

**Family reunification and the disappeared children of El Salvador:
Quotes from the disappeared youth**

1. Pre-Disappearance

"I was a very playful child. I liked to play 'the little frog.' I was very tight with my dad."

-Female, 7 years old at disappearance, reunited with parents and siblings

"I was simply a boy who came from a place of low resources, although very beautiful because I had a family."

-Male, 5 years old at disappearance, reunited with father, uncles, aunts

2. Disappearance episode

"They shot my dad... I saw that his body was full of blood; that the blood did not stop running. When I saw him I started to shout. I said to him, 'Dad, don't die! Dad! Dad! You know that I can't be alone! Dad look—' Then my dad fell. He just took me by the hand and he said, 'Daughter, do whatever they [the soldiers] tell you.' Those were the last words that my dad said to me. Then about five minutes later two soldiers came and they started to torture my dad. They took off his clothes. With the same knife that my dad carried, they opened his throat. I shouted at them, that that were not going to do anything to me... It started to get dark. When I looked at my dad, they had slashed his throat. I could see that his heart still had life because the flesh of his heart was still beating... Then one of the soldiers came... .. I cried and the soldiers told me that they were going to take me to my mom. Then a helicopter was above us dropping bombs that were red color. The helicopter landed. They [the soldiers] put us [children] into the helicopter and took us to a military base."

-Female, 8 years old at disappearance, reunited with mother and siblings

3. Separation

"We saw each other as sisters. That was the nice thing about the orphanage. We created a family. But I tell you it hurt us to not have our parents because we always wanted to know about them. We dreamt of finding them, of knowing what happened to them, what our identity was. What was our origin?"

-Female, 7 years old at disappearance, reunited with parents and siblings

"A child needs the support of a mom and a dad. And if the parents aren't there, of a relative, or someone that helps them. It was very hard. We went to an institution where they raised us as orphans and no child likes that."

-Male, 5 years old at disappearance, reunited with father, uncles, aunts

"A mom should never leave her children abandoned. That's like, as they say, shedding blood. At least she could have taken us with her, but not to combat. It was very dangerous... The necessity to see my mom is vital, in a dream or in person."

-Male, 2 years old at disappearance, reunited with grandfather, aunts, uncles

4. Searching

"I wanted to meet my biological parents... I have had practically everything because my [adoptive] family has given me that... But I wanted to know my roots... There was a long period when they [Pro-Búsqueda staff] tried to convince me to have a reunion and to go see my biological family because I didn't want to see them. I reproached them for abandoning me. 'Why didn't they search for me?' I said to them [the Pro-Búsqueda staff]. It was a long process until I finally assimilated what happened and I accepted to meet them."

-Male, 2 years old at disappearance, reunited with parents

"I felt super excited to learn that I had family and that I was going to meet them."

-Female, 3 years old at disappearance, reunited with aunts

5. Reunion event

"When we arrived to my dad's house, my mind was zooming. There were times that I would pinch myself. I felt even frozen. I felt huge currents running in my body, as if it was boiling water that ran through me. I said to myself, my God, what's this going to be like? But the beautiful part was this: When my dad arrived, there were so many people. First Father Jon got out [of the car] and those words, I will never forget. When he says to my dad, 'Look, this is your son,'... Then my dad comes out to the road, to find me and hug me. The man was crying. 'You don't remember me?,' he says. 'I don't remember anything,' I say... Half an hour later, my mom came... I said to myself, 'This lady, what is she like?' A little short lady. They said to me, 'This is your mom.' She comes over and hugs me. I felt different. I felt as if there was a force, like a magnet that lifts you. When she hugged me and I hugged her, I felt so different..."

-Male, 5 years old at disappearance, reunited with parents and sister

"It [the reunion] was wonderful... I saw so many faces that said to me, 'You are going to be our son'... Uncles crying, cousins, aunts—gosh—I felt good. But in the middle of all that happiness I felt the pain of not seeing my mom. I wished I could be with her, tell her what these years have been like for me."

-Male, 2 years old at disappearance, reunited with grandfather, aunts, uncles

"I met my mom and there was a lot of crying... 15 years later. You can't explain how it feels. It's inexplicable to find my mom, my brother, others that were very poor. Gosh—it's hard. Believe me, it's hard."

-Male, 5 years old at disappearance, reunited with mother and brother

"When I met him [my dad] it was incredible because I realized that we are identical... I saw myself reflected in him."

-Female, 10 days old at disappearance, reunited with father, grandparents

6. Reunification

"I always felt alone. The fact of finding them [my sisters] does not mean that all filled all my emptiness. No!! Finding them just served to clarify my doubts and clarify my true identity."

-Male, 7 years old at disappearance, reunited with sisters

"What I saw was that the blood that one has—I don't know—it's as if I belong to that little group. That group of relatives is immense. Even though I haven't figured out what is uncle, cousin, grandfather, I am trying to figure out my identity."

-Male, 2 years old at disappearance, reunited with grandfather, aunts, uncles

"I don't want to say that if I had not found my family I would not have been successful. I had already made the steps on my part to go forward, but there is a part that is vital for one's development: to know the family, what is a family, how a family behaves. It is necessary to have a family, even if maybe it's not a very strong love. And the necessity was so big for us because of how we had grown up..."

-Male, 5 years old at disappearance, reunited with father, uncles, aunts

"I didn't feel normal... I'll be sincere with you. I didn't feel much happiness, like my mom did. I was accustomed to other things [in the orphanage]."

-Male, 5 years old at disappearance, reunited with mother

"It changed me a lot. Really I felt like an important person, since I had family. It filled everything that I lacked in life. Now I see that I am the most important person in the world to my parents."

-Female, 7 years old at disappearance, reunited with parents and siblings

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