to make sure there was sufficient food on the table. My grandparents were people who struggled, hardworking people, well known in the village for their efforts at the time. The major achievement of my grandfather was to work endlessly and tirelessly for potable water in the village, which contributed to the benefit and development of the community. He was the one who proposed the project and then worked tirelessly to implement the project which still functions in the community to date.

I started going to school in the neighboring community, El Espinal. There I went to first grade. I remember that I could not write and I remember making figures in my mind that were letters, but they were not correct. The teacher did not make any effort to teach and only dedicated her attention to those students who could already read and write. So when it was time to read, I was unable. It was difficult for me to learn and I flunked twice at that school. Then my parents enrolled me in the school in my village. There the teachers were different. They worked to ensure that each student was learning. That year I began to learn to read and write thanks to God I passed the school year. When I started junior high school (7<sup>th</sup> grade) I had difficulties with language. It was the only subject, I didn't understand. I was passed on my grade average with the condition that if I didn't get good grades, I would have to repeat the year. Thanks to God I put all of my effort to pass all of my classes. In ninth grade everything was different. We were 10 kids in the class, a very small class by ninth grade. The classroom where we had classes had a

damaged roof and when it rained, the rain came in the room and everything got wet. We had to cancel class if it rained. It was a sad reality in my little school.

In 2007 I left school because the economic resources in our family were very scarce and there was no possibility to send me to high school. Speaking with my family they told me to do the paper work and exam to see if there was a possibility of getting into the National Institute of the Municipality. I did everything possible to get in to school and thanks to God my mother heard about a scholarship program in the municipality. We communicated with the promoter of the CIS / Our Lady of Presentation scholarship program (Iris) and she gave us the application form. When I got approved to be part of the program, it was a great blessing because it would be one less expense for my family. The first year of high school, it was a very heavy load for me. It was a different atmosphere with a lot of subjects. In the first semester, I failed two classes, by just a few decimal points. I wasn't worried, because I would have time to make up the decimal point in the next semester. The second semester I was able to improve my grades and pass all of my classes for the year. I then passed all my courses throughout high school. I wasn't the worst or the best student, but I made my best effort. I asked for help from friends for my professional development. So that is how I graduated from high school. Then my friends started to do the paper work to apply for University of El Salvador. They asked me if I was going to go on to study at the university. In my mind, my family did not have the resources to help cover my costs at the university. At the moment when I got up my courage, I told my mom I wanted to go to the university. She told me there were no resources. But then some of my sisters that were working said they would help me cover some of the expenses. This motivated me. I had never imagined, I would be able to go onto the university to study. I applied again to the CIS/Our Lady of Presentation Scholarship program. And thanks to God, I again was approved to continue my university studies. I did all the paper work and exams required to get in the university. I took the exam to study journalism at the University of El Salvador. Unfortunately, since it is extremely competitive, I did not get in on the first exam, but since I got a good grade, I did not give up hope to pass the entry on the second round of exams. I assisted course every Sunday for five weeks to improve my grades on the University of El Salvador entrance exam. I went to take the exam with total confidence, but again I did not get a high enough grade to get in to study journalism. I did not lose hope, because I thought, I did not pass to study this career for a reason. I went to investigate which of the private universities had the lowest tuition fee and had careers that I would like to study. At that moment, I found the Pedagogical University of El Salvador. I signed up to study computers, but in the first semester, I realized that was not for me, and I switched my major to marketing. I continued my university life and thanks to God in 2016 I finished all my coursework. I am now in the process of graduating, which means writing a thesis and doing a 500 hour volunteer project that is documented to be able to graduate in 2017.

I enjoy helping others when I can and when people ask for help. I like listening to music, especially electronic music. I like to read articles related to my studies.

My shorter goal is to graduate from the university and to be able to help my family. I also want to help young people to overcome in their studies, as I am very aware that the only way for this country to get out of its crisis, is for the young people to prepare themselves. In the future, I would like to start my own business. I know if I make the effort, I will achieve this goal. I would also like to apply for a scholarship to study abroad, to be able to get a post graduate degree and help with the development of my country. Then, if God permits me, I would like to form my own family, as I know it is a fundamental base for the society. My main dream of graduating from the university will soon be achieved thanks to the scholarship program, which enabled me to form professionally and as a person. I am excited and honored to have been selected to be the promoter for the scholarship program, which I believe in, and fundamental to get me where I am. I want to help give other youth the same opportunity.