

Running head: NARRATIVE EXPOSURE THERAPY HYBRID CASE STUDY

NARRATIVE EXPOSURE THERAPY:
THE HYBRID CASE STUDY OF “ANA”

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF APPLIED AND PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
OF
RUTGERS,
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
BY
ANGELICA PATRICIA TORRES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

MAY 2018

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011) on the post-traumatic symptomatology and sequelae of Latinx immigrants with complex trauma. NET was developed to meet the unique needs of individuals from non-western cultures who have experienced repeated trauma. It is an evidenced-based trauma-focused treatment characterized by the integration of emotional processing through imaginal exposure, and the documentation of past trauma through the creation of a comprehensive autobiographical narrative. The study provides an overview of NET and its empirical evidence, explores the burden of PTSD in Latinx communities, and illustrates key processes in the delivery of this treatment through a session by session analysis of how NET was implemented. Treatment considerations are demonstrated via the hybrid case example of “Ana” who serves as a vivid portrayal of a Latina psychotherapy client with PTSD consistent symptomatology stemming from both interpersonal violence and the immigration process. Ana’s composite case example is comprised of actual disguised psychotherapy cases this clinician has treated, as well as clinical examples of severe trauma found in relevant psychological literature. Demonstrating Ana’s NET course of treatment provides an avenue for describing relevant clinical issues related to the treatment of immigrant Latinx with PTSD. Using the pragmatic case study research format (Fishman, 2005), Ana’s case material is analyzed through qualitative processes and quantitative measures. It is proposed that the composite case of Ana illustrates that NET has the potential to be helpful in the treatment of Latinx immigrants suffering from PTSD related to interpersonal violence and its sequelae. This composite case study is designed to be a resource for therapists who seek to gain additional understanding of how to provide efficient and effective treatment for PTSD when working with Latinx clients. Additionally, this study provides

support of NET as a promising culturally sensitive practice in evidence-based treatments for PTSD. This dissertation concludes with a discussion about future areas of study and recommendations for practice when working with this population.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my dissertation committee, Monica Indart, Psy.D. and Daniel Fishman, Ph.D. Monica you have been an excellent chairperson and a wonderful mentor throughout my training at GSAPP. You have taught me how to use clinical practice to make a difference in the world at large; you have been and will continue to be a true inspiration. Thank you for your patience and continued support even in through the tough times. Dan thank you for your support, which began even before I ever set foot in GSAPP. You have taught me so much about the importance and value of an individual's experience and voice.

Thank you to the GSAPP faculty, students, and staff; you have each contributed in immeasurable ways to my growth as a clinical psychologist.

To my friends and co-workers thank you for your patience and understanding throughout this journey.

A special thank you to every single case that has granted me the honor of sitting across from them as they share the most personal and vulnerable parts of themselves with me. I do this work for you.

Paul, thank you for helping me keep my sanity through it all. Your unwavering support and love has been noted and deeply appreciated.

And last but not least, I want to thank my family. Mami, Papi, Diana, Angie, Patricio, Bayo, Kenya, Tany, Miti, Gaby y el resto de mi familia, gracias for su apoyo incondicional y todo su amor. Todos mis logros son gracias a ustedes.

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CHAPTER I

Case Context and Method

The Rationale for Selecting this Particular Client for Study

The demographic make-up in the United States is rapidly shifting. The U.S Census Bureau projects that by 2043 the U.S will become a majority-minority nation for the first time. They also project that in the next 50 years the Latinx population will more than double. Like others from all over the world, Latinxs migrate north in search of many things not least of which is safety. Many Latinxs leave their home countries looking for the peace and freedom not found at home. The violence they experience can come from different sources—the government/military as a result of civil war or unrest, the police, gangs, drug cartels, and even their own families. By the time they reach the U.S. many Latinx immigrants have endured multiple and repeated trauma experiences, some of which may have occurred on their journey across the border.

Like in other immigrant communities once individuals arrive in the United States many disappear into the hustle and bustle of cities and rural areas across the nation trying to build a new life in a new country. However, for many individuals the sequelae of their trauma experience follows them. This can be expressed through internal symptoms such as anhedonia, depressed mood, anxiety, irritability, distrust of people, worry and/or fear, as well as, outwardly expressed symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, exaggerated startle response, social withdrawal, irritability, and hypervigilance. Unfortunately, for many in these communities lack of access to healthcare—due to cost, time, and/or language issues—coupled with the persistent stigma of seeking mental health services makes engaging in psychological treatment extremely difficult. Although there is now considerable knowledge about the epidemiology and validity of post-traumatic stress across cultures, the personal meaning derived from the experienced trauma and

whether an individual has access to and seeks help and treatment does vary across cultures (Schauer, Neuner & Elbert, 2011). Developing and implementing treatment interventions with cross-cultural applications is imperative in today's global society. At this point in time in the United States there is a large need for research that provides a better and more holistic understanding of both the impact of trauma on Latinx immigrants and best treatment practices with Latinxs given the current political climate and anti-immigration sentiment felt across the country. Similar to refugee populations, Latinx immigrants with a complex trauma history, facing discrimination, and an uncertain future, can benefit from short-term treatment models that utilize practices that are culturally familiar and empowering to the individual. This study postulates that Narrative Exposure Therapy provides this and can be adapted to treat Latinx immigrants in community mental health settings.

In order to explore the therapy implications of using Narrative Exposure Therapy as the treatment modality when working with Latinx immigrants with post-traumatic stress symptoms a hybrid case example has been created. This hybrid case is a composite case informed both by actual disguised psychotherapy cases this clinician has treated, as well as, clinical examples from relevant psychological literature. As such, this composite aims to serve as a vivid portrayal of a Latina immigrant client who struggles with post-traumatic sequelae. Carefully describing the session by session course of treatment with this patient provides an avenue for describing key clinical issues that may arise when using NET with Latinx immigrants with PTSD. It is important to note that since no single case can illustrate the heterogeneity of experiences for Latinx immigrants, this hybrid case should not be interpreted as the sole representation of a Latinx immigrant with PTSD resulting from a complex trauma history.

With this study, my hope is to increase therapists' understanding of the effects of

complex trauma on Latinx immigrant clients, familiarize therapist' with the NET treatment approach, and explore how NET could be utilized and implemented as a treatment for trauma sequelae in Latinx clients. Ultimately with this study, my hope is to extend the current, albeit limited, research in this area to include a systematic case study of the treatment of a Latinx client presenting with trauma related symptoms and sequelae and treated with NET, a promising culturally sensitive psychotherapeutic approach.

This dissertation's structure follows the format of a traditional pragmatic case study, which includes: (i) a short description of the hybridized client; (ii) the case's theoretical guiding conception, in this case Narrative Exposure Therapy and associated literature review; (iii) a detailed assessment of the client's presenting problems, goals, strengths, and history; (iv) a treatment plan using guiding principles from NET; (v) a detailed description of the course of treatment session by session; (vi) a review of therapy monitoring and the use of feedback; and (vii) a final quantitative and qualitative analysis of the therapy outcome (Fishman, 1999). I review literature on the empirical support for NET and the burden of PTSD among Latinxs, as well as, describe what are currently thought of as best practices when working with Latinxs with PTSD. The pragmatic case study calls for the use of a qualitative, disciplined inquiry approach (Peterson, 1996), which allows treatment to be uniquely tailored to the client's psychological presentation and focus to be shifted according to the client's mental health needs. Within NET, the treatment in and of itself is uniquely tailored to the client's presentation—the length and focus of treatment is adjusted with each case to meet that client's trauma history. Quantitative data collected was used to inform the therapist and client of how well the treatment was working, however, since a semi-structured treatment model was being implement, the data could not be used to shift the treatment focus or implementation. I provide the reader with the fictionalized

results of quantitative measures in order to concretely demonstrate the client's level of distress and functioning at three different time points—pre-treatment, during treatment, and at the end of treatment. Although fictionalized data is used, this data reflects general patterns I have observed across treatment with Latinx immigrant clients.

In this study, I present a composite case that incorporated information of Latinx clients with a history of complex trauma, ages twenty-one through forty-five, for whom I have provided short- and long-term treatment in outpatient settings over my years as a doctoral-level graduate student. In particular, while completing an externship in a non-profit counseling center for refugee and asylum seeking communities a significant portion of my psychotherapy experience was focused on the treatment of Latinxs with a history of trauma, particularly intimate partner violence. The hybrid case presented in this study will focus on the experience of a Latina client with a history of complex trauma and experiencing PTSD symptomatology.

The composite clinical case in this study, hereafter referred to as “Ana,” is a thirty-four-year-old Latina who presents with symptoms of PTSD. Ana entered the United States illegally, petitioned for and was granted asylum to remain in the United States; at the time of treatment she was petitioning legal status for her children. Although she had been granted legal status and was no longer at-risk for interpersonal violence she struggled with the sequelae of the fourteen year trauma she endured. As a result she was experiencing significant symptoms or distress including persistent fear for her safety, as well as, difficulty in her interpersonal functioning.

The Clinical Setting in Which the Case Took Place

Ana's treatment took place at an urban counseling center within a nonprofit organization in the Northeastern United States. The treatment was provided at no cost to the client. Throughout my treatment of Ana, I was supervised by a licensed clinical psychologist trained in Narrative

Exposure Therapy. Ana's treatment lasted for nine weekly sessions, and was understood from the outset to be time- limited to approximately two months.

Sources of Data Available Concerning the Client

No information was available to me prior to beginning treatment with Ana other than basic demographic information. This was Ana's first experience with psychotherapy, and collateral information (e.g., from family members or medical providers) was not accessible nor acquired.

Confidentiality

Given that Ana is not in fact a real person, but rather a composite of multiple individuals, the confidentiality of my previous patients has be protected by adopting a pseudonym—"Ana." Additionally, parts of Ana's history and presentation have been fictionalized in order to further protect my clients' identities.

CHAPTER II

The Client

Ana, a thirty-four-year-old, separated, female from El Salvador, sought psychological treatment to address her history of trauma and depressed mood. She presented with symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5), including intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks, physiological reactivity to trauma-related stimuli, avoidance of traumatic reminders, detachment, anhedonia, and negative cognitions about self and others. Ana was a likable woman who from the start of therapy experienced depressed mood and was plagued by significant negative beliefs about herself, in particular, she struggled with feelings of self-blame and guilt associated to her trauma history and being separated from her family, including her children. This was Ana's first experience with individual psychotherapy. Our treatment spanned nine sessions over the course of approximately two months.

CHAPTER III

Guiding Conception and Review of the Literature

Guiding Conception

Overview of NET.

Narrative exposure therapy is a standardized, short-term treatment for post-traumatic stress symptoms. It was originally developed for the treatment of survivors of armed conflict, political violence and torture, however, the revised, second edition manual expands its target population to include victims of organized violence, continuous civil trauma, and family violence. Individuals who have experienced organized violence, continuous civil trauma, and family violence are often left feeling helpless for a prolonged period of time and may have difficulties with mental and daily functioning. This impairment in functioning often hinders individuals from reaching economic self-sufficiency, as well as, “social and economic reconstruction and development” (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011, p. 33). NET aims to provide a healing and time limited intervention that empowers survivors to live self-determined lives.

NET is based on the principles of Foa’s Prolonged Exposure Therapy (activation and modification of fear networks), autobiographical memory and the framework it provides in understanding intrusive symptoms, and Testimony Therapy (Robjant & Fazel, 2010). Emotional processing theories support the use of exposure therapy and suggest that habituation of the emotional responses is the mechanism that improves trauma-related symptoms. However, other theories suggests this is only one of such mechanisms and that the distortion of the explicit autobiographic memory of traumatic events leads to a fragmented or incoherent telling of these traumatic memories (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011). Testimony Therapy is a short-term treatment that aims to place the trauma within the cultural socio-political context in which it

occurred and allows for the construction of a coherent narrative of traumatic events (Robjant & Fazel, 2010). Testimony Therapy was developed in the 1980's in Chile to treat and give a voice to survivors of the Pinochet dictatorship; "the focus in TT is not on habituation but on the reconstruction of the shattered autobiographic memories of traumatic experiences" (Neuner, Schauer, Roth, & Elbert, 2002, p. 206). Narrative exposure therapy makes use of both emotional processing theories and narrative reconstruction. NET weaves habituation to emotional responses through exposure and the reconstruction of autobiographical memory through the creation of a coherent life narrative to target various mechanisms underlying the presence of trauma-related symptoms.

As explained in the manual developed by Schauer, Neuner, and Elbert (2011) a basic tenet of NET is the distinction between declarative 'cold memory' and 'hot memory'. Cold memory contains contextualized information about one's life at different levels of organization, with increasingly specific information at each stage. Hot memory is linked to the specific contextual memory and includes detailed sensory information, as well as, cognitive and emotional perceptions, and physiological and motor responses, all of which are intertwined (Schauer, Neuner & Elbert, 2011). One of the aims of NET is to improve the encoding of declarative autobiographical memory (cold memory) when trauma memories (hot memories) are triggered, basically the incorporation of cold and hot memories. This anchors the event in time and reduces the sense of current threat.

In NET the classical form of exposure therapy is adapted to meet the needs of individuals who have undergone repeated traumatization. Prolonged exposure therapy requires that the worst traumatic event the person has experienced be the focus of treatment. However, for many survivors, particularly those who have experienced continued civil trauma or family violence

identifying the single worst event can be very difficult (Halvorsen & Stenmark, 2010). Taking this into account, NET uses the chronicity of Testimony Therapy; “the survivor constructs a narrative of his whole life, and is exposed to all the traumatic experiences in his life through imaginal reliving instead of identifying a single event as a target in therapy” (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2005, p. 24)

NET works at the level of the individual by “encouraging the telling of the trauma story and by reliving the past traumatic sceneries within an imaginative exposure design.” (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2005, p. 2) The construction and organization of autobiographical knowledge is connected to personal goals and to basic beliefs about the self, therefore active emotional processing takes time and effort. Schauer, Neuner, and Elbert (2005) have found that many survivors have poor social support hold on to fragmented pieces of their history and explain this continued fragmentation as a consequence of that limited support. They suggest that these individuals have limited opportunity or encouragement to talk about the event, therefore do not have the opportunity for emotional processing and the chronological reconstruction of autobiographical memory (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2005, p. 21).

“A considerable number of people, especially those who suffer from PTSD, are unable to narrate their personal histories because of the pathological effects of the traumatic events on their memories. This puts them at a disadvantage in comparison to the perpetrators and bystanders who usually have no difficulties explaining their positions. Offering victims a means of processing their traumatic events and documenting their history can help to give them a voice within their society” (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2005, p. 23).

A post-modern approach.

According to Fishman (2005) the post-modern notion of ‘constructivism’ posits that “human knowledge is not a mirrored reflection of reality, but rather a constructed interpretation of the undifferentiated ‘flux’ of experience” (p. 5). It is argued that personal narratives are constructed and re-constructed throughout our lives and that they integrate multiple perspectives; these perspectives include time, culture, and the perspective of others. Personal narratives are adjusted across the life span to incorporate conflicts and achievements that arise as one enters/completes different life stages. In addition, cultural factors influence personal narratives. Culture forms a context through which individuals develop their identity, as well as, as a context through which responses to all events, including events perceived as traumatic, are viewed and judged. Furthermore, for Latinxs in the United States these narratives are influenced by language, values, and traditions of both the culture of origin and the host culture. Finally, personal narratives are also impacted by how others perceive and describe one’s experiences; this includes partners, children, parents, friends, as well as, systemic forces (government, religious community, school systems, etc.). Personal narratives are not static perspectives created and maintained in a vacuum. Instead they are co-constructed and adjusted as clients interact with others and with society as a whole—including the therapist. As such, Narrative Exposure Therapy provides an avenue for this normal process to occur within the context of a safe and therapeutic framework. NET is a collaborative construction of reality; collaborative meaning it is co-constructed by the client and the therapist.

Furthermore, NET was originally developed and studied in cultures in which oral tradition and storytelling are important. Through the use of storytelling, NET allows for the construction of an autobiographical narrative as one’s story gets told and retold. This process of

verbal expression also allows for the organic telling and understanding of traditional rituals of healing used in many cultures, including the Latinx culture, which individuals use to heal themselves. In such a model, it is crucial that the therapist has some knowledge of the individual's culture, while at the same time granting the client the opportunity of exploring it in detail without assuming that cultural knowledge means that culturally significant content does not need to be further expanded.

Review of the Literature

Empirical Support for NET.

Over the course of the last two decades support for NET has expanded greatly. Robust evidence for the effectiveness of using NET to treat trauma-related disorders has been found across different populations beyond the initially intended treatment group. A review of the emerging evidence for Narrative Exposure Therapy by Robjant and Fazel (2010) aggregated all the data of NET trials prior to 2010 and concluded that results from treatment trials have “demonstrated the superiority of NET in reducing PTSD symptoms compared with other therapeutic approaches” (p. 1030). They reviewed all NET trials both published and unpublished—a total of 9 trials conducted in a variety of settings and with a variety of populations. Trials had been conducted in both low/middle income countries (developing nations) and high-income countries (western nations) with asylum seekers, refugees and native populations. Six trials had been conducted in low- and middle-income countries and four studies conducted in high income countries. These studies compare NET to treatment as usual (combination of psychotherapy and/or medication), supportive counseling, or psycho-education. Robjant and Fazel (2010) concluded, “all studies show promising results in that NET is found to be an effective treatment for reducing symptoms and rates of PTSD as well as reducing co-

morbid disorders in some cases” (p. 1033). In addition, some trials had also found an overall increase in functioning among participants who receive NET as compared to those in other conditions. Furthermore, one of the trials studied the effectiveness of NET in the treatment of chronic PTSD among older individuals who met criteria for PTSD and who had endured torture and persecution 40 years prior to the study. NET was found effective in the reduction of PTSD symptoms among older individuals who had lived with decades of chronic PTSD (Bichescu, Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2006)

A case study conducted by Neuner, Schaeur, Roth, and Elbert (2002) of a client in a refugee camp for which other methods of stabilizing his personal and social situation had failed, found NET to be “superior to psychoactive medication, counseling and problem solving treatment” (methods previously used with the client) and did not observe any negative consequences of NET. It is important to note that although the treatment was considered successful it did not eliminate PTSD completely; a mild form of PTSD was still present right after treatment. Nevertheless, NET alleviated symptoms, particularly in the areas of dissociation and hyper-arousal allowing the client to function again (Neuner, Schaeur, Roth, & Elbert, 2002). Furthermore, a study conducted by Stenmark, Catani, Neuner, and Elbert (2013) in Norway looked at the feasibility of using the NET model to treat PTSD in general psychiatric health care units found that refugees and asylum seekers can be successfully treated with NET in such settings. NET resulted in clinically relevant symptom reduction of both PTSD and depression in this population, and significantly more symptom reduction when compared to treatment as usual (Stenmark, Catani, Neuner, & Elbert, 2013).

Volpe, Quinn, Resch, Douglas, and Cerulli (2016) looked at the feasibility and acceptability of utilizing NET to address mental health issues related to intimate partner violence

(IPV) in parenting and pregnant adolescents by hosting five focus groups in two community based agencies. They analyzed data from twenty-eight primarily African-American, female adolescents ages eighteen through twenty-one. The findings from their focus groups indicate that within this population, participants have favorable attitudes about NET that would aid in the implementation of NET within trusted community agencies. In particular, this study found that although adolescents expressed concerns about the potential emotional challenges associated with participating in this type of treatment, they also articulated hope that it could result in emotional relief and growth. Their findings also indicated the importance of establishing trust and a strong therapeutic alliance between the client and therapist as a way to increase engagement and therapeutic success (Volpe, Quinn, Resch, Douglas, & Cerulli, 2016).

A pilot study conducted by Steuwe et al. (2016) looked at the feasibility and effectiveness of using NET to treat patients with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and PTSD in an inpatient setting. The study treated eleven patients (one male, and ten females) with NET during a ten week inpatient program. Steuwe et al. (2016) found low drop-out rates and high acceptance of NET, with only one patient rejecting the treatment. Overall, the program was found to be feasible and safe among this population; the rate of self-harming behaviors remained low throughout the treatment phase and the treatment did not lead to aggravation in symptom severity post-treatment or at the twelve-month follow-up.

In 2017, Robjant, Roberts, and Katona conducted a retrospective audit of the treatment of ten female survivors of human trafficking with PTSD treated with NET. Ten women received and completed NET treatment at the Helen Bamber Foundation in London. Robjant, Roberts, and Katona (2017) found that prior to treatment, all ten clients were in the severe range for PTSD based on their PDS scores. At the end of treatment, their PDS scores ranged from mild, to

moderate, to severe. However, at three-month follow-up, the severity of their scores had decreased and actually ranged from mild to moderate, with no client scoring within the severe range on the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS). Quantitative assessment of the outcomes found that there was a significant effect of psychotherapy on PDS scores; a significant difference between PDS scores before treatment and directly after treatment, as well as, before treatment and three months after treatment. Although this was a retrospective audit limited by sample size the results are promising. It is also important to note, that none of the participants dropped out of treatment suggesting NET is tolerated and accepted by survivors of human trafficking (Robjant, Roberts, & Katona, 2017).

Currently, Mauritz et al. (2016) are conducting a study to evaluate NET in patients with severe mental illness and comorbid PTSD associated with repeated interpersonal trauma in The Netherlands. They postulate that there is already a large amount of evidence that supports the effectiveness and use of NET on several vulnerable patient groups with repeated interpersonal trauma histories. Mauritz et al. will use a mixed methods convergent study design where they will analyze robust quantitative data from repeated measures including the Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 (LEC), the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5 (CAPS), the Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (M.I.N.I.-plus), the Structure Clinical Interview for DSMV-IV Personality Disorders (SCID-II), the Health of the Nation Outcome Scale (HoNOS), the Camber Assessment of Needs (CAN), the Manchester Short Assessment of quality of life (MANSA), the Global Assessment of Functioning Scale, as well as, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to compare each individual's experienced symptoms, perceived care needs, and quality of life. This study, which is still being conducted aims to evaluate the effectiveness of using NET to treat comorbid disorders.

Recently, a multicenter, pragmatic RCT was also conducted to study the effectiveness of NET in the treatment for immigrant children with trauma histories. Kangaslampi, Garoff, And Peltonen (2015) proposed a study protocol that would study up to eighty immigrant children (ages nine to seventeen) who have experienced war and who have suffered from PTSD symptoms. They aimed to compare the primary outcomes of PTSD and depressive symptoms, psychological distress, resilience, and level of cognitive performance between the NET treatment group, the control group providing treatment as usual, and the waiting list group on (Kangaslampi, Garoff, & Peltonen, 2015). They also aimed to look at the effects of the intervention on traumatic memories and posttraumatic cognition as potential mechanism of change mediating the overall effectiveness of NET. Results from this study have not yet been published, but indicate the interest and investment in further researching and understanding the mechanism of change underlying NET.

NET has also been adapted for use with violent offenders and soldiers who are at high risk for repetitive aggression and who suffer from trauma-related disorders, to facilitate the transition and integration into society. “Narrative Exposure Therapy for forensic offender rehabilitation (FORNET) aims at reducing symptoms of traumatic stress and controlling readiness for aggressive behavior” (Hecker, Hermenau, Crombach, & Elbert, 2015). Hecker, Hermenau, Crombach, and Elbert (2015) posit that evidence from pilot studies have provided evidence that support the feasibility of FORNET. For example, the first RCT of FORNET was conducted with war-affected youth in the DRC. This RCT compared the results of fifteen ex-combatants who received FORNET to the outcomes of a matched controlled group who received treatment as usual in a reintegration center and found that although both groups reported a substantial decrease in appetitive aggression, only the group that received FORNET reported

reduction in PTSD symptoms and less contact with active and former combatants six months after the treatment ended. A different RCT conducted in a Burundian residential center for street children found that sixteen youth who received FORNET reported having committed significantly fewer offenses and presented with fewer physical health complaints four to seven months after treatment than the matched controlled participants. Hecker, Hermenau, and Elbert (2015) stipulate the need for further research and review several studies being currently conducted that may provide further evidence of the feasibility and effectiveness of FORNET for soldiers or veterans of war deployment.

The empirical support for NET continues to grow and existing treatment trials show promising results, however, further study of its effectiveness on different patient populations is needed. In particular, to date no study has looked at the feasibility or effectiveness of using NET to treat Latinxs with trauma-related disorders in the United States and this study aims to take the first step towards beaching that gap.

Burden of PTSD in Latinxs.

According to Eisenman et al. (2007) Latinxs and Latinxs immigrants may be at a higher risk for both exposure to trauma that may lead to PTSD and PTSD itself, however, not much research looking at how PTSD impacts Latinxs has been conducted. A systematic review conducted by Alcatara, Casemant, and Lewis-Fernandez (2013) found that the “conditional risk for PTSD—defined as the prevalence, onset, persistence, or severity of PTSD after traumatic exposure—is higher among Latinxs relative to non-Latinxs after accounting for sociodemographic factors. Their review found consistent support for elevated rates of PTSD onset and PTSD symptom severity among Latinxs.

Latinxs and Psychotherapy.

It is estimated that the current Latino population is now the largest minority group in the United States. The 2010 Census reports that the growth seen in the past decade was larger than expected in most states for Latinxs, a trend that they expect will continue for the next 50 years. Although small, the research exploring Latinxs as subjects has indicated that Latinxs have perspectives that differ from the mainstream perspective on stress and coping, manifestation of trauma symptoms, and treatment (Murcia, 2008). Despite life stressors and psychological suffering, Latinxs find it difficult to seek help; it has been suggested that this is in large part related to cultural and language barriers. In other words, “treatments are not being built on a set of ideas that complement their cultural traditions” (Murcia, 2008). Given that NET was developed as a treatment that understands the very complex and yet delicate relationship between culture, violence, trauma and treatment, and that it employs the common element of oral tradition found among many cultures, it is ideally suited for cross-cultural applications. Therefore, it may be a treatment intervention that compliments cultural traditions and overcomes language barriers, thereby, potentially increasing the use of mental health services among Latinxs.

CHAPTER IV

Assessment of the Client's Presenting Problems,

History, Diagnosis and Strengths

Presenting Problems

Ana presented for treatment to address her symptoms of PTSD, which she reported began after leaving her home country of El Salvador three years prior to presenting for treatment. Ana reported she began experiencing some of her presenting symptoms while still living in El Salvador but described her focus on survival as superseding all emotions and thoughts at that time.

Ana was detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents after crossing the border illegally three years prior to presenting for treatment. She was detained for three months while awaiting deportation at a detention center in Arizona. Ana described feeling terror at the possibility of being returned home to her husband who physically and sexually abused her and terrorized her for approximately fourteen years. Ana requested asylum and was released pending appearance in immigration court. Ana was experiencing intrusive memories (multiple times per day), flashbacks, and nightmares (several times per week) about the abuse she endured and the violence she was exposed to in El Salvador. Whenever Ana discussed the details of her abuse she would feel disconnected from her emotions and at times even her body (dissociative reaction). When this occurred, Ana's body would visibly tense up and she would sit and stare out with a distant look on her face. She would also stop responding or limit her responses to one-word answers. This dissociative reaction was particularly problematic throughout her long asylum process. Nevertheless, Ana was granted asylum approximately one year before presenting for treatment.

Ana described being generally unable to fully enjoy life and having little interest in participating in activities she used to enjoy, such as, attending church services, cooking, and interacting with family and friends. She described feeling detached from those around her. Her brothers had commented several times that she was no longer the fun and easy-going sister they remembered. Ana was often burdened with negative self-thoughts and feelings including self-blame for dating her husband and for not leaving him sooner. She also felt incredibly guilty for leaving her children in El Salvador under the care of her sister-in-law. She felt guilty for missing important milestones in their lives. In addition, the initial uncertainty of her legal situation and the subsequent prolonged petition process made it particularly difficult for Ana to be away from her children.

Ana had difficulty talking about her history with providers and avoided talking about herself and her history all together with people in her community. Her reasoning for this resistance was twofold: firstly, she was afraid it would trigger a negative emotional reaction, and secondly she was afraid that someone in her community would recognize her. She was preoccupied with fear that her husband would find out where she was. She also experienced an ongoing sense that there was a “negative presence lurking” in the dark waiting to hurt her; she experienced hyper-vigilance and an exaggerated startle response whenever she was out in public spaces. This sense of impending danger along with the nightmares she experienced kept her up at night; Ana was having difficulty falling asleep and sleeping through the night. She reported her nightmares often consisted of being choked, chased, or being sexually assaulted by a dark figure she could not identify.

Relevant Personal History

Ana grew up with her mother, father, and five younger siblings in the small town of Santa

Ana in El Salvador. Her father “disappeared” when Ana was five-years-old after he was dragged out of their home by military personnel. After her father’s disappearance her mother was forced to move to the capital city of San Salvador to make ends meet. Her mother left Ana and her siblings with their grandmother and aunt. Growing up during the civil war, Ana described witnessing much violence and death. At age twelve she and some of her siblings were reunited with their mother in San Salvador. Ana began helping by waitressing in her mother’s small restaurant.

While working after school at the family restaurant when she was sixteen-years-old, she met and began dating a local police officer; he was nine years her senior. Soon after they began dating he asked to marry her; her mother knowing that she still had five others siblings to care for, allowed Ana to marry him. Her husband Jose was originally from a small town called San Luis del Carmen; soon after they got married Ana became pregnant and he moved her to his hometown to live near his family. Early on in their marriage, Jose began physically and sexually abusing her, usually when he was drunk. She described one occasion where she was repeatedly hit and kicked in the stomach when she was eight months pregnant with her first son.

Ana had her first son when she was eighteen-years-old. Over time the domestic violence increased in its frequency and intensity and was triggered by what she described as insignificant events, such as, forgetting to lock the door. Ana was expected to cook and clean for her small family, as well as her husband’s larger family. Ana described feeling very isolated and unsupported; her in-laws overlooked the abuse and sometimes even instigated it. Ana later learned that her husband had witnessed domestic violence growing up; his father would often beat his mother in front of him and his siblings. Ana kept to herself and did not share her problems or feelings with her family because she did not want them to worry.

When Ana's son was approximately five-years-old, after Jose prevented Ana from being at her mother's side as she passed away, Ana decided to leave him. She waited until he returned to his post away from home and she left with her son. She hid in her great-aunt's house for many months. She disclosed the abuse to her family who supported her decision to leave and helped her until she was able to get back on her feet. Ana was approximately twenty-three years old, had not finished high school and lacked employable skills; it was difficult for her to find work but she eventually began working in a clothing manufacturing plant where she learned to sew. Ana enrolled her son in school and was able to rent a small apartment; she began making friends and having a social life. Ana started a second romantic relationship and had a daughter at the age of twenty-four. Although the relationship did not work out, they maintained an amicable relationship. Things went well for Ana for approximately three years until one day she was recognized on the street by her husband's old partner. A few weeks later Jose showed up and forced her to return home with him to San Luis Del Carmen.

Ana and her children returned with Jose to their old life in San Luis Del Carmen. However, the abuse grew more severe because her husband did not trust her. Jose threatened to kill her and harm her family if she left him again. In one particularly traumatic incident of abuse, Ana described being forced to watch her husband point his gun at her daughter and then at her own head; she feared for her life and the life of her children. Ana described knowing their lives were in danger and she had to escape. One morning while he slept Ana left again with her children and hid at her aunt's house. Her husband and other police officers threatened Ana's family and tried to intimidate them into telling him where she was. Ana's family filed a complaint with the police department but little was done on their behalf.

A few months after leaving Jose for the second time she immigrated to the United States

seeking safety away from the abuse. Ana decided to cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally and left her children with her sister-in-law. She described her immigration experience as a long and difficult journey. Ana crossed the desert with a group of people that included women and children. She witnessed someone die of exhaustion and dehydration during her journey. She reported that soon after crossing the border her “guides” disappeared and her group was apprehended by Customs and Border Protection officers (CBP). Ana was detained and was held in detention for three months. While in the detention center, Ana met a woman who encouraged her to request asylum. Due to her pending asylum case Ana was not deported back to El Salvador, and instead was released under the care of a family member to N.J.

Ana engaged in treatment one year after being granted asylum. At that time, she was living with her two brothers in a small basement apartment and working part-time as a waitress in a small restaurant. Ana saved most of her earnings and sent them back home to help support her children.

Medical History

Throughout her life Ana had not received ongoing medical care; even during her pregnancies she received limited medical care. The first time in many years that Ana had a medical check-up was while in detention. Ana complained of recurrent headaches and insomnia; she was seen by a nurse who determined from basic lab work that Ana had high cholesterol and who recommended she pursue a physical examination by a Primary Care Physician upon her release. Ana did not immediately follow up with a doctor after being released from detention due to lack of medical coverage and limited financial resources. The nonprofit organization that Ana was working with helped her apply and receive Charity Care from a local city hospital. Ana was able to receive primary care services, education about nutrition and exercise, and

pharmacological treatment for hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol) at a low cost. She also received a referral for her first gynecological appointment

Presentation at the Beginning of Therapy

Ana presented for treatment in 2014; she was thirty-four-years old. This was Ana's first experience in therapy. At the start of therapy, Ana presented with depressed affect and a sense of helplessness. Although Ana had been granted asylum she had not yet reunited with her children and she felt she had little control over her future. She shared many negative thoughts about the world, including that the world is an "unsafe place" and that "no one could be trusted." Ana expressed a deep desire to go back to being the person she used to be but had little hope that her situation would improve.

Quantitative Assessment

Given that Ana was experiencing symptoms of PTSD, the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) was administered. The PCL-5 is a twenty item self-report measure designed to assess the twenty DSM-5 symptoms of PTSD with a score range of 0 to 80. At this time the authors suggest using a cut-off score of 33 as clinically significant until further psychometric work is done; initial psychometric evaluation of the PCL-5 for *DSM-5* found strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$), test-retest reliability ($r = .82$), and convergent ($r_s = .74$ to $.85$) and discriminant ($r_s = .31$ to $.60$) validity (Blevins, Weatherz, Davis, Witte, & Domino, 2015). Ana initially scored a fifty-three on the PCL-5 measure which is considered clinically significant; all of her PCL-5 scores can be found in Table 1.

In order to assess Ana's general distress level and her satisfaction regarding interpersonal relationships, the Outcome Questionnaire-45 (OQ-45.2) was administered. The OQ-45 is a forty-five item, self-report measure that has a total score and three subscale scores: Symptom Distress,

Interpersonal Relations, and Social Role (Lambert et al., 1996). Ana's OQ-45 results are presented in Table 3. At the start of treatment, Ana's total score on the OQ-45 was one-hundred and-seven, her symptom distress (SD) score was sixty-six, her score on the interpersonal relations score (IR) was twenty-eight, and her social relations (SR) score was thirteen; all of these scores are considered clinically significant.

Given the overall disruption that PTSD symptoms can have on an individual's quality of life the Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) was administered as well. The QOLS is a sixteen item self-report measure adapted by Burckhardt and colleagues from Flanagan's original fifteen item Quality of Life Scale (QOL) for persons with chronic illness. The original QOL has been found to be internally consistent ($\alpha = .82$ to $.92$) and had high test-retest reliability over three weeks in stable chronic illness groups ($r = 0.78$ to $r = 0.84$); these reliability estimates have also been replicated for the sixteen item scale ((Burckhardt and Anderson, 2003). According to Burckhardt and Anderson, this scale measures five domains of quality of life: material and physical well-being, relationships with other people, social, community and civic activities, personal development and fulfillment, and recreation; this measure can be used to track a client's progress in regards to how they perceive their own quality of life. The possible range of scores on the QOLS is sixteen through one-hundred-and-twelve, with the lowest score indicating very low quality of life, and the highest score indicating completely satisfying quality of life. Ana's initial QOLS score was forty-eight; all of her QOLS scores can be found in Table 4. Ana's initial QOLS was lower than the average found in healthy individuals, as well as, lower than the average QOLS found in Israeli individuals with PTSD.

Ana completed these three quantitative measures during the pre-treatment assessment session, in mid-treatment, and during the last treatment session. These assessment tools can

provide valuable information about the patient's initial presentation, as well as, her progress throughout treatment. The initial scores on each of the measures were consistent with Ana's qualitative presentation. For example, Ana's high score on the PCL-5 was higher than the suggested cutoff point and very consistent with her endorsement of multiple moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD such as intrusive memories, flashbacks, and nightmares. In addition, Ana's high score on the OQ-45 symptom distress scale coupled with her overall high score in the QOLS measure were consistent with her report of how much these symptoms impacted her overall functioning. Although these measures can be particularly helpful in guiding treatment by providing useful information as to what symptoms and areas of the client's life are improving or remaining stagnant, the short-term nature of NET, and Ana's nine week treatment made it difficult to administer these measures on more than three occasions. Furthermore, given the semi-structured focus of NET provided less opportunity to change the nature or focus of treatment in response to Ana's scores on these measures. As such, the measures provided more of a snapshot of how Ana was doing pre-treatment, mid-treatment, and at the end-treatment. Furthermore, the initial and post scores were particularly helpful in quantitatively evaluating the effectiveness of the treatment.

Diagnosis

At the beginning of treatment Ana met DSM-5 criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Ana was a survivor of intimate partner violence, which she endured for approximately fourteen years (criterion A). In the year prior to beginning treatment, Ana had been experiencing intrusive memories, nightmares, and dissociative reactions (criterion C and B). She had also been avoiding thoughts related to her trauma and external reminders of her trauma such as conversations about her history, situations that involved domestic conflict (i.e. walked out of her apartment when she

heard the neighbors arguing), and men that looked or reminded her of her husband (criterion C). She had also been feeling alienated from others, experiencing self-blame and negative beliefs about herself, diminished interest in activities she used to enjoy, and persistent fear, horror and anger (criterion D). She also endorsed hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, and an exaggerated startle response (criterion E). These disturbances were not due to another medical condition, substance use, or medications (criterion H). Furthermore, the breakdown of Ana's initial response profile on the PCL-5 also supported a diagnosis of PTSD (see Table 2).

Strengths

Ana presented with many strengths. She demonstrated motivation and engagement from the start of therapy; she was always on time and did not miss any scheduled sessions. She was highly invested in treatment and demonstrated good problem solving skills; Ana was able to work out a schedule change with her boss in order to safeguard her weekly psychotherapy appointment time. Ana also demonstrated good interpersonal skills and was well liked by people. Although she felt disconnected from people, she continued to maintain regular contact with her family and children via telephone and Skype. Furthermore, Ana presented with great resiliency, she remained emphatic with others and expressed desire to improve her life even though she had a difficult time envisioning such change.

CHAPTER V

Case Formulation and Treatment Plan

Formulation

At the start of treatment Ana was a 34-year-old woman with a history of multiple traumas beginning at the age of five who met criteria for PTSD. Through the lens of NET, Ana's trauma-related symptoms are conceptualized as a consequence of physiological changes in the brain that occur as a result of noradrenergic responses to stress and that have impacted her ability to encode trauma related memories. When stress occurs during life threatening events and subsequently in the re-experiencing of these in PTSD, the functioning of the hippocampus is significantly impaired by the release of stress hormones. At the same time the amygdala is intensely activated, resulting in an accentuated sensory representation of the event. This disproportional engagement of the neural structures means that memories for traumatic events differ from normal memories in that they include increased number of cues and the association between these cues are stronger; therefore, these traumatic memories can be more easily activated. The reduced functioning of the hippocampus means that spatio-temporal information of trauma events is not incorporated into the memory well, making it hard for Ana to narrate the event and leading to fragmentation. Lack of contextual information also means that Ana maintains a sense of current threat (Robjant & Fazel, 2010, p. 1032).

Treatment Plan and Treatment Goals

Ana's treatment plan was structured to follow the NET format. NET is a short-term treatment approach that has been tested with varying lengths of treatment; the number of sessions required depends on the patient's presentation, as well as, the setting where the treatment is being conducted (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011). Although there is flexibility with length of

treatment it is recommended that the number of sessions be determined before treatment starts. Ana's treatment included one pre-treatment assessment session followed by eight sessions of NET treatment over the span of approximately nine weeks.

As previously discussed in Chapter III, NET is guided by the principles of exposure therapy, autobiographical memory, and testimony therapy. It is important to note that NET is not a manualized approach, it is a set of guiding principles. Because the experiences of individuals with complex trauma can vary greatly, NET provides important information that helps guide the therapist on how to conduct imaginal exposure and simultaneously co-create the client's autobiographical narrative, while allowing flexibility within the treatment to meet the client's needs based on his or her particular trauma history. NET does not provide a step-by-step fully structured approach to treatment.

List of Treatment Goals.

Treatment Goal 1: To build rapport and create a safe therapeutic environment.

Because Narrative Exposure Therapy requires the client to discuss openly and fully every traumatic life event, it is important to build rapport and create a safe environment that would help Ana feel as comfortable as possible sharing intimate and difficult trauma memories and associated symptoms. I aimed to foster this by openly and explicitly introducing myself, my background and my interests, as well as, reassuring Ana that she could speak openly about anything, including distressing memories, without fear of judgement or concern of overwhelming me.

Treatment Goal 2: To provide a clear rationale for treatment.

Given that the intensity of exposure treatment and that this was Ana's first therapy experience, it was be very important to fully explain the rationale for treatment, to fully explain

the treatment model (NET), to discuss empirical support for NET, to be explicit about the treatment expectations and possible side effects, as well as, to provide psychoeducation about PTSD and her symptoms at the start of treatment.

Treatment Goal 3: To gain a clear understanding of Ana's diagnostic picture.

In order to make sure that NET was properly administered and that Ana's treatment needs were being appropriately met it was important to have a full and clear understanding of her diagnostic picture, including the presence, intensity and frequency of symptoms and the areas of her life that were being negatively impacted by these symptoms. This was achieved by conducting an in-depth clinical interview, as well as, with the administration of three quantitative measures prior to the start of treatment.

Treatment Goal 4: To create a cohesive autobiographical narrative.

By creating a safe space with a strong therapeutic alliance and a clear understanding of what the treatment would look like, Ana should be able to engage in treatment and fully participate in the co-creation of a complete, chronological autobiographical narrative that includes all of her major positive and negative life events. This will aid in the reduction of fragmentation.

Treatment Goal 5: To decrease Ana's avoidance of trauma memories through emotional processing, habituation and cognitive restructuring.

In NET Ana will actively engage in imaginal narrative exposure of the various trauma events she has experienced thus facilitating emotionally processing and habituation of conditioned negative emotional responses, ultimately gaining mastery over these trauma memories. As such, the intense activation caused by these memories should decrease, and reliance on avoidance to manage this activation should also decrease.

Treatment Goal 6: To decrease Ana's PTSD symptoms below the PCL-5 suggested cut-off for PTSD (<33).

A treatment goal for Ana was to lower her PCL-5 score below the suggested cut-off score of 33 which would indicate a decrease in severity and frequency of PTSD symptoms.

Treatment Goal 7: To decrease Ana's distress level to an OQ-45 score in the "less than clinical significance" range.

A treatment goal for Ana was to lower her score on the OQ-45 to the sub-clinical range across all of the OQ-45 scales (including the total score, as well as, subscale scores). Ana's sub-clinical scoring on this measure would suggest a decrease in the level of distress caused by her symptoms, as well as, improvement in her interpersonal relationship and social functioning.

CHAPTER VI

Course of Treatment

Ana participated in a total of nine weekly meetings that included a pre-treatment assessment session followed by eight sessions of NET. In this Chapter the format and content of each session will be reviewed beginning with the pre-treatment assessment session. The pre-treatment assessment session was used to gather diagnostic information, establish rapport, provide psycho-education about PTSD and provide a clear rationale for treatment. NET treatment started in session one with the creation of Ana's lifeline. This session served to further establish rapport, familiarize Ana with the structure of the treatment, and to create a roadmap that outlined Ana's major life events which guided subsequent treatment sessions. Session two through eight were characterized by the implementation of narrative exposure. For these sessions I have included the autobiographical narrative that was co-created in each session, followed by a review of that session's key points. It is important to note that beginning in session three, the autobiographical narrative created in the previous session was read out loud at the beginning of the session to facilitate habituation; Ana was encouraged to make any changes or add details that were missing. After a review of the narrative to date, the session picked up where the narrative left off the previous session and the chronological narration of Ana's life continued. The same structure was followed in session eight, however, at the end of the session the entire autobiographical narrative that was co-created in treatment was read out loud and signed by Ana, as it is done in Testimony Therapy (see Appendix A). This termination session also included Ana's review and reflection of treatment outcomes.

Pre-treatment Assessment Session: Diagnosis and Psycho-education

As with any other client I treat I started the pre-treatment assessment session by providing a short introduction, including my name and status as a graduate student at Rutgers University. With Ana I also disclosed my bilingual and bicultural background to increase her level of comfort and build rapport. I explained the limits to confidentiality as a psychologist in training, ensuring her that information about her treatment and life will only be reviewed with the supervising psychologist. I then explained the purpose of the project, as well as, my ethical stance to first and foremost help facilitate a healing process. In order to gain a better understanding of the occurrence of PTSD symptoms, as well as, the presence of any other symptoms, I asked Ana to complete the PCL-5 and the OQ-45 explaining that often people who have experienced multiple traumas experience a range of psychological symptoms. I also asked Ana to fill out the QOLS explaining that I am interested in understanding what areas of her life are currently being affected and her overall satisfaction with life. The session was followed by a diagnostic interview. Although Ana completed the self-report questionnaires with little problem, she became increasingly hesitant and guarded during the clinical interview. Noticing her discomfort, I asked her what it was like for her to share with me about the symptoms she had been experiencing. Ana explained that she grew up in a family where they didn't really discuss negative experiences or feelings. She added that even now as an adult she has not shared what she is going through with her brothers' even though she lives with them because she doesn't want to worry them. Ana then very shyly added "plus I don't want people to think I am going crazy." I acknowledged how difficult it must be for her to share such personal information with a stranger; information she feels embarrassed about and which she has not shared with others before. In validating Ana's reaction I hoped to convey my respect for her experience, as well as,

my ability to be attuned to her experience during our interactions. Ana's disclosure also provided the perfect opportunity to shift the focus of the session from diagnosis to psychoeducation in an effort to clearly explain her diagnosis, normalize her symptoms, and legitimize her experience.

I marked this shift by reassuring Ana that although she may think she is going crazy what she is experiencing is actually experienced by many people who have survived trauma and that there is a name for it—post-traumatic stress disorder. In order to gauge how much psychoeducation was necessary I asked Ana if she had ever heard of PTSD and if so what her understanding of it was. Ana averted her gaze and quietly answered “no I have never heard of that... do you think that is what is going on with me?” I explained to Ana that her symptoms are actually an adaptive response gone awry and proceeded to explain how this happens in PTSD. I paused and asked Ana if what I had just explained made sense so far and asked her to share with me her understanding of what I explained. She stated, “When you go through something horrible like what I have been through, you just want to survive. My body and mind are now confused and think I am still in danger and so they still act the same as when I was in danger. Also my mind is trying to make sense of what happened that's why I keep thinking about it day and night and no matter how much I try to push the memories away they just keep coming back.” I nodded my head as she explained what she understood to encourage her. When she finished I proceeded to reflect back what she said by stating, “That's exactly it, in dangerous situations the main focus is survival.” Then I elaborated by adding “after the danger our body and mind can get confused and continue trying to protect us, while at the same our mind is trying to understand what happened.” It was important in this moment for Ana to understand the connection between her trauma experience and her current symptoms to help dispel the notion that she is “going crazy.” I

then explained to Ana how in therapy we will explore these memories together and eventually give her mind a chance to understand and put together these fragments into a cohesive picture.

I went on to explain the theory behind NET, as well as, what would be expected of her if she agreed to continue. I emphasized that although she has been actively and even at times successfully avoiding these painful memories, in order for the treatment to work she would need to be willing to talk about them in detail and feel them while in the room with me. I explained that in order to heal she must first access the fragmented memories—all the thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations—in order to explore them as completely as possible. I reassured her that I would be there with her and will make sure that she returns to a comfortable place before we finish each session. Ana looked very pensive and asked me, “and this will help me?” I proceeded to use an analogy to help explain how exposure can be therapeutically helpful. “You were left with a wound that cannot heal properly. Like a broken bone if it is not treated, every time you touch it, it hurts and overtime you learn how to avoid the pain. However, when a doctor resets it and puts in a cast it has a chance to heal; this resetting can be very painful but it allows for the bone to heal correctly in the long run. Similarly, in order for you to heal you have to face the pain and construct a complete story that describes your life in detail. It should include all the happy times, as well as, the painful and traumatic things you have experienced. As we retell it some of the bad feelings will subside and some of the pain will go away making room for healing.” It was imperative in this moment to be clear with Ana that this treatment would not be easy and would require hard work, while at the same time maintaining hope in the room that this treatment could improve her life. Ana became more curious and asked questions about the length of treatment, and what each session would look like. She also expressed some worry and hesitation about engaging in something that would be painful. After all, for years she had been

trying to avoid the painful memories I was asking her to explore in detail. It was crucial to acknowledge and normalize the anxiety she was feeling, while at the same time reassuring her that she would not be alone because I would be with her every step of the way.

I answered all of her questions until we both felt she understood what the process would be like, as well as, what our mutual expectations of each other would be. I briefly explained that the next time we meet we would construct a road map of her life in chronological order to help guide the rest of the treatment. The reasoning for giving Ana a heads up of what the next session would entail was twofold—first I wanted to be transparent and offer her a sense of control as she embarked on a new and unfamiliar experience; secondly I wanted to further establish rapport and trust. In addition, I made sure to use the word “we” as often as possible to emphasize that the treatment is collaborative and that this is not a treatment where I would be doing something to her but one in which we would both be active participants.

Before the session ended I introduced and had Ana practice a short deep breathing exercise, as well as, a visualization exercise. I explained the rationale behind these exercises and how these tools can help her physically calm down when she is feeling overwhelmed with emotion. Although this is not explicitly a part of the NET process it is a clinical decision I made in an effort to give Ana concrete tools to deal with some of her symptoms. The rationale for introducing these exercises was to arm Ana with some tools she could utilize in between sessions as this type of trauma treatment can be very activating; in addition I wanted to

Session 1: Lifeline Creation

The second meeting took place one week after the pre-treatment assessment session; this was the first treatment session and it was approximately ninety minutes long. I began the session by providing Ana with the opportunity to ask any questions that may have lingered from our first

session, and to voice any concerns she may have. Ana was tearful and stated that she was scared but also tired of living the same nightmare every day. I acknowledged Ana's cautious optimism and reassured her that she will not be alone throughout this process. I explained to Ana how we would visually set up her life "story" in chronological order using a long piece of yarn to represent the river of life, and other symbols to represent both positive and negative major events in her life. I pulled out some flowers and stones of various sizes and explained that the stones would be used to represent negative/traumatic events and the flowers would be used to represent positive events she has experienced. I made note of the various sizes available for her use and explained that the larger flowers and larger stones can be used to represent really happy and really traumatic events throughout her life. I reminded Ana that although there may be certain events that will bring up a lot of feelings, in this session we would focus on creating a chronological map of her life; we would be laying out a map that would help guide us as we explore her life in future sessions. I reassured her that there would be ample opportunity to talk about these feelings in future sessions.

We began with her birth and marked it in space and time by placing a pink flower and writing the date, place of birth, and parents' names on a post-it that was placed to the right of the flower. Ana wanted to include her parents' names when marking this moment in her life; she explained that her life and her life story is not hers alone but rather a continuation of the intertwining lives of her parents and ancestors. This beautiful interpretation of her life in the context of time allowed me an opportunity to connect the reasoning behind NET with one of the most important motivators for Ana—her children. I told Ana that her story will continue with her children and that in order for them to understand where they come from she would first have to have a clear and complete understanding of own life story.

Ana continued to place the symbols with brief descriptions uninterrupted and was able to remain in a calm state for the most part. However, when she placed the rock that symbolized meeting her husband Ana began to get agitated and immediately started to discuss the regret she felt and how much she wished she had not met him. In that moment I had to interrupt Ana, validate how difficult it is to talk about painful memories, while at the same time reminding her of the task at hand. I explained that she will have time to discuss in further detail her memories and reactions to each important moment in her life in future sessions. Ana looked down and softly apologized for “messing up.” In that moment, Ana’s tendency to feel ashamed and guilty for disappointing others became clear. It was important to clarify that I was not reprimanding her and to remind her that this is her treatment and that we are partners in the process. I explained that it is normal to want to dive right in since she has been holding all of these memories to herself for a long time. I emphasized that my role is to help guide her and keep us on track; I forewarned her that I will have to interrupt, redirect, or push her to share more at different times throughout treatment.

Throughout the rest of the session, Ana completed her lifeline. Ana struggled in the second session with identifying and pinpointing major events in her life. Given her history of complex trauma and the repetitive nature of abuse in interpersonal violence, Ana has experienced multiple traumatic events making it difficult at times to differentiate which was more important or impactful. As a result, on her lifeline Ana used time periods rather than specific dates to symbolize the trauma related to ongoing partner violence; these periods of time were visually represented with stone clusters (see Figure 1). With reassurance and guidance Ana was able to identify some major events that were particularly traumatic and, or had long-term consequences in her life; these were then represented by larger stones on her lifeline.

Once the lifeline was completed and before packing away the materials, I took a picture of the lifeline to be used as a visual aid that would help guide treatment and would help me anticipate traumatic events in future sessions. I asked Ana if she would like a copy of the picture as a visual representation of her life. Ana did not want a copy of the picture at that time but stated that perhaps she may want it in the future. I explained that I we would be packing the materials used to create her lifeline into a box for her to keep at the end of treatment and that I would also include this picture in her box. As we neared the end of the session, and given her reluctance to accept the picture I asked Ana to spend a few minutes reflecting on what this process was like for her. As she examined the lifeline laid out in front of her and slowly put each piece into the box, Ana discussed feeling sad that her life had been filled with so much pain and suffering. I made a note of this and wondered whether her perception would change after the completion of NET.

Session 2: Trauma begins early

Narrative. *I was born in Santa Ana on May 15, 1980. I am the third of six children. I have 2 sisters and 3 brothers. My parents were Maria Fatima and Luis Alberto. Mami was a stay at home mother until my father died. My father was a teacher and used to teach math in the same school my brother and sister went to. I don't remember much from when I was a child. Our house was light green and it was surrounded by grass. I was always playing with my brothers, sisters, and cousins. My aunt Sonia lived nearby, just a few houses down the road. Our house was always full of people; my mom loved to cook for everybody. My dad was important, people would come visit and stay for hours. I was a child; I didn't really understand that he was politically involved or what that meant. All I knew was that he was very busy, important, and*

most of all kind. He had dark hair. He was very funny and always made us laugh. He was such a happy man. I never saw him get angry.

I was about 5 years old. We lived in the house where I grew up, it had a front yard with grass where I spent hours playing. We would see people walking by and say hello to them. We knew everyone who lived nearby. My parents were liked by everyone. It was October or November. It happened after lunch; my mom had made pupusas, you could smell them throughout the house. It was a sunny day; I was playing in front of our house when I saw 3 military Jeeps driving down the road. The cars were so fast, they kicked up so much dirt and dust that I was covered in it. The dirt hurt my eyes and I couldn't breathe. The soldiers were wearing green military uniforms and they had big guns. They stormed into my house and dragged my dad out; that was the last time I saw him. I was scared, the men that took my dad did not look nice, they were so serious. They hit him a few times, I saw blood dripping from the corner of his mouth. They dragged him out and my mom was yelling and crying. I was crying too; I was hiding behind my brother Edgar. I was holding on to him so hard, I thought they might take him too. I was standing outside my house. They turned the cars on and drove away just as fast as they came. Leaving only a cloud of dust behind. Mami collapsed on the ground as she yelled, "no se lo lleven! Por favor, por favor" (don't take him! Please, please!). All of our neighbors had come out, they surrounded us as they watched them drive away with my dad.

Things changed after that. People stopped visiting and my mom was always sad and she would cry as she prayed at night; she didn't laugh or sing anymore, the house was quieter. I never asked about my dad. She would sit for hours just looking out the window, many times I would sit with her and she would let me brush and braid her hair. Her hair was dark black and

thick. It was long and smooth, my small hands would easily slide in and out of each strand. I would make each braid over and over until it was perfect.

I remember looking for my dad whenever I heard that someone was left dead on the side of the road I would stop breathing and for a moment wonder if it was my dad. I would look to make sure it wasn't him. The dead bodies were usually swollen and bruised but what was scary was the thought that it could be him. It was never him, so I just walked away relieved every time.

Eventually we moved to my aunt's house and my mom went to the capital to work. We lived with my aunt Sonia and my cousins. Eventually mami came and took the girls with her back to the capital. Sometime later my brothers came to live with us. We lived in a small apartment, there wasn't a lot of space to play and I wasn't allowed to go outside unless my brothers were with me. I would go to mami's restaurant after school and help out, mostly setting tables and refilling salt shakers. As I got a little older, maybe 10 or 11 I started buzzing tables at the restaurant too. I would go to school and then go straight to the restaurant. I would get there and the first thing we would do was eat, everything she made was delicious. I would buzz tables and I would help her in the kitchen. I loved watching mami cook. That is how I learned how to cook. I watched everything she did. I would watch her cut potatoes, chop vegetables, and mix different spices together. She always looked happy when she was cooking. There was a radio in the kitchen that was always on and she would sing along as she cooked.

Therapist Review.

Session summary. Session two focused on beginning Ana's life narrative, starting with her earliest memories and delving into her first traumatic memory. For Ana, the first trauma she experience was the kidnapping of her father from their home when she was five years old. Using imaginal exposure Ana narrated her experience of witnessing her father being dragged from their

home. She tapped into her feelings of helplessness and anger as her father was ripped from them. She also discussed how the family dynamics changed and how this event deeply impacted her mother. After the affective intensity of exploring her first traumatic experience and the aftermath, the session focused on a quieter and happier time in her life in order to help Ana self-regulate and prevent her from leaving the session in an excessively aroused state.

Setting the tone. Throughout session two I focused on encouraging Ana to keep going, there were several instances where she would stop and look at me as if waiting for permission to continue. I nodded along, and at times even articulated this by telling her she was doing well and asking her to “go on.” There were also times where it seemed she did not know how to continue or what to say next. In those moments I found it imperative to find a balance between gently encouraging her and guiding her narrative without censoring her. My aim in gently pushing her was twofold—to challenge the norms she grew up with and internalized which dictated that negative feelings and painful memories should be kept private, as well as, to convey that I cared about her and welcomed all of her experience nonjudgmentally.

Furthermore, I aimed to set a tone of collaboration by the use of the word “we” over “I” as much as possible. Given the sensitive nature of her trauma I found it important to remind Ana she was not alone in the room with her memories, the way she had been many times before treatment.

Assessing the context of the traumatic event. In helping Ana create a comprehensive and chronological autobiographical narrative it was necessary to identify the details of her life just before her first trauma. The excerpt below illustrates how I asked Ana specific questions about her background and then questions that helped embed her first trauma in place and time.

Therapist: When and where were you born?

Ana: I was born in Santa Ana on May 15, 1980.

Therapist: Tell me about your family? What were your parents' names and what did they do for a living?

Ana: My parents were Maria Fatima and Luis Alberto. Mami was a stay at home mother until my father died. My father was a teacher and used to teach math in the same school my brothers and sisters went to.

Therapist: How many brothers and how many sisters do you have?

Ana: I have 2 sisters and 3 brothers. I am the third of six children. I don't remember much from when I was a child

Therapist: That's ok. Can you tell me what you do remember about the house you grew up in? Who were your neighbors? What did you like to do when you were a kid?

Ana: Our house was light green and it was surrounded by grass. I was always playing with my brothers, sisters, and cousins. My aunt Sonia lived nearby, just a few houses down the road. Our house was always full of people; my mom loved to cook for everybody. My dad was important I guess, people would come visit and stay for hours. I was a child; I didn't really understand that he was politically involved or what that meant. All I knew was that he was very busy, important, and most of all kind.

Therapist: You're doing great, go on.

Ana: I don't really remember what he looked like, he had dark hair I believe. He was very funny and always made us laugh.

Therapist: You were just smiling as you described him, but then you suddenly got very sad, what happened?

Ana: I smile when I think of him. He was such a happy man. I never saw him mad.... But it also makes me sad because I didn't really get to know him. I miss him.

Therapist: [Head nod]

Ana: Wow I haven't talked about this in such a long time, actually I have never really talked about it. It's hard to explain what happened, I'm still not sure what happened to him. He just disappeared one day.

Therapist: That's ok let's slow down and let's start with how old you were and where you lived.

Ana: I was about 5 years old. We lived in the house where I grew up, it had a front yard where I would play for hours. I liked it because it had grass and whenever I fell it didn't hurt. I also liked that we could always see people walking by and say hello to them. We knew everyone who lived nearby. My parents were liked by everyone, well until he disappeared.

Therapist: Walk me through what you remember from the day he disappeared, let's start with what time of year it was.

Ana: I don't remember

Therapist: I know this is scary, but give it a try, I am right here with you.

Ana: It must have been October or November, my brothers and sisters were home which meant they were on break from school, and it was before the holidays I think, because I remember everyone being very sad during the holidays after that.

Therapist: Great, now in as much detail as you can tell me what did you see, hear, and smell that day?

Ana: I guess it happened around lunch time; my mom had made pupusas, you could smell them throughout the house. Maybe it was after lunch because my father always came home for lunch. It was a sunny day; I was playing in front of our house when I saw 3 military Jeeps driving down the road.

Recognizing a traumatic event. As we approached the point in her narration where her father was kidnapped, Ana became visibly nervous, she began to breathe in a shallow manner, and this signaled to me that we were approaching the hot memory. Ana also attempted to gloss over the event by stating “*They stormed into my house and dragged my dad out; that was the last time I saw him. That’s it.*” It was important to encourage Ana to continue so the hot memory could be fully explored.

Narrating in slow motion. Remembering and putting into words details from trauma experiences can be very painful and it is not unusual for clients to avoid them by trying to gloss over or completely leaving out particularly painful details. At first Ana insisted she didn’t remember much of what happened the day her father was kidnapped explaining she was just a little girl when this happened. This reluctance on Ana’s part to explore the memory may have been in part due to the fact that her memory of that day was confusing and disjointed. Ana had never shared with anyone her experience nor had she spoken to her family to compare accounts and get a better understanding of what happened. I asked Ana to slow down and go over every single detail about that day. In NET it is important to weave together the cognitive memories, as well as, the emotional and physical experiences into a single narrative—her life story.

As illustrated by the session excerpt below, by asking Ana to slow down, she was able to verbalize her experience and begin to put the fragmented pieces together in a more coherent way. Slowing down Ana’s narrative also allowed her to process the strong emotional reaction she had

to losing her father which included feelings of anger that no one helped, fear that he was most likely dead, a strong desire to find out what happened to her father, and sadness over her mother's grieving of her father.

Ana: They turned the cars on and drove away just as fast as they came. Leaving only a cloud of dust behind. Mami collapsed on the ground as she yelled, "no se lo lleven! Por favor, Por favor" (don't take him! Please, please!). I was confused because I wasn't sure what had just happened but when I heard mami cry I knew it was bad. All of our neighbors had come out, they surrounded us as they watched them drive away with my dad. If only someone had done something, but no one said or did anything. That's when everything changed.

Therapist: This was a crucial moment because it changed your life. But let's slow down for a moment, can you go back and tell me what it was like for you seeing everyone watching and crying and no one saying anything?"

Ana: It was confusing, why was everyone just standing there? Why didn't anyone help us? Why didn't anyone say he was innocent! I never found out why they took him or what they accused him of, I suspect they thought he as a political dissonant. I don't know if he was, all I know is that he was my father, he was the man who made us laugh and tickled us until we couldn't take it anymore. His place was at home with us and they took him from us. Everyone just watched it happen, it makes me so angry. There were so many people out there and only a few soldiers. They were all a bunch of cowards; they were supposed to be his friends but no one said anything.

Therapist: It was and still is painful to have had your dad taken away. How did things change after he was taken?

Ana: People stopped visiting and my mom was always sad and she would cry as she prayed at night. I never asked about my dad, I somehow knew I wouldn't see him again. It was like we were not allowed to talk about it. I remember being afraid that they would come back and take someone else, but they never did.

Therapist: Let's slow down again, what was it like to see your mom so sad and upset?

Ana: I hated it, she didn't laugh or sing anymore, the house was quieter. I just wanted to make her happy, I wanted to help. She would sit for hours just looking out the window, many times I would sit with her and she would let me brush and braid her hair.

Therapist: Do you remember what her hair looked like and what it felt like to braid her hair?

Ana: Her hair was dark black and thick. It was long and smooth, my small hands would easily slide in and out of each strand. I would make each braid over and over until it was perfect. I wanted her to like them, I wanted her to be proud of me... but she barely noticed, she just looked out the window, I think she was waiting for him to come back.

Therapist: What about you, were you waiting for him to come back also?

Ana: ...No, somehow I knew he wouldn't. I remember everyone cried so much after they took him, just like at a funeral so I knew.

Therapist: You knew he was dead?

Ana: Yes, I remember that whenever I heard that someone was left dead on the side of the road I would stop breathing and for a moment wonder if it was my dad. I just had to go look, I had to make sure it wasn't him. I wanted to know what happened to him but I was also afraid of finding him dead.

Therapist: What was it like seeing those dead bodies?

Ana: It was weird but you get used to it I guess. I saw a lot of them. They were usually swollen and bruised but what was scary was the thought that it could be him. It was never him, so I just walked away relieved every time. But when I think about it now it is heartbreaking to think that he died alone somewhere in some jail or even worse that he was tortured to death just like all those men I saw.

Therapist: What is it like for you knowing that he may have been tortured and killed?

Ana: It makes my stomach turn. It's terrifying to think that maybe they kept him alive for a long time and that he suffered. The worst part is not knowing; I will never know. All I can do is imagine what could have happened but I will never really know—maybe what actually happened to him was not so bad, or maybe it was worse than I can imagine. I just want to know.

Therapist: I know it is hard to accept that you will probably never know what happened to him, and I imagine you still wonder and think about it. But what is clear is that he was taken away from his family too soon and that you miss him.

Ana: Not a day goes by that I don't think about him and miss him.

Therapist: [Nodding my head] I would like to go back a bit if it is ok with you. What happened to you and your family after your father was taken?

Ana: Eventually we moved to my aunt's house and my mom went to the capital to work. At first it was just her. We lived with my aunt Sonia and my cousins, I liked it there, I never felt lonely but I missed my parents.

Narrating in slow motion also allowed me to reinforce reality by encouraging Ana to stay in the present when talking about the past. Throughout the session I continuously rephrased the

details she shared and incorporated them to her narrative using the past tense whenever she described her reaction in the present tense.

Activating and tagging hot memories. Hot memories consist of multiple levels including cognitive, emotional, and physiological information (Schaeur, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011, p. 49). During narrative exposure it is necessary to address all levels of the hot memory; this can be accomplished by asking direct questions about the different levels of the person's experience, and by providing verbal feedback of observations about the person's physiological and emotional state in the room.

As illustrated below, Ana is at first resistant to exploring these multiple levels of the memory but with gentle encouragement she is able to articulate how confused and terrified she felt. Activating her emotional reaction allowed her to explore the physiological elements of the memory and ultimately fully activated her hot memory.

Therapist: Do you remember how you felt that day?

Ana: No it was so long ago, I was a little girl.

Therapist: Give it a try, you may remember more than you know. Go on.

Ana: I was confused I didn't know what was happening, it all happened so fast. I was also scared, the men that took my dad did not look nice, they didn't look happy either because they were so serious. They hit him a few times, I see blood dripping from the corner of his mouth. They drag him out and there is so much yelling; my mom is yelling and crying.

Therapist: Go on, you are doing great. Do you remember where you were? What were you doing?

Ana: I remember I was crying too; I was hiding behind my brother Edgar. I was holding on to him so hard, I thought they might take him too. [Ana gripped the chair so hard that her knuckles turn white]).

Therapist: I notice that you are holding on to the chair are you holding on to the chair like you held on to Edgar that day?

Ana: [Ana let go of the chair] I didn't notice I was doing that, Yes I was so scared I held on to him so tight. I want to scream and tell them to let him go, I want to run to him but I can't, I can't move.

Therapist: How does your body feel right now as you remember feeling that you couldn't move even though you wanted to run to him so badly?

Ana: I feel scared and paralyzed.

Therapist: Where in your body do you feel that and how do these parts feel? do they feel cold or hot?

Ana: [Ana turned her hands around and slightly pulled them out in my direction] Here and on my legs. I don't really feel them, they feel numb; cold maybe. I don't think I would be able to stand up right now. My legs feel so weak.

Therapist: Is that how your body felt that day?

Ana: Yes, I couldn't move. I'm mad I didn't do anything. I can see myself that day just standing outside my house watching a car drive away with my dad. I just let them take him! No one did anything!

Therapist: You were scared. Even though you were only 5 years old, you realized there wasn't anything you could do. Those men could have taken you or anyone else. What

did it feel like to just stand outside your house and watch the car drive away with your dad?

Ana: I felt powerless. Now I feel very sad. I didn't know that would be the last time I would see him.

In NET it is part of the therapist's job to note and provide feedback about any emotional or physiological sensations the client is visibly experiencing in the room, or sensations that are described in order to name them and help the client integrate these bodily sensations into their narrative. During this session with Ana, I observed Ana grabbing the chair until her knuckles turned white, like she described grabbing and holding on to her brother Edgar. It was important to provide feedback of this observation to Ana in order to link her physiological experience in the room to her hot memory, helping her understand how her present experiences can be shaped by past traumatic events. The sharing of such observation also facilitated further activation of the other elements of Ana's trauma structure.

Ending the first session. From information gathered during the assessment phase, as well as, the creation of her lifeline, I knew Ana had met her husband when she was sixteen-years-old in her mother's restaurant. Learning about her time working in her mother's restaurant before meeting Jose seemed like an appropriate place to end session two. There was not enough time left in the session to cover another traumatic experience and I felt it was better to stop Ana before she introduced Jose into her narrative given all the trauma associated with their marriage. As she recalled her time in the restaurant prior to meeting Jose, Ana was significantly calmer and even smiled. I explained this to Ana and ended the session by asking her to reflect on what the session had been like for her to set a tone of collaboration and opening the space for her to express her reactions to the treatment process.

Ana did not have any prior experience with therapy or exposure to mental health professionals. Providing a clear explanation of what to expect, the overall structure of sessions, and the foreshadowing of symptoms in the form of psychoeducation was particularly important in joining with Ana and establishing trust between us. As illustrated below, I wanted Ana to have as much information as possible so that she did not feel blindsided by the therapeutic process nor the potential side effects of recalling very traumatic experiences.

Ana: As I got a little older, maybe 10 or 11 I started buzzing tables at the restaurant too.

I liked it, I liked feeling useful, helping mami out because she worked so hard. I also liked meeting people, speaking to the patrons.

Therapist: I see you smiling, as you recall your time in the restaurant helping out your mom. Tell me more about your life during that time period.

Ana: I remember I would go to school and then go straight to the restaurant. I would get there and the first thing we would do was eat, I remember everything she made was delicious. Everyone always commented on how great her cooking was. I remember I always ate really fast; I wasn't allowed to help her unless I had finished everything on my plate.

Therapist: Do you remember how you would help her?

Ana: I would buzz tables and I would help her in the kitchen. I liked buzzing tables because sometimes the people I served would give me a few coins and I was able to buy candy in school the next day. I also liked helping out in the kitchen, I loved watching mami cook. That is how I learned how to cook.

Therapist: It sounds like you enjoyed watching her cook.

Ana: I did. I watched everything she did. I would watch her cut potatoes, chop vegetables, and mix different spices together. She always looked happy when she was cooking. There was a radio in the kitchen that was always on and she would sing along as she cooked. I catch myself singing sometimes when I cook as well.

Therapist: Those sound like some very happy memories. I think this is a good place to end for today. Tell me what today was like for you?

Ana: It was strange and hard. I have tried so hard to forget what happened to my dad, in part because I don't really know what happened and it was all so confusing. When I talk about it, it seems like yesterday but it has been so long. This was hard and I don't know if I will be able to talk about the other things I have been through.

Therapist: I know that it was hard to talk about what happened to your dad but you got through it. In every session, there will be memories that are really difficult to remember and to share but it is important that we explore them. As you can see from today Ana, what we are doing together is revisiting your life, kind of in "slow motion", focusing on all these small small details that most of the time people may not notice. But for our work together, those small details are so important– that is how we will help you come to feel and think differently about all that has happened to you. This slowing down of memory will not make the memories disappear, but the memories will have less power over you. I will be with you every step of the way and will make sure that we don't stop until you are feeling calmer like we did today. Does that make sense?

Ana: I guess

Therapist: I know it can feel a bit frustrating at times that I am always asking you to slow down, so I want to hear from you what it feels like as we go through this together. It is

also possible that you may experience strong and perhaps even overwhelming memories in between our sessions. Remember that those moments will not last forever and they will pass as they always have. Most importantly remember that it is sometimes normal to feel worse before you feel better, it is in no way a reflection of how you're doing in therapy or whether you are doing it "right;" this process is hard for everyone and it takes a lot of courage to be here in the first place. Remember that if the memories feel too overwhelming or intolerable you can use some of the deep breathing and visualization exercises we practiced before.

Ana: Ok, I will.

Session 3: Abuse Begins

Narrative. *I met Jose at my mother's restaurant. I was 16 years old and he was 25; he was a police officer. He used to eat lunch at the restaurant every day. I thought he was handsome but I was too shy to speak to him. One day, he grabbed my hand and as he looked into my eyes he called me beautiful. I felt special. After that day I would go straight to the restaurant after school so I could be the one to wait his table. We would spend a few minutes talking each time he came in. My feelings for him grew. He started picking me up after school and walking me to the restaurant. Mami was not happy, she confronted him and asked him what his intentions with me were; he talked her into giving him permission to date me. He was my first and only boyfriend. Around the holidays we went to a local fair. We were having such a good time dancing and laughing that I stayed out later than I was supposed to, when he took me home it was dark outside. There was a big "discussion" between mami and Jose. I wasn't part of the conversation but at the end of the day, I was engaged to marry Jose and a wedding date was set.*

Two months later Jose and I got married. We got married in February of 1997; I was sixteen years old.

After we got married there was a big party. When the party ended he took me home with him. He was very drunk. His face was all red, he smelled like liquor and cigarettes, and he couldn't walk straight. He forced himself on me. He was rough as he took my clothes off. He kissed me and bit my lip until I bled. The taste of his mouth disgusted me. I tried to push him away but he held me tighter. I cried and asked him to stop but he slapped me and said "tu eres mi esposa y tienes que complacerme" (you are my wife and you have to please me). I stopped crying and protesting I just let him do whatever he wanted. He fell asleep on top of me and I felt like I was suffocating; his skin was hot and sticky and I had to push him off of me. He snored all night. I couldn't sleep, I just laid next to him all night without moving. The next day I had pain and some bleeding which made it difficult to walk or sit. I also had bruises on my arms and on my thighs. I hated what he did to me, it made me feel dirty.

Six months later I found out I was pregnant. I was happy, happy that I would have someone to love, someone to keep me company. Jose was annoyed that his life would be disrupted. He told me I had to go live in San Luis del Carmen, and his family would help me with the pregnancy. Jose dropped me off at the bus stop with my small bag and my father-in-law picked me up when I got to San Luis. It was a big change for me. His family was cold and distant. His mother, Clara would only speak to me when she wanted me to do something for her. I had to help her cook and I had to wash everyone's clothes. Jose visited a few times just for a few days. He spent most of his time visiting family and drinking with his cousins he did not spend time with me. It bothered me because I felt invisible. My birthday came and there was no celebration or acknowledgement. Mami always remembered our birthdays. She would wake me

up singing Las Mañanitas (typical mariachi birthday song) and would prepare tamales colorados for me because they are my favorite. Although I was alone on my birthday I didn't feel lonely because I was pregnant.

When I was eight months pregnant I went to Sunday mass and bumped into Juan, Jose's brother-in-law; he offered me a ride home. When we got home Sara, Jose's sister was very upset to see me get out of her husband's car. She made a scene accusing him of cheating and she accused me of throwing myself at her husband. I was mortified, the entire family came out to see the commotion and heard what she was saying about me, I saw the look of disapproval in their eyes. I was embarrassed and mad. My face felt like it was on fire, my cheeks were red. I wanted to shrink or become invisible. I didn't want them all to stare at me like they did. A few days later Jose came to visit and Sara told him what happened. He was furious, he yelled and broke things in the house; he kept saying that I had embarrassed him in front of his family and that he would make me pay. I sat in a corner of the house crying and shaking; I was scared but he left right away. He came back really late that night. I was in the bedroom sleeping. He was drunk. He came into the bedroom, turned the lights on and woke me up with his yelling; the light was so bright it was blinding and I couldn't really see him. He grabbed me by my arms hard. He dragged me out of bed and dropped me on the floor. He yelled at me and said that a whore like me did not deserve to share a bed with him. I hit the floor hard, I landed on my back. I cried and tried to get up but he kept pushing me back down. I begged him to stop, I reminded him I was pregnant. He kicked me with his hard black boots on my head, arms, and stomach. I tried to protect my stomach, I laid on my side and wrapped my arms around my belly, but I still felt the blows to the side of my stomach. I stared at the yellow wall in the bedroom. It was cold, the window was open and there was a breeze. The tiles on the floor were colorful and pretty but they

were hard and cold. I was shivering and my teeth were chattering like crazy. Jose was angry and his face was red and scrunched up. I was shocked. I asked myself how could he kick me knowing I was carrying his child? It seemed to go on forever. He pulled my hair so hard I thought he was going to pull it out of my head. My head hurt so much. He pulled my face near his with his big hands hurting my cheeks; he yelled in my face and his spit landed on me. When he got tired he stopped, stumbled his way around me and passed out on the bed. I was too scared and in too much pain to move so I spent the rest of the night on the floor quietly sobbing and shivering. The floor felt cold and hard against my skin. My tears and blood merged into a sticky cold liquid that dried on my face and my clothes. My eyes were swollen and hurt from all the crying; everything was blurry. I was afraid to move, to wake him up. I was so scared for my baby. When he moved inside me it made me so happy that I smiled while crying. The next day I woke up and got myself cleaned up as best as I could. Jose left without saying anything to me. I went over to the main house to help his mom with breakfast. My eyes were very swollen, my cheeks were red, and I had bruises all over my arms and legs. I know his mother saw them. She said to me, “no debes darle razón para enojarse, si tu marido se enoja es tu culpa” (“you shouldn't give him a reason to get angry, if he gets upset with you it is your fault.”) and I realized how alone I truly was. I felt trapped. Not long after that my son was born.

The night before my son was born I started feeling a lot of pain and had no idea what was happening to me, I was afraid something was wrong with the baby but I didn't want to bother my mother-in-law in the middle of the night. I waited until day break and slowly walked over to his parents' house. I had to stop every couple of steps because the pain was excruciating; it was warm outside and the sun was shining. His mother offered me some coffee and I sat in the kitchen patiently waiting, digging my nails into the palm of my hands when the pain came. The

pain grew stronger and started coming more frequently; I cried out in pain. I was moved into one of the guest bedrooms and forced to lay down. Everything in that room was white. The pain felt like something was tearing me up from the inside, like someone was ripping my insides. I felt scared because the pain was so unbearable, I had never felt that kind of pain before. I was drenched in sweat as if I had been caught in an afternoon thunderstorm without an umbrella. I was in labor. I was not ready for my son, I wanted him to stay inside me as long as possible. I didn't want to share him with them and even less with Jose. But when I held him I felt indescribable love and also panic, I knew my baby needed me and I needed to protect him from everything especially from his father. I focused on my son and made sure he was taken care of. I spent hours just watching him sleep. He was perfect and I was happy. Jose came to visit his son a week after he was born and was pleasant. He was proud to have a son and was in a good mood. He showed the baby off to his friends and family. I would pray every day that Jose would not visit often and when he was there I would pray that he did not stay very long. I did everything I could to stay out of his way and to prevent him from getting angry with me. I barely spoke to anyone, including his family, I did my chores and took care of my son. I enjoyed talking and playing with my son.

Therapist review.

Session summary. Session three began with a quick check-in with Ana about her experience in between sessions. Ana endorsed having some nightmares after the previous session and also reported she had been preoccupied with thoughts about what happened to her father. Ana's experience was normalized within the context of trauma treatment. We then reviewed the narrative created in session two; Ana was invited to explore or add any details that were missed the previous session. I reminded Ana we would do this at the start of every session going forward.

In session three we focused on the time period in Ana's life during which she met Jose, got married, and had her first child. This session was approximately two hours long and covered the narrative exposure of two traumatic events. Ana first explored the narrative of her wedding night during which she was forced to engage in sexual activity with Jose. Ana's first sexual encounter took place against her will and through the use of force and coercion. Ana described how she was confused and in pain and although she asked her husband to stop he continued to hold her down and told her it was her duty as his wife to please him. Ana discussed her reaction to that night and how that incident made her feel "dirty." Ana continued her narrative and discussed her pregnancy and her move to San Luis del Carmen, which like her marriage was decided for her without her input. Ana then explored the narrative of the first physical attack she endured from Jose when she was eight months pregnant. The session ended with Ana's narrative about the birth of her first child Javier.

Assessing the context of the traumatic event. In this session, it was important to identify the period of time just before Ana's first intimate partner rape incident to help her incorporate this incident to her greater life story in a chronologically accurate manner. To accomplish this, I asked questions to help orient Ana to the lifetime period when this occurred, including what time of the year it was, how old she was, as well as, where it occurred, asking Ana to describe Jose's apartment in detail. Once this was accomplished it was imperative to identify what marked the beginning of the incident, for Ana the beginning of the incident was arriving in Jose's apartment; identifying the beginning of this trauma experience was also a cue to slow down the narration as we were approaching a hot memory.

Cognitive restructuring of self-blame. According to Schauer, Neuner & Elbert (2012) guilt, is typically a secondary emotion that is not encoded as an element in the fear network.

Instead it is an emotional reaction that develops when the trauma is appraised retrospectively. Intense guilt can lead to self-blame. Ana's first sexual experience was traumatic and she blames herself for not being "prepared." It is possible that this self-blame grants her a false sense of control over an otherwise confusing and helpless situation; however, it comes at the incredible cost of lifelong feelings of guilt and taking responsibility for the actions of Jose. Such self-blame in intimate partner violence and in sexual assault perpetuates the idea that the victim is to blame. In my work with Ana I believe it was important to challenge the idea that the sexual assault and the physical assault she experienced were her fault in order to restore the blame and responsibility to the appropriate person. This was done within the context of co-creating her autobiographical narrative by engaging in a thorough and detailed narration of the event. In doing so, Ana gained a more thorough understanding of her behavior during the event ultimately helping her realize she had no choice at that time and hopefully leading to decreased feelings of guilt; this also facilitated Ana getting in touch with her feelings of anger for what was done to her.

Ana has spent her entire adult life with internal and external voices telling her that she was to blame for the abuse she endured. She held on strongly to the false belief that the unforeseeable abuse Jose would perpetrate was foreseeable and therefore she should have been able to predict it. I felt it was important to challenge the guilt Ana felt and the subsequent notion that she was to blame for what happened to her. I provided her with feedback about her situation and experience, as well as, my subjective opinion that her behavior did not cause the abuse to clarify that the responsibility for Jose's actions fell entirely on Jose.

Working through difficult emotions. Is it also possible that Ana's self-blame served as a protective mechanism—preventing her from accessing feelings of helplessness and anger

towards Jose which she could never safely express. As well as, protecting her from consciously acknowledging the anger and resentment she felt towards her mother for deciding to marry her off at such a young age. By taking on the blame for what happened to her, Ana did not have to confront her powerlessness as a sixteen year old girl who had no control over the decisions being made in her life. Furthermore, it gave her distance from the intense feelings of anger and resentment that she felt. However, the process of narrative exposure required Ana not only to recognize this anger but to feel the full emotional impact and corresponding sensations and physiological arousal.

As Ana discussed the anger she felt towards Jose and her mother, she quickly tried to take it back stating that she was not really angry with her mother. Understanding that accessing anger felt towards her mother most likely brought forth feelings of guilt as well, I had a strong urge to validate and reassure her of the adequacy of her anger. However, although that cognitive intervention may have facilitated the process of joining between the two of us, it would have distracted from the emotional processing she was engaged in. Instead of focusing on the appropriateness of her anger, I encouraged Ana to stay with the anger and describe how and where she felt it physically. This helped Ana create a mental image of what that anger felt like inside of her, and how it had been impacting her all these years; this is illustrated in the excerpt below.

Ana: Of course I'm angry. I'm angry at Jose for what he did to me that night and so many nights after that. And at mami.... how could she marry me off to him? I would never do that to my daughter.

Ana: I didn't mean that. I'm not mad at mami, she didn't know.

Therapist: It can be very hard to have negative feelings about the people we love. But I am going to ask you to stay with that feeling. Where do you feel that anger?

Ana: right here in my stomach.

Therapist: How does your stomach feel right now?

Ana: It feels tight, like this [she made a fist]. Like I have rock in my stomach.

Therapist: Tell me about that rock feeling, is it large or small?

Ana: It's big and heavy, I feel like it's weighing me down.

Therapist: Does it feel hot, cold, warm, or wet? How does it feel inside of you?

Ana: It feels hot

Therapist: Stay with that, tell me about that heat you feel?

Ana: It's like a big ball of fire burning up inside of me.

Therapist: You feel this heavy ball of fire burning up in your stomach, do you feel it anywhere else?

Ana: Yes, everywhere, it's like the fire is traveling through my veins.

Therapist: How does your body feel right now?

Ana: Hot, I feel hot, like my blood is boiling.

Therapist: I notice your hands are balled up into fists right now, tell me about that?

Ana: It's like the fire inside me wants to come out. I don't want it to come out. I have to keep it inside.

Therapist: This fire you feel wants to come out, what would happen if it did?

Ana: It won't, I can't. I don't know what would happen.

Therapist: Try to imagine.

Ana: [crying] It makes me want to scream, and yell, and break stuff.

Therapist: The anger that you feel is big and heavy. It is burning up inside of you and weighing on you but you feel like you can't let it out, just like you couldn't let it out then.

Ana: [Sobbing] It makes me so angry that he did that to me and then the next day it was like nothing ever happened. I had to act the same, pretend he didn't hurt me. I hate him so much and I was never able to say it or show it, it would have been worse for me if I did.

Once the anger with all of its corresponding sensations had been fully explored, relived and better understood, I made a choice to go back to Ana's anger towards her mother. Clinically, that moment seemed important to acknowledge. I was concerned that glossing over it would inadvertently communicate to Ana that her anger towards her mother was inappropriate and that the related guilt was warranted. I felt it was important to validate Ana's feeling, normalize that one can feel both negative and positive feelings towards another person, and simultaneously recognize and validate Ana's love and respect for her mother. Above all my aim was to communicate that she was in a safe and nonjudgmental space as illustrated in the session excerpt below.

Therapist: Ana, I would like to go back to what you said about feeling angry at your mom. It must be hard for you to acknowledge this anger, but it seems to me like it is understandable to be angry with the adults that made decisions about your life, and this includes her. This does not mean that you love her any less.

Ana: I loved her so much. I know she loved me. But she just let me go with a stranger.

Therapist: You are angry that she let you marry someone that neither of you really knew.

Ana: Yes, I would never do that to my daughter. It's my job to take care of her to protect her. Sometimes it's hard for me to understand why she did it. But I do understand, she

thought I had found a man to take care of me, and she had so much to worry about with my siblings and the restaurant.

Therapist: Even when we understand why someone did something it does not mean it didn't hurt us or that we can't be angry about it.

Therapist: How do you feel talking about this with me right now?

Ana: [With tears in her eyes] sad, all I ever wanted to do was to make her happy and protect her but she couldn't protect me.

Ana: I also feel bad... guilty. I am sitting here talking badly about the woman that raised me and sacrificed so much for me.

Therapist: I know that it is difficult to talk about all of this and that you may feel like you're betraying her but I want you to know that I don't think badly of you or her as you share all that you have been through with me. No one is all good or all bad and it is normal to feel a mixture of feelings towards the people we love. I also think we can find a way to talk about all you have been through honestly and without betraying her memory. Would that be ok with you?

Ana: Yes

Managing Avoidance. There were several moments in session three where avoidance had to be addressed, either through redirecting, by pointing out inconsistencies, or by gently reminding Ana to slow down. For example, when discussing her reaction to finding out she was pregnant, Ana starts talking about how she has never felt alone again because of her children. Although her children are clearly important to her, encouraging her to continue talking about her children may have encouraged avoidance; her lifeline clearly indicated she was building up

towards a big stone. Ana had to be redirected as she began to move away from the chronological narrative to a more present based narrative.

In another moment during this session after exploring the trauma memory of her wedding night Ana attempted to brush off the impact of that night on her by stating that the pain and bruises she was left with were “not a big deal.” While Ana was telling me she was fine with her words, not only was that reaction incongruent with the gravity of the experience she had just shared, it also did not match her physical presentation in the room; Ana was shaking her leg vigorously. As illustrated in the excerpt below, I noted the discrepancy and Ana grew angry; she got in touch with the anger she felt after she had been violated.

Therapist: What happened next?

Ana: Nothing. I got out of bed early and made breakfast. When he got up he ate and then we went to play soccer like he did every weekend after that.

Therapist: How did you feel the next day?

Ana: Fine, I kept busy there was so much cleaning to do in that apartment.

Therapist: How about your body, how did it feel?

Ana: [shaking her leg vigorously] I had some pain and some bleeding which made it a little hard to walk or sit but that only lasted for a day or 2. I also had some bruises on my arms from when he held me down and on my thighs but they weren't a big deal. I was fine.

Therapist: Let's slow down for a moment. It sounds like the night before was confusing, scary, and upsetting.

Ana: Yes, I was upset that night because I wasn't prepared but I was fine the next day. I understood it was part of my job as a wife.

Therapist: Your words are telling me you were fine but your body is telling me maybe you weren't. I notice that you are shaking your leg a lot.

Ana: [Ana began crying and then yelled.] What do you want from me? Do you want me to sit here and tell you that I hated what he did to me? That it made me feel dirty. That I knew I would never be the same after that night!

Ana: [after a moment of silence] I'm sorry I didn't mean to yell.

Therapist: It's ok Ana, you're angry.

Ana: Of course I'm angry.

Narrating the hot memory. As previously explained, this session contains narrative exposure of two separate hot memories. The excerpt below from the second hot memory, illustrates how Ana's sensations, feelings, and thoughts were put into a verbal narrative and integrated into chronological sequences within her autobiography and thus converted into declarative memory.

Therapist: And then what happened?

Ana: A few days later Jose came by and the first thing Sara did was tell him what happened. Jose was furious he yelled and broke things; he kept saying that I had embarrassed him in front of his family. I just sat in a corner of the house crying. Eventually he left and I thought the worse was over, I had no idea how evil he could truly be.

Therapist: What do you remember about that day?

Ana: I try not to think about it. But I remember that day like it was yesterday. It was the first time he hit me, and it was the first time I felt genuine fear for my life.

Therapist: Ok, let's slow down. What time of the day was this?

Ana: It was late, it was the middle of the night. I was already asleep when he got home drunk that night.

Therapist: He got home in the middle of the night drunk, what did he do next?

Ana: He stormed into the room and turned on the light. The light was so bright it was blinding. I couldn't see him. He dragged me out of bed and started hitting me.

Therapist: Remember to go slowly, moment by moment in as much detail as possible.

Jose turned on the light and then what happened?

Therapist: He was yelling at me saying that a whore like me did not deserve to share a bed with him. He grabbed me by my arms hard. He pulled me out of bed and dropped me on the floor, I landed on my back. I hit the floor hard and started crying which only made him angrier.

Therapist: He was yelling and pulled you out of the bed and dropped you on the floor.

You landed on your back and then what happened?

Ana: I tried to get off the floor but he kept pushing me back down. I started pleading with him reminding him I was pregnant but that only seemed to enrage him further. He began kicking me as he repeated all the things Sara had told him. He kicked me.

Therapist: How did he kick you, where did he kick you?

Ana: He kicked me hard with his hard black boots. He kicked me everywhere, on my head, arms, legs, and stomach.

Therapist: What do you remember about that moment when he was kicking you?

Ana: I was on the floor in the in the bedroom. I tried to protect my stomach and wrapped myself up like a baby, but I still felt the blows to the side of my stomach.

Therapist: Tell me about the bedroom—the walls, the floor, what do you remember seeing?

Ana: The walls were painted yellow like the sun. The window was open and there was a breeze—I was cold. The tiles on the floor were colorful and pretty, they formed a pattern, an indigenous pattern. Although the floor was pretty I hated it in that moment because it was hard and cold. I was shivering and my teeth were chattering like crazy. I remember Jose's face, it was red and scrunched up, he was so angry.

Therapist: Try to go back to that moment, how did you feel looking at Jose's face?

Ana: Shocked. I didn't expect it. How could the same man who used to tell me jokes and open doors for me be doing this to me? How can the father of my child kick me on my stomach knowing I was carrying his child?

Therapist: Jose kicked you on your stomach even though you were pregnant. Can you tell me about the pain you felt? Where do you feel it?

Ana: It seemed to go on forever and I can still remember every blow. He kicked me right here (holding the side and front of her stomach) with his hard boots.

Therapist: Did he do anything else to you?

Ana: He also pulled my hair so hard I thought he was going to pull it out of my head. My head hurt so much. As he was yelling he pulled my face near his with his big hands; that hurt my cheeks so much. As he yelled his spit would land on me [Ana wiped her face].

Therapist: He kicked you hard on your stomach, head, arms, and legs, as you laid on the cold floor trying to protect your stomach. He pulled your hair so hard you thought he was going to pull it out. He grabbed you by your cheeks and yelled so closely that his spit landed on your face. Then what happened?

Ana: Eventually he stopped, stumbled his way around me and passed out on the bed. I was too scared and in too much pain to move so I spent the rest of the night on the floor quietly sobbing.

Therapist: Slow down, tell me what you remember about being on the floor that night.

Ana: I will never forget how the hard, cold floor felt against my skin, and how tears and blood merged into a sticky cold liquid that eventually dried on my face and my clothes. I think my eyes were swollen from all the crying because they hurt and after a while I couldn't really see clearly.

Therapist: How did you feel in that moment?

Ana: I was terrified. I didn't move. I was afraid he would wake up. I was so scared for my baby. When he moved inside me it made me so happy that I smiled while crying.

Therapist: You were terrified to move because you didn't want to wake Jose up. You were also afraid something happened to your baby until you felt him move and you felt so happy, you smiled even though you were crying. What happened after that night?

Ana: The next day I woke up and got myself cleaned up as best as I could. Jose left without saying one word to me. I headed over to the main house to help his mom with breakfast. I intended to talk to her to ask her to help me, to talk to Jose for me, to make him understand that what he had done was wrong. My eyes were very swollen, my cheeks were red, and I had bruises all over my arms and legs. I know his mother saw them. We worked quietly in the kitchen, but before I had the courage to talk to her she said to me, "no debes darle razón para enojarse, si tu marido se enoja es tu culpa" ("you shouldn't give him a reason to get angry, if he gets upset with you it is your fault.")

As demonstrated in the excerpt above, my role in this treatment entailed the delicate balance between engaging in a detailed inquiry of the trauma event, and then taking those details, articulating them in a cohesive and linear manner, and as such co-creating her autobiographical narrative to integrate the fragmented memories.

Session 4: Living with Violence and Deciding to Leave

Narrative. *Javier brought me so much joy, he was such a good and beautiful baby. He didn't cry much. I spent all my time with him. I used to sing to Javier and tell him stories, like the stories my father used to tell me. Jose wasn't there most of the time. My son's first Christmas was such a bad Christmas. Javier was sick, he had a fever and a cough, he was so small I was worried about him. Since it was Christmas and Jose was home visiting he had specifically requested that I make him tamales and chiles rellenos for noche buena (the night before Christmas) but since my son was sick and I was so concerned with bringing his fever down, I didn't have enough time to prepare them. He got home from his parent's house just after midnight. He was drunk and stumbled in yelling. He was hungry so I warmed up some food and set up the table. When he sat down and looked at the food he got so mad he slammed his hands on the table and started yelling at me. He picked up the plates one by one and slammed them against the wall. I was scared, I was afraid to move and have him come after me, but I knew that the longer I sat in his range of vision the most likely it was that he would hit me. I got up quickly with the pretense of wanting to clean up the mess he was making. I almost made it out the door but he grabbed me by the hair and pulled me back into the dining room. He had a crazy look in his eyes, he told me I was going to learn to respect him. He grabbed me by the hair again and slammed my face against the table. The pain was so excruciating that initially I could not see straight, everything was blurry. I tasted blood coming down from my nose. He dragged me by my*

hair. He threw me against the floor on top of the food and kicked me on my ribs because I had made a mess. He told me to clean it up and I did like a robot. After I finished cleaning everything up, Jose had finally fallen asleep. I sat on the kitchen table and I cried. I cried because I remembered how my previous Christmas had been so different; the holidays had always been a happy time for me but not anymore. Many nights after that ended the same. It would mostly happen when he was drunk. Whenever I knew he would be drinking I would feel nervous all day; holidays were really terrible. I would make sure to tire out my son so he would be able to sleep through whatever fight was coming. I accepted our marriage the way it was and did not think about leaving him until my mom passed away. Javier was almost 5 years old when I got a call from my younger sister Rosario letting me know mami was very sick. She had stomach cancer and was told there was nothing they could do for her. I wanted to go see her that moment but I knew I had to wait for Jose to come home. He was visiting home that weekend, so I waited anxiously for him. When Jose finally came home I begged him to let me go see her. He simply said no. I looked into his eyes and there was no compassion. That night he robbed me of the opportunity to say goodbye to my mother. She passed away two weeks later. I was angry. Just the sight of him would make my blood boil. I wished that it was him that was dead not mami. I could not look at him without rage and resentment. I knew I could not live the rest of my life next to him; I could not let my son turn out like his father. That's when I decided to leave. I left two months later. I didn't pack very much just some clothes and my son's favorite toy. We left in the middle of the day around noon. We got to the bus station got on a bus and left. The bus was very crowded but I got a seat. When we got to the bus terminal in San Salvador we took another bus to El Paste, where one of my great aunt's lived. It was a very rural and remote town but it was the safest place for us since Jose never met this aunt and didn't know anything about her. She

was older and alone; her children had all moved away. I hadn't seen her or spoken to her in years. Gracias a Dios (thank God) mi tia Mela (my aunt Mela) recognized me. She saw something in my face and she gave me a big hug and said "Deja todo en las manos de Dios" (leave everything in God's hands). For the first time in a long time I felt safe. I stayed there for a few months. I grew very close to Tia Mela, she would listen to me for hours at a time and she never judged me. She was understanding and would tell me repeatedly how strong and brave I was even though I couldn't see it. We spent hours in the kitchen cooking and talking about life. She reminded me so much of my mom. Tia Mela was very active in her church community. I would accompany her to church every Saturday. I grew up Catholic but she was an Evangelical Christian. I quickly grew to appreciate and love their Christian community, they offered me support and love when I most needed it. They really welcomed us. For the first time since I left my home I felt like I belonged. I also really enjoyed the services, particularly the songs; they were lively but meaningful. We often sang about hope and courage, the things I thought I had lost while living with Jose. Since then I have considered myself evangelical and try to live my life accordingly.

Therapist Review.

Session summary. Ana began session four by discussing the joy that her first born Javier brought into her life. However, this joy was short lived as the abuse at the hands of her husband continued to escalate. The exposure portion of the session was halted as Ana entered a dissociative state. Clinical interventions were used to ground Ana in the present before proceeding with the narrative exposure of the trauma she experienced on Christmas of 1998. After clinically addressing Ana's tendency towards dissociation, Ana narrated in detail the physical assault she endured for not preparing the Christmas dishes Jose had demanded. Ana

discussed how this type of physical assault became common in her marriage and how closely they were tied to Jose's drinking problem. She described how quickly she grew to accept the abuse in her marriage until her mother died. Ana detailed the trauma of losing her mother to stomach cancer and how Jose prevented her from being by her side and saying goodbye to her. The emotional injury of being robbed of that moment and then further being prevented from grieving her mother's loss with her family prompted Ana to want to leave her marriage. Ana discussed how she escaped and her life following her escape. Ana found refuge in her great-aunt's home and in the evangelical Christian community where she felt supported and understood.

Managing dissociation. "The therapeutic challenge in NET is to look at the traumatic past from the present perspective" (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, p. 62) This is a therapeutic challenge because at times the physiological and/or emotional memory of a trauma can be so intense that it takes the person back to the past, as with a flashback. In order for true healing to take place the patient must stay in reality and tolerate the painful memories of a past event. As such, my role in treating Ana was to make sure she stayed in the present. In this session, as she began narrating the trauma event she experienced on Christmas 1998, Ana's narrative was fragmented, she began to verbally slow down, she made little to no eye contact, and decreased her mobility significantly. Given her physical and cognitive changes, I began to suspect that she was entering a dissociative state. Continuing without addressing the changes in her state could have led to a complete dissociative episode which would ultimately dysregulate her and further strengthen avoidance and anxiety. My goal in that moment was to implement clinical interventions that would support emotional containment, physical activation, and grounding. As illustrated in the excerpt below, some of the interventions utilized in this session included

physical activation through movement and applied pressure, as well as, increasing Ana's sensory awareness of the present by eliciting identification of as many senses as possible.

Therapist: Ana, are you thinking about what happened that night?

Ana: [For a while Ana did not respond] I'm sorry, what did you just say?

Therapist: Are you thinking about that night?

Ana: [Slowly she shook her head yes]

Therapist: I notice that you are withdrawing into yourself, perhaps the memory of what happened is too powerful and painful, but I want you to stay with me Ana, in this room.

Can you tell me where you are right now, what is this place?

Ana: I am at the clinic.

Therapist: Very good, we are the clinic. What is this room that we are in?

Ana: A room, an office?

Therapist: Right, now what I am going to ask you to do may seem odd, but I think this exercise will help you remember you are here, in this room with me and not in the past with Jose.

Ana: I know I'm here, I'm on crazy

Therapist: I know you're not crazy. It's just that sometimes our memories can be so strong that they can confuse us and I don't want that to happen to you, so will you participate in this exercise with me?

Ana: Ok

Therapist: Ana, I want you to get up to stretch your legs, walk around the office noticing everything that is in the office.

Ana: [Slowly got up and look quizzically at me]

Therapist: I want you to tell me everything you see, describe it to me in as much detail as you can, for example, tell me the size, color, etc.?

Ana: Ok, I see two chairs

Therapist: What color are the chairs?

Ana: One is green and the other one is blue.

Therapist: Why don't you touch them and tell me what they feel like, what's the material like?

Ana: The green chair feels soft like a velvety material. The blue chair is sturdier, and the fabric is rougher, it doesn't feel as smooth as the other one.

Therapist: What else do you see in here?

Ana: There's 4 walls, they're half white and half blue. There is also 1 large window.

Therapist: Keep going

Ana: There is brown carpet in this room

Therapist: What else?

Ana: There is a small table, it's grey and it has a lamp. The lamp is on and it's beige with some designs. There is also a small tissue box and a red candle on the table.

Therapist: Pick up the candle what does it smell like?

Ana: It smells like apples

Therapist: What does it feel like in your hand?

Ana: It's a little heavy, and the glass feels smooth in my hands, the glass is cold.

Therapist: I know it may have been odd but you did great, you can take a seat if you want. How do you feel right now?

Ana: Like I am more awake, I was getting tired before. Sleepy.

Therapist: Before you got up and walked around what was happening for you inside?

Ana: I don't know I just got very scared.

Therapist: What did that feel like in your body?

Ana: My heart started racing, it felt like it was going to come out of my chest. I don't like that feeling, it feels like I am going to die. If I stay really still and focus on looking at only one spot on the wall it goes away.

Therapist: What goes away?

Ana: The memories.

Therapist: What does it feel like when they go away?

Ana: I start to get sleepy, I don't feel anything, I don't think. I just feel like my mind went away. Went someplace else.

Therapist: I know that what you have been through has been so scary at times, that the only way you knew how to deal with it was to zone out, to disconnect your mind from your body. Does that make sense?

Ana: Yes, It's better that way. I don't have to remember. I don't have to remember how awful it was.

Therapist: I know in the moment it feels better because it makes the pain go away but in the long run it gives these memories more power and it keeps your body and mind disconnected.

Ana: [Crying] But I can't control it. I'm going crazy.

Therapist: For a while now this is one of the ways that you have learned to deal with the difficult memories and it may even happen automatically now whenever you start to feel overwhelmed by these memories and feelings but it doesn't have to be that way.

Ana: It doesn't?

Therapist: No it doesn't. What we are trying to do here in therapy is the opposite. In order for you to heal we have to make that connection between your body and mind, in other words, between all of your thoughts, feelings, and memories. But unlike other times, this time you are not alone. I am right here with you, I'll be with you every step of the way and I won't let anything happen to you. Do you think we can give it another try?

Ana: Ok

Therapist: And if I notice that you are leaving me again, we will go through similar exercises as before to make sure you stay in this room with me ok?

Ana: Ok

As illustrated above, in addition to grounding Ana in the present, I also found it important to provide psychoeducation about trauma and dissociation. For years Ana had experienced similar episodes without any understanding of what was happening to her emotionally or physically. The lack of understanding and sense of uncontrollability of her body during such episodes contributed to her already mounting concerns that she was "going crazy." My hope was that by providing information about what was happening to her would not only help Ana name her experience but also help her gain back some ownership and control over her body by arming her with tools that would help her identify and manage these episodes going forward.

Session 5: New Life Away From Jose

Narrative. (Second half of the session) *I loved living with Tia Mela but as much as I liked living there, the little bit of money I had managed to save before leaving Jose was quickly dwindling and I knew I would have to get a job eventually. At first Jose and other police officers who were his friends tried to intimidate my family into telling him where I was. But after a while*

he would bother my family less frequently and about 6 months later he stopped looking for me, there were rumors that he had left the country.

At that point I really needed a job. My sister told me about a job at a clothing factory and helped me find a small apartment. I moved back to San Salvador, started working, sent my son to school and lived a simple but happy life for a few years. I worked at the factory and would pay an elderly neighbor to care for my son after school. At first I would only go out to go to work, I was afraid to bump into Jose. Eventually my brother Edgar got confirmation from a friend that Jose had left the police force and moved to the United States. That feeling of always watching my back and being constantly afraid started to go away and after a while I started to feel like myself again. Like the person I was before I met Jose. I was friendly with people, I would talk to everyone, and I laughed. I felt free. I didn't have to be careful about what I said or who I spoke to anymore. I didn't have to hide anymore.

Later I met German. He was a taxi driver who was often parked outside the factory. He pursued me for months but I was not interested in another relationship because I was scared. We became friends and he would often drive me home after work. He wasn't as handsome as Jose and he didn't have the domineering presence that I had first admired about Jose. But that was what I liked about him, he was a clown and would make me laugh all the time. One day he finally won me over. What I liked most about him was that he was gentle. He never raised his voice. He never treated me badly. I felt safe with him. After seeing each other for a few months I got pregnant with Diana. When I found out about it I was excited because I knew it would be different than my first pregnancy, I was near my family and I made sure to go to all my doctor appointments. I told Javier on a Sunday morning, I took him to the park, the sun was shining and I sat him down on a bench. I starting talking about all the kids that were on the playground and

how lucky they were to have brothers and sisters to play with and then I told him he was going to be just as lucky because he was going to be a big brother. He was so excited that he jumped up and down and kissed my stomach. We went to get ice-cream after the park; when it started raining we ran home. On our way home Javier pointed out a rainbow that had formed, it was beautiful. I felt like it was a sign from mami telling me everything was going to be alright. When I got home I started sewing a dress for the baby from this bright pink fabric I had found. That day was probably the happiest day of my life.

Towards the end of my pregnancy I found out German had lied to me, he was a married man. It didn't make me sad. I was angry when I first found out because he had lied to me. But he had never promised me marriage or anything like that and I had never painted a picture in my mind of us as a happy family. I was ok with the relationship ending. I would see German occasionally, he would visit Dianita and helped me out financially as much as possible. My main focus was spending time with my children. My son was getting older and he was such a big help with Dianita, he taught her how to walk. I spent all my time with my kids, visiting family, taking them to the park or just playing with them at home. We didn't have a lot but we were at peace and we were really happy.

Therapist Review.

Session summary. Session five diverted from the established structure of NET. As Ana entered the room, Ana appeared visibly depressed and was somewhat disheveled. Before the change in her mood and appearance could be addressed she disclosed that she had lost her brother Edgar a few days before. Given her recent loss and her strong emotional reaction to it, the focus of this session became processing Ana's grief. Ana discussed her close relationship with her brother and the impact of his loss. She explored intense feelings of guilt and unresolved

grief related to previous unprocessed losses. Once her affect in the room was better contained the focus of the session shifted back to NET. Ana narrated her experience after leaving Jose and creating a new life for herself. She discussed creating new interpersonal relationships, as well as, the birth of her second child Diana.

Diverging from the autobiographical narrative. The lifeline created in session one was a blueprint that provided guidance throughout most of the treatment. However, in therapy, just as in real life even the most well developed plans sometimes need to be adjusted when new information or unpredicted situations arise; this was the case in session five. As Ana entered the room it was clear from her demeanor and affect that something was wrong. Finding out that Ana's brother had suddenly passed away immediately put me on alert given her history of complicated loss and bereavement. Although there was a tentative plan for session five, it seemed clinically appropriate to adjust the focus of the session to give Ana a space to grieve and process her recent loss. This may not be the clinically appropriate course of treatment for every NET client that suffers a loss while in treatment but given Ana's history I was concerned that failing to do so would simply replicate past experiences where her grieving process was thwarted. How this was addressed in treatment is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Ana: (Ana looked very upset as she entered the room. Immediately after sitting down she begins without waiting for a prompt). I lost my brother Edgar last week.

Therapist: Ana I am so sorry for your loss. What happened?

Ana: My brother killed himself. He drank himself to death.

Therapist: Ana, you have just suffered a major loss and if it is ok with you I would like to pause our regular session and spend some time talking about Edgar before we continue with your narrative.

Ana: Ok (crying)

Therapist: I can see that this is very upsetting for you

Ana: I can't believe he is gone. I will never see him again, I will never hear his laughter again, I will never hear his stupid jokes again. The worst part is that I didn't even get to say goodbye.

The loss of Ana's brother brought to the surface feelings of guilt and inadequacy she experienced both as a child when she lost her father, and as an adult when she lost her mother. In all three occasions, Ana was unable to properly say good bye and grieve the loss of her loved ones due to circumstance beyond her control which have left her feeling powerless and helpless. In this session, Ana was able to put into words the anger and sadness she felt and continues to feel knowing that she was not able to be there for her family the way she would have liked. This gave us the opportunity to engage in cognitive restructuring of these past losses and help her obtain a deeper understanding of how they have impacted her cognitions and emotions. Furthermore, in this session Ana's feeling of anger and resentment towards Jose for robbing her of achieving closure, as well as, important moments with her family, were briefly explored.

Managing helplessness and holding on to hope. The unexpected loss of her favorite brother left Ana feeling helpless. This loss was experienced by Ana as another unfair hit by life; another experience where something just happened to her independently of her actions or desires. Ana started doubting her own agency and was having difficulty identifying and getting in touch with the incredible resilience and strength that have allowed her to survive and continue to fight despite her extensive trauma history. I saw my therapeutic role in that moment as twofold. First and foremost, it was important to remind Ana of her resilience and the hope for a better future that had been motivating her since she left Jose. It is not uncommon for survivors of complex

trauma to view hope as a dangerous thing, being hopeful inherently means that you are vulnerable to losing that which you wish to achieve; letting go of hope, can serve a protective strategy because if you have no expectations then you cannot be let down. However, it is also this very hope (although dangerous) that motivates individuals to keep fighting and defy odds. I had to respect and acknowledge that Ana was having a hard time accessing that part of herself, while at the same time holding on to my hope and believe it was possible for her to have the life she wished for. Therefore, in that moment my role was also to make my own hope available for us to share until she was ready and able to get in touch with that part of herself again. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

Therapist: How does not having control over your life make you feel?

Ana: Powerless... angry. I want to yell at times, other times I just cry because there is nothing I can do to change my situation. It's like no matter what I do, I'm stuck.

Therapist: I know that it feels like all the major decisions in your life have been made and continue to be made by others. But you are here because you decided and had the strength to seek a better future for you and your children. You are fighting and doing everything in your power to make sure you can start a new life with your children, here. I believe you have gained some control back and you will continue to do so.

Ana: I just don't feel like that today.

Therapist: That's ok. You just lost your brother suddenly and you're feeling that pain, on top of the pain of being separated from your loved ones. If it is ok with you, today I will hold that hope for the both of us.

Ana: Ok

Processing positive memories. Although it was necessary to diverge from the telling of her narrative in chronological order to focus on her recent loss, it was also clinically important to maintain continuity in treatment. Having spent the first hour of the session on Ana's grief reaction her affect and demeanor in the room changed, she remained sad but was not as angry and agitated as when she first walked in. As such we shifted focus, with her permission.

The disruption of this session also provided a perfect opportunity to focus more fully on some of Ana's positive life memories, or flowers. Although the focus in exposure therapy is to explore in detail trauma experiences, in NET the therapeutic goal is not only to desensitize an individual to their trauma experiences but to create a coherent and comprehensive autobiographical narrative which must include important positive experiences. As such, it is also important to spend time fleshing out positive life experiences during the course of treatment. Given Ana's sense of helplessness expressed in session five, and the constricted amount of time we had left in the session, it seemed particularly appropriate to focus more fully in a time in her life when she felt more independent and hopeful than to try to delve into narrating the next traumatic experience. This was a choice point where the clinical rationale behind it had to be considered and understood. I worried that maybe I was trying to protect Ana from visiting painful memories in this session and therefore was colluding with her in avoidance. However, I also recognized and admired her strength and resilience and did not see her as a wounded person that needed my protection. Furthermore, I truly believe that Ana's hesitation to resume the narrative portion of the session was not due to simple avoidance but was directly related to the pain and grief she felt having just lost her favorite brother. As described in the NET manual, the therapist should not proceed with imaginal exposure of a new trauma if there is not enough sufficient time left in the session to fully process the event and help the client come down from

the resulting arousal. Weighing all this, I proceeded with my revised plan for the session and focused the remainder of this session on helping Ana incorporate a time in her life when she was happy and independent into her narrative.

Session 6: Reliving the Nightmare

Narrative. *At that time, my main focus was spending time with my children, my son was getting older and Dianita was learning to walk. It had been three years since I left Jose and I tried not to think about him or what I went through with him. But my peace didn't last because that bastard found me. One afternoon I was waiting on the bus stop after work with the girls I worked with, when Jose's old partner drove by. At first I couldn't place him, he looked familiar but it had been years since I last saw him, it wasn't until he walked up to me and talked to me that I realized who he was. I wanted to run away but I froze, it took me a few seconds to respond to him and when I did I could barely get any words out. I was scared. My co-workers grew concerned and told me that I looked like I had seen a ghost. I felt dizzy and had to find a place to sit because my head was spinning. The rest of that day I was very nervous, afraid to leave my house. Eventually I was able to calm myself down because I thought Jose was still in the USA.*

A couple of weeks went by and nothing happened so I began to feel better, less scared. I went back to my regular routine. I would wake up at 4:30am, cook for the day, pack our lunches and then get myself and the kids ready. We would leave the house at 6:00 am, I would leave my kids with the neighbor and I would take the bus to the factory. I would start work at 7:00 am and the day would go by very quickly. It was tedious work but I liked the girls I worked with. It was my co-worker Sandra's birthday and another co-worker Fatima made a cake for Sandra; we sang her happy birthday. That was the last day I saw them. That afternoon I was waiting for the bus and my worst nightmare came true. Across the street staring right at me was Jose. I did not

know he had been deported a few months back and had resumed his search for me. He turned the car around and stopped at the bus stop. He got out of the car and walked up to me. I was paralyzed, I wanted to run, I wanted to scream but I could not move. He smiled at my co-workers and introduced himself as my husband. The girls I had worked with for the past three years had no idea I was married. Everything moved in slow motion and did not seem real. My heart was beating fast, so fast it was hard for me to breathe. And it was so loud, the beating was so loud, and there was so much traffic, so much noise. I couldn't hear what anyone was saying. I couldn't move. It was like I was carrying bags of bricks that I couldn't put down. He put his arm around me and escorted me to the car. I got in his car.

As he drove away I sat silently in his car. At first he was angry and yelling, he said I had taken his son away and that he deserved to see him. He told me he knew where I lived and where I worked and that he wanted to see our son. Then all of a sudden he changed. He lowered his voice and told me he had missed us and that he was there to take us home. He told me that a family needs to stay together and that my place was at home with him. When we got to my apartment he made me go inside and told me to pack. While I packed he walked around touching everything. It made me cringe. I didn't want him there I wanted to tell him to leave. I felt naked. Now he knew everything about my life. He found some of Dianita's toys and I had to tell him I had a daughter. He didn't say anything. I knew that would be the last time I would be in that apartment, as I left the apartment tears fell down my face. I felt like I was leaving a part of me behind. We went to my neighbor's house to pick up the kids. I had to pretend everything was ok because I didn't want to scare my kids. Jose introduced himself to my neighbor and told her a story about how he had been in the US and was now back so I didn't have to work anymore and we would be going back home to San Luis del Carmen. She looked worried but since I didn't say

anything she didn't say anything either. When Jose saw Javier he forced him to give him a hug; Javier was reluctant but complied. He then picked up Diana and examined her, and without saying anything he handed her to me and said let's go. I sat in the back seat with my two children. They both fell asleep and I cried as he drove away, away from the safe life I had worked so hard to create. I felt defeated, like I had lost and Jose had won. I knew what awaited me in that house. I was angry with God for letting that happen. Once we drove into San Luis del Carmen I knew no one would help me. I was alone. It was dark when we arrived in his house, he unpacked the car and led us inside. The house looked the same inside, not much had changed since I left, except everything looked older, dirtier, and darker.

Jose looked older, worn out, just like the house he looked the same but different at the same time. Everything in the house was in the same place, it gave me a weird feeling, like I never left or like I belonged there. I hated everything in that house, it was like a prison to me. But I didn't fight it. Me resigne (I resigned myself to that life). I missed the life I had built but I chose not to think about the factory or the friends I left behind. It was easier that way. I focused on trying to make the best of it. I spent most of my time with my children. Jose was not a police officer anymore and that seemed to have impacted him a lot. He helped his father run his business, but I don't think he contributed much; he spent most of his time drinking. His family blamed me for breaking Jose's heart. At first, the worst days were when he would come home drunk and forced me to sleep with him. Most of the time he was so drunk he couldn't perform and that would enrage him. He would blame me for his issues; he would slap me and grab me by my hair as he shoved me around until he would pass out or until he got bored. At first the abuse went on at night and never in front of the children. Later that also changed. He would get mad if the children were too loud or if Diana cried. He would yell at them and whenever Javier

misbehaved he would make him kneel on rice. I didn't like it but I wouldn't say anything because I didn't want Jose to hit him instead. The children were scared of him and tried to avoid him whenever he was home which would make him angry. Every day went by slowly. I would think about running away, but then quickly push the thought away until the day he crossed the line.

It all started because of a stupid joke; some stupid drunk made fun of Jose for raising a child that wasn't his. Everyone knew Diana was not his daughter but no one had ever brought it up until that day. He came home and was so angry. He was drunk and his eyes looked like they were going to come out of his face as he yelled. He slapped me with the back of his hand; he hit me so hard that I stumbled backwards, tripped over the chair behind me and fell on the floor. He hit me with such force that he cut my lip open. The noise woke up the children and when Diana saw me on the floor bleeding she came running towards me. He didn't like that so he pulled Diana by her hair and called her "hija de puta" (daughter of a whore). Javier was twelve years old and loved his little sister; he stepped in and tried to shield Diana. He looked at Jose right in the eyes and yelled "te odio" (I hate you). I tried to pull him away but it was too late to stop Jose. Jose got in Javier's face and said "Te crees un hombre? Vamos a ver que tan hombre eres" (You think you're a man now? We'll see how much of a man you really are) he grabbed Javier by the arm and dragged him out the door. I felt my heart sink, my worst nightmare was coming true. I yelled at Jose to let Javier go but he didn't listen. It had rained earlier so it smelled like wet grass. It was pretty quiet except for the wind; it sounded like it was howling. I watched from the door as Dianita held on to my leg. It was pitch black outside and he walked far away from the house until I could barely see them. He made Javier kneel on the dirt in front of him. Then he turned around and yelled for us to go to him. I was scared and I shivered as I walked towards them because it was a windy night. He made us kneel as well. I was wearing a

skirt and the wet grass got stuck to my legs. It was dark but there was just enough light coming from the house to see what was going on. Jose reached behind his back, under his shirt, and pulled out his gun. I made an indescribable loud noise as I watched him point his gun to the back of Diana's head. I tried to get up to protect her but he yelled for me to stay where I was otherwise he would shoot her. Javier had tears in his eyes but he did not cry. I felt horror. I really believed he would shoot her. I looked around and tried to find something to attack him with but there was nothing other than grass. There was nothing I could do to stop him. I was so angry, I wanted to throw myself on him and rip his eyes out. But I was afraid. I prayed that he would stop. I asked him to kill me and let her go but he ignored me. I felt like I couldn't breathe, like I couldn't move, like time stopped moving. I didn't feel the wind anymore, I didn't hear the wind hitting the leaves and branches on the trees anymore. I felt so hot. Like I had lava in my veins, my blood felt like it was boiling inside me. I felt hate towards him. I dug my nails into my hands hard. I didn't feel any pain although I cut my palms with my nails. All of a sudden he looked directly at Javier and asked him what he was going to do about it, telling him that if he was such a man he would protect his sister. Javier didn't answer him so Jose moved away from Dianita and hit Javier with the bottom of the gun on his head as he said "eso es lo que pensaba" (that's what I thought). He told Javier he could do anything to us because we all belonged to him, he was the head of the household, he was the king. I saw blood coming down the middle of Javier's forehead, it was like a shiny liquid when the moonlight hit it. I was on the ground holding Dianita. He grabbed me by my shirt and put me back into kneeling position. He was standing in front of me, he was so close. He held the gun to the front of my head. Jose was pressing it hard against my skin; the gun felt cold and heavy on my skin. I heard my kids, crying and yelling. I saw the fear in their eyes. I looked straight at them and told them everything was

going to be alright. I didn't believe that. I thought—"al fin llego el momento" (the moment has finally come). I knew he was going to pull the trigger so I closed my eyes. I could still hear them crying and then I heard a click. Nothing happened. The gun was empty. I was afraid to open my eyes, I was confused. I kept my eyes closed for a while until my children hugged me. I pulled them close to me and kissed them over and over again, they were both crying quietly. I looked around for Jose and found him leaning against a tree some distance away. He was laughing hysterically; he looked like a crazy person. When he realized we were staring at him he yelled for us to go back in the house. He stayed outside by the tree drinking from his bottle of guaro (traditional liquor).

We ran back in the house quickly. I was angry for what he did to my kids. I was also tired, "sin animo" (without spirit). We were all dirty but I didn't care; the three of us got into Javier's bed and held each other. Eventually they fell asleep but I didn't sleep that night, I just kept waiting for Jose to come back in the house but he never did. The next day he just pretended nothing had happened like he always did. After that night I decided I was not going to stay and let myself or my kids be his victims. I promised myself that was the last time I would let him hurt my kids. I didn't know how or when but I knew we had to leave him.

Therapist Review.

Session summary. In session six, Ana narrated how three years after leaving Jose she was spotted by his old partner and ultimately found by Jose. She detailed how Jose showed up one day after she got out of work and forced her to return to San Luis Del Carmen with him. She discussed the sadness of having to say goodbye to her apartment and the independent life she had created in San Salvador. Ana narrated in great detail what Jose did to her and her children after he was ridiculed for raising someone else's child. She vividly described the terror she felt when

Jose pointed a gun to her daughter's head in an effort to show them who was in charge. She described her belief that he was going to kill her when he put his gun to her forehead and pulled the trigger of an empty gun. Finally, Ana described her decision to leave Jose and flee to the USA in search of safety.

Narrating in slow motion. This session highlights the importance of slowing down the narration to bring forth as many contextual factors surrounding the trauma memory to the forefront. It was important to help Ana establish the circumstances surrounding the event or incident before asking her to place herself at the beginning of the sequence. This was accomplished by asking sensory relevant questions about her surroundings leading up to the trauma experiences as illustrated below.

Therapist: Tell me what you remember about that night outside of your house?

Ana: It was pitch black outside and he walked far away from the house until I could barely see them.

Therapist: Do you remember anything about the air, the smell of that night? How about any sounds?

Ana: It had rained earlier so it smelled like wet grass. It was pretty quiet except for the wind it sounded almost like an animal howling.

Therapist: What did you see?

Ana: I saw how Jose and Javier walked away from the house and into the darkness of the night towards the trees.

Therapist: You were standing at the back door watching them walk towards the darkness. You smelled the wet grass from the earlier rain and you heard the loud howling wind. What happened next?

Ana: The further they walked away from the house the harder it was to see. I watched from the door as Dianita held on to my leg. He made Javier kneel on the dirt in front of him. Then he turned around and yelled for us to go to him. I didn't want to but I was afraid of what he would do to Javier if we disobeyed him. I wished it was a dream, I still wish none of it would have happened.

Activating the fear structure. In this session I provided direct verbal feedback of an observed physiological response to help further activate Ana's fear structure. As illustrated below, doing so helped Ana access the intense horror and fear she felt when faced with the possibility of losing her daughter.

Therapist: I noticed you were just holding your breath, where you holding your breath that night as well?

Ana: I think so, while I watched him point the gun at Dianita I felt like I couldn't breathe.

Therapist: What else do you remember feeling?

Ana: like I couldn't move, like time stopped moving. I didn't feel the wind anymore, I didn't hear the wind hitting the leaves and branches on the trees anymore. All I could do was watch to see what Jose did next, waiting for the worst I held my breath. When he moved the gun away from her head I moved towards her and grabbed her so hard that we collapsed to floor hugging. I was so relieved for a moment until I watched him hit Javier with his gun and saw blood coming down the middle of his forehead.

Therapist: What happened then?

I heard what Jose said to Javier but his voice sounded so distant I remember just watching the blood come down Javier's forehead. Because it was so dark I couldn't really see the blood until the light from the moon hit it and made it look like a shiny

liquid on his forehead. [Ana touched her forehead]. After he hit Javier I thought it was over but it wasn't. Jose was so unpredictable that night.

Furthermore, my role as the clinician was to help put Ana's sensations into words and incorporate them into the narrative flow rather than having these sensations be isolated and seemingly unrelated experiences. Helping Ana access these physical sensations allowed her to get deeper into the imaginal exposure of the trauma memory.

Therapist: Where was he standing?

Ana: He was standing in front of me, he was so close I could have punched him but I didn't.

Where in your body was he pointing the gun?

Ana: He was holding the gun to the front of my head.

Therapist: Do you remember what the gun felt like against your skin.

Ana: It felt, it felt... cold and heavy. Jose was pressing it hard against my skin.

Therapist: Can you feel the gun against your skin right now as you did then?

Ana: Yes, right here [pointing to the middle of her forehead] I feel pressure right here.

Therapist: Help me see that moment. What did you think about?

Ana: [Shaking her head rapidly] I don't want to, I don't want to.

Therapist: It's ok Ana. I'm here with you, we will go very slowly but I need you to tell me everything you remember about that moment.

Ana: [Closed her eyes, and put her hands over her ears] If I think about it I can still hear them.

Therapist: Who did you hear Ana?

Ana: I hear my kids, crying and yelling.

Therapist: In that moment you heard Diana and Javier scream and cry because they were afraid. What else do you remember?

Ana: I looked at my children but I couldn't bear to see the fear on their faces. I looked in their eyes and told them everything was going to be alright.

Extending the length of the session. Each previous treatment session had been approximately ninety to one-hundred-and-twenty minutes long. However, given the richness of session six a clinical decision to extend the session for an additional fifteen minutes was needed to make sure that there was enough time and attention paid to Ana coming down from an excited and aroused state prior to the end of the session. Session six had to be extended to one hundred and thirty-five minutes to guarantee that we had enough time to not only fully engage in the imaginal exposure of the trauma, but also had time to stabilize Ana and bring her arousal level down into an appropriate window of tolerance.

Assessing suicidality. While engaged in imaginal exposure of the trauma memory Ana mentioned she believed Jose was going to kill her in that moment and that a part of her wanted him to do it. Because we were in the middle of imaginal exposure, rather than disrupting the emotional processing moment I made a mental note of it and made sure to bring it back up at the end of the session; I wanted to further inquire about both past and current suicidal ideation. Ana admitted that she had experienced some passive suicidal ideation related to the guilt that she felt for not being able to protect her children from being terrorized by Jose. However, she was adamant that she has never tried to end her life and would never do it citing her children and religious values as protective factors. Nevertheless, I used that opportunity to provide information about available resources at her disposal should she ever feel like that again.

Session 7: Journey Towards a Safer Life

Narrative. *After Jose threatened us with his gun I didn't sleep much. When Jose wasn't home I didn't sleep well because I was worried about when he would get home and what mood he was going to be in; any little noise would wake me. When he was home, it was even worse because I had to stay up to make sure nothing happened to my kids. I knew we had to go but first I had to figure out where. No matter where I went in El Salvador, there was a risk he would find me. One day I decided to leave El Salvador. Two of my brothers, Hector and Pedro left El Salvador many years before to work in America. From what I had heard it is a really big country where people could get lost. That's what I wanted to do, I wanted to get lost so he would never find me. I just had to wait for the right moment. After I knew I would leave things got better and worse at the same time. Better because my faith came back, I finally had something to look forward to; I saw light down my path. But every day my hate for Jose grew stronger until I couldn't even tolerate the sound of his breathing. I spent the next couple of months putting aside some of the money Jose gave me for food and a few times I even took money from his wallet when he was passed out drunk. I was scared. Scared of what would happen if Jose found out about my plan before I was able to get away. I was afraid he would kill us.*

The day we left, Jose was sleeping out on the couch snoring loudly. He was a heavy sleeper when drunk. I woke up the children and told them we were going on a trip. It was a Wednesday morning, we left the house around 7:00am, I would normally take Javier to school at that time so if Jose woke up he wouldn't notice anything was going on at least for a little while. The first bus left at 9:00am; as we waited at the bus station time moved so slowly. I sat on a hard bench watching the seconds go by on an old clock they had at the station. It seemed like we waited an eternity. I prayed the entire time, prayed that Jose would not wake up and notice we

were gone. “Dios me escucho” (God listened). We took the bus to San Salvador and from there we went back to Tia Mela’s house. Jose never knew that is where I hid when I first left him so I was pretty sure he would not find us there. I was finally able to calm down when we got on the second bus.

The next couple of months are a blur, they went by fast as I was trying to arrange how to leave the country and what would happen to my children. I decided to leave Javier and Dianita in El Salvador. It was a hard decision; it was the last thing I wanted to do but I couldn’t afford to bring them and I knew it would be a hard trip for them to take. My plan was to come first and then send for them, like so many of our friends and neighbors had done. Tia Mela was too old to take care of them so I left them with Cecilia my sister-in law. The day I said goodbye to them Diana was wearing a yellow dress I had sown for her; she looked so beautiful. They cried as they hugged me, and I tried very hard to keep a smile on my face. Javier told me “no te preocupes mami yo la voy a cuidar muy bien” (don’t worry mom I am going to take good care of her). Deep down it hurt so much to say goodbye to them; I had never been apart from them before.

I was scared and excited at the same time. It was like my life was starting over. There were ten of us who left together from El Salvador. I didn’t know anyone I was traveling with. We picked up more people along the way in Guatemala and Mexico; at one point there were twenty-two of us traveling together. Everyone quickly learned to watch their things very carefully. We slept holding on to our bags tightly to make sure no one stole our things, especially the coyotes (smugglers). I saw them go into people’s bags and take stuff, mostly food, water, etc. when they thought no one was looking. One of the most difficult parts for me was when we crossed from Guatemala to Mexico through the Suchiate river. We crossed in the middle of the night on large

rubber tires with strips of wood on top held together by rope. It had rained for a few days before our crossing and the water was rough. I don't know how to swim and I had never been on a boat before. It moved around so much I was afraid I was going to fall off and drown. I sat on the wood strips with my legs towards my chest and with my hands to my side holding the wood so tightly I got a few splinters. I was cold. Water constantly splashed on me and my clothes were completely wet. It wasn't really cold but the night breeze made my wet clothes stick to me. I was so scared and cold that I shivered the whole time. The water was so loud. It sounded angry. After we crossed the river we stayed in a house near the water. It was hard for me to sleep that night because when I closed my eyes all I could hear was the river. We spent the majority of the journey in Mexico where we usually traveled at night. Most days we were given 1 meal. Medicine was hard to come by and expensive; if you got sick you could not continue to the next stop. They didn't want anyone slowing us down; they left behind some elderly people, as well as, a pregnant woman from Guatemala. We spent so many hours on the road with nothing to do except talk to each other. That's how we got to know each other. Everyone had a story, a reason to leave their country, but everyone was leaving loved ones behind in search of something better. Some people would talk about their dreams, fantasies of what their lives would be like in the US, others only talked about what they were leaving behind whether it was their mother, or their wife, or a new baby. I talked about my children. I grew to like a few of the members of my group, especially Manuel. Manuel was a fifty-seven-year-old man from El Salvador; he reminded me of my father, of what he would have been like if he were still alive. By the time we got to Tijuana there were only fifteen of us left. We stayed in an old and decrepit home for almost a week because "la migra" (CBP) had been conducting a lot of raids and the coyotes did not think it was a good time to cross the desert. One day they woke us up in the middle of the night and

hurried us into the truck. We were dropped off at the desert each with two large bottles of water, some snacks, and two smugglers who would help us cross. I remember being surprised because it was cold. The first night we walked for about two hours and then we rested until dawn but I couldn't sleep because I was too excited. When the sun came up the temperature quickly changed; we walked under the sun all day stopping every couple of hours to rest and drink water. It was hard to walk because the sand makes you feel like you are sinking with every step you take. The sun is on top of you the whole time and it is just so hot and there is no refuge from that. The wind would pick up the sand and smack you in your face with it. I had sand everywhere. No matter how much we walked it looked like we weren't going anywhere because everything looked the same out there. Manuel was with me in the desert and he was so afraid of running out of water that he went a long time without drinking any and he got really sick. He could barely keep up with the group, he fell down multiple times. We all took turns helping him walk until we got to our resting place for the night. We tried to help him drink water but he had trouble swallowing and would spit it out. He looked so different that day, he looked old and tired. His skin looked hard like leather. That night the leaders told us he was too sick to continue and that it would be better for the group if we left him there. He knew he was dying. When I said goodbye to him he squeezed my hand and kissed me on my forehead. His lips felt hard and dry against my sweat covered forehead. He told me to keep walking and not look back; I did as he asked and did not look back as I walked away with tears on my face. I feel guilty about leaving him and I wanted to go back for him but I didn't because I knew I would never survive out there on my own. I was afraid of dying so I chose to save myself and let him die alone in the desert. We kept walking. We walked and walked until the coyotes told us we had made it to the US side and instructed us to hide behind some dry bushes until midnight when three cars would come for us,

they would signal us by flashing their lights; the coyotes left us there. Later that night we heard cars coming closer and closer but their lights never flickered. A bunch of men in dark uniforms got out of the cars and started walking around. No one moved at first but then someone yelled “la migra” (CBP) and everyone started running in different directions. I froze and watched how these men grabbed people and threw them on the ground. I realized there was nowhere to run so I didn’t even bother trying.

I was detained that night and taken to a detention center in Arizona. The detention center was like being in jail, we were treated like criminals. They yelled at us a lot. I was scared, I had no idea what to expect. Three days after being there I was given the chance to make a phone call. I called my brother and told him what happened. He was concerned about me but there wasn’t much he could do because New Jersey was very far away from Arizona and he was also undocumented and was afraid of being deported. I felt completely alone. Then I met Olga, a woman from Honduras. She told me about asylum and encouraged me to apply for it. I didn’t know anything about asylum but I was willing to try anything because I didn’t want to be sent back and have Jose find me again. At my hearing I told the judge I would like to be considered for asylum. After three months in the detention center I was released to the care of my cousin in New Jersey. I’m very grateful to Olga, I owe my new life to her.

Therapist Review.

Session summary. In session seven, Ana discussed her decision to leave El Salvador and join her brothers in the United States a place where she could hide among others. She left Jose and returned to her great aunt’s house in El Paste until she was able to secure passage with a smuggler. Ana discussed the difficult decision to leave her children in El Salvador under the care of family members. Ana detailed her journey out of El Salvador through Guatemala and Mexico.

She narrated difficult experiences during her trip like her fear of drowning while crossing a river between Guatemala and Mexico on a makeshift draft. Ana also discussed growing close to Manuel, a man that she met during her journey who reminded her of her father. She discussed her experience crossing the desert between Mexico and the US. She detailed watching Manuel suffer from exposure and dehydration and the guilt associated with making the decision to continue on her journey with the rest of the group leaving Manuel behind in the desert. Finally, Ana discussed being detained by CBP and held in a detention center for three months.

Recognizing when and how to facilitate cognitive restructuring. In this session, Ana struggled with the guilt that was elicited as she discussed what happened to Manuel in the desert and what she interpreted as a selfish decision to save herself rather than Manuel. Although we were entrenched in the middle of an exposure moment I found myself having to fight the urge to interrupt this process to engage in cognitive interventions such as discussing the adequacy of her guilt and helping facilitate a more robust understanding of the nature of the lose-lose situation she was in. Although in a non-exposure treatment that may have been the clinically appropriate place to take the session, in NET it is important to trust the process of exposure and habituation of hot memories. Nevertheless, my clinical role in that moment was to help Ana stay with and tolerate the corresponding emotions associated with the hot memory before engaging in cognitive re-structuring of that event.

Unlike in PE, in NET cognitive re-structuring is encouraged following the imaginal exposure of an event because it further helps in the construction of a coherent narrative. Before ending this session, I made room for Ana to discuss and reach a more complete understanding of her behavior in the desert and her decision to leave Manuel and continue on with the rest of the group. By discussing Ana's new insights and realizations surrounding the trauma memory

cognitive restructuring of the event was facilitated. I aimed to challenge the false beliefs that plagued Ana about this memory by clarifying responsibilities. For example, it was important to correct Ana's distorted notion that Manuel getting sick could have been predicted and prevented by Ana. In addition, it was important to also clarify that the decision to leave Manuel behind was made by the leaders of the group, and that at worst she shared just partial not entire responsibility for that decision. Finally, it was also necessary to explicitly discuss Ana's state of mind in that moment and the realistic concern that she also could have perished in the desert if she stayed with Manuel to help bring forth a valid justification for why Ana violated her values with the decision to leave him. Beyond challenging Ana's guilt, we also engaged in rich discussion of the transference issues related to the traumatic loss of Ana's father which were activated by Manuel. This helped Ana achieve a deeper understanding of why and how she had been plagued with such intense guilt for all these years.

Session 8: Life in the US and Missing her Family

Narrative. *I was released from the detention center in Arizona and traveled directly to New Jersey. I arrived in Newark Airport around nine at night. I was picked up from the airport by my cousin who drove me to my brothers' apartment. My brothers and I have lived in a basement apartment in Union City since. It was a big change that took some time to get used; especially all the noise and all the people. At first I was overwhelmed by how much my life changed in one day. When I was in the detention center I felt like I was in jail. I was there for about three months and before that I had been traveling through Central America for about three weeks so it had been a long time since I had slept in a place where I felt safe. It was nice to be free but it was also weird. For almost four months I had followed routines set by other people; I had been told when and where to sleep, when and what to eat, and all of a sudden that*

changed. I know it sounds strange, but being released from the detention center as good as it was, also made me feel more nervous and worried. I was finally in the United States, an unknown place for me; I didn't know many people and did not speak the language. Getting to this country was my goal for so long, but I never really thought about what it would be like to be here. I was finally able to stop worrying about hiding, or about surviving and making it to the next day. I started worrying about what the rest of my life would look like. I worried about getting a job and saving up so I could bring my kids here. I worried about my asylum case and how to find a lawyer. Thankfully my brothers helped me get a job at a nearby restaurant. I started working there as a waitress a week after I arrived in Union City. I also joined a church that is only a couple of blocks from our apartment. The majority of people I know I have met either at work or through the church. Eventually as I got to know people and they found out I had some experience sewing they started asking me to do alterations for them. Doing alterations has really helped me out financially, it also helps me forget. When I sew I concentrate in that piece of fabric or clothing and nothing else. I focus on it and I can stop thinking about the past; it distracts me. It's been hard to make friends, people always want to know where you are from and about your life before coming here; I don't feel comfortable talking about that stuff. The only exception is Olga; I trust her because she has helped me so much. I have kept in touch with Olga since we met at the detention center. She lives in New York with her sister and a cousin. She helped me find a lawyer who helped me with my asylum case for free. So many things about the asylum process were hard, for example not knowing what the outcome would be, but what was the most difficult thing was having to relive and retell different people multiple times. Each time I had to talk about what Jose did to me, I felt like whatever progress I had made in forgetting my past just evaporated. When I first got here I was doing ok, I kept busy and focused

on saving money to send back home to my kids. I just wanted to forget about my life in El Salvador so badly. I didn't want to talk about it but I knew I had to otherwise I wasn't going to be able to stay here. When I started talking about it I began to feel trapped in my own body because I could not control myself. I couldn't control the shaking, the sweating, the nightmares, and the constant fear. I hate Jose for that, he took a very valuable thing away from me; he took away my peace. The first time I really had to talk about it was for an intake for the lawyer. I remember she had a list of questions she went through and I had to answer whether or not I had ever been through it and if the answer was yes I had to explain it. I tried to tell that lady as much as I could, but it was hard. I cried most of that meeting and I think she felt bad because there were certain things she didn't force me to talk about. She was nice but I was so embarrassed, I kept wondering what she thought of me the whole time I was with her; I couldn't even look at her face. But the hardest thing was working with the social worker who helped write the affidavit for my case. I couldn't do it all at once. We met three different times; it was the hardest month for me. I had nightmares almost every night. The last day we met was the worst. I did not show up to the previous appointment, I just couldn't leave the house I was too shaky, my heart was beating too fast and I was having a hard time breathing. So for the last appointment I asked Olga to go with me. Knowing someone was going to come with me pushed me to leave my house. I had a headache the whole day. That day was a sunny day, the sun was so bright which made it hard to keep my eyes open because the light made the headache worse. When she read the affidavit to me I could see it all play out like a movie in my head. It did not seem real. It was like it had all happened to someone else. I was in a fog when I left the office. Olga took me home and told me I didn't talk the whole way home; she was worried about me but couldn't stay with me. That day I felt like everything around me was happening in slow motion, the volume of things, like others'

voices were very low like they were very far away; I could barely hear. I think I tried to cook that day but I don't know what happened. I put a pot of water to boil and I must have forgotten about it. My brother came home later and told me the stove was on and the pot was black because it had burned. I remember looking at the pot and thinking I was just like that pot—damaged and useless. I went to bed early that day but I couldn't sleep. It took me a few days to get out of it, but eventually it got better. Until I had to go to court. The court process took a long time and it was terrifying. I was scared that they would ask me to retell my whole story in court, the last hearing was the most stressful one. I was a mess. I couldn't sleep for days before that. All I did was pace around all night. I didn't want to go but I also wanted to get it over with. It was June 24. I had to go alone because no one could come with me that day. I was so afraid that they would deny my request and that I would have to go back home. I didn't really have a plan in case that happened but I just knew I could never go back to El Salvador. It felt like it was judgment day, I was either going to be saved or not. The judge was male and I was scared to tell a man what happened to me, I was afraid he wouldn't believe me, or worse I was afraid he was going to side with Jose. Jose often told me it was my fault he got angry, what if the judge agreed with him and thought it was all my fault? That day I remember waiting in a cold hallway for hours before it was my turn. I met the interpreter a few minutes before I had to go in; she was an older lady, she was serious and professional but I could tell she was nice and she wanted to help me. The actual process was not as bad as I imagined, the judge did not ask as much as I thought. The worst part was all the waiting, specially having to wait for a decision. When he read the decision I didn't understand what was happening. The judge spoke rapidly and used words I had never heard before, however, I remember seeing a smile across my lawyer's face and she reached over and squeezed my hand, that's when I knew my life was about to change. I was granted asylum after two long

years of waiting. It has been about one year since that happened but it still feels like yesterday sometimes. Things have moved even slower since I was officially granted asylum but I can't complain. I feel relieved because I can work here legally now and I have petitioned to bring my children. I wish they were here with me already but my lawyer tells me I should get approval any day now and they will be able to come soon. I cannot wait to see them again. I miss them so much; there isn't a moment that I don't think about them. Every birthday and holiday that passes and they are not with me I wonder if I did the right thing in leaving them. I have to remind myself that our separation is temporary. Aside from missing them it has also been difficult to worry about them and not be able to be there if or when something happens. When Dianita broke her arm while playing with some friends in the playground, it was hard not to be there to comfort her, to help her get dressed and help her do all the things she needed help with while she was in that cast. I also worry about Javier a lot. He is a boy and he is getting older. Gangs in El Salvador are very active and are a part of everyday life. I talk to him and warn him about them all the time. I know he is not interested, he is into sports and really enjoys playing soccer, but I also know that sometimes that doesn't really matter. If they want you to join, it doesn't matter whether you want to or not, they will threaten your family until you give in. I pray every day asking to keep them safe just for a little while longer. My lawyer tells me I should get approval to bring them soon, maybe just a few more months. She has been an angel sent from above. She has been with me every step of the way; I owe her my life. Not only did she help me get asylum and is helping me reunite with my children, but she has helped me in so many other ways also. She began telling me about therapy and counseling from the beginning but I didn't think I needed it, I'm not crazy, if anyone is crazy it is Jose. But I guess she finally convinced me. She told me that I have done everything in my power to protect my children and give them a better life but that

they also deserve a mother who is happy and able to enjoy life with them and not just someone who is in the background watching life go by. I feel like our life has been on pause for the past three years. I cannot wait until the day my children can come and join me. I want to hold them and tell them in person how much I love them. I want to be a better person for them. I don't want Jose to take anything else away from us. That is why I am here, to take control back, to write my own story and pave my own path. I have realized that as bad as some parts of my life have been there have been some good parts as well—mainly my children, and those are the parts I want to focus on. I am still living and writing the story of my life and maybe the next half will be better, happier.

Therapist Review.

Session summary. In the final session Ana filled out her last set of self-report questionnaires prior to starting the session. We briefly reviewed her narrative up to that point and then then she continued the narration by discussing her transition to life in New Jersey after being released from the detention center. She began working as a waitress soon after arriving in Union City and she joined a local church. She discussed how her past experiences have made it difficult for her to trust people and make friends, with the exception of Olga, a woman she met in the detention center who has been supportive and helpful. She narrated her experience navigating the asylum application process and detailed her difficulty openly discussing her trauma experiences as part of the immigration court process. She discussed her reaction to being granted asylum, her difficulty being away from her children for three years, as well as, her hopes for her future. Ana was then given the narrative write up that had been co-created over the span of eight sessions and read it out loud. Finally, Ana was asked to reflect on her therapy experience of creating a cohesive autobiographical narrative and to discuss any changes both positive and

negative that she experienced throughout the treatment. The session ended with Ana signing her autobiographical narrative document and receiving her lifeline box.

Habituation reduces symptom severity. Throughout each review of the previously created autobiographical narrative Ana grew more and more comfortable with the affective, cognitive, and sensory details of her trauma experiences. In session eight, Ana was able to read the entire document, revisit each major traumatic event without getting emotionally dysregulated and without dissociating. Although she did get teary at different points while reading her completed autobiographical narrative, she exhibited an optimal level of arousal—she was not emotionally distant, flat, nor visibly overwhelmed; this illustrated Ana’s habituation to the fear networks.

When avoidance is no longer needed. Towards the end of this session I engaged Ana in a robust discussion about PTSD and how some of its symptoms, particularly avoidance and dissociation were used as ineffective methods of managing her traumatic memories and related painful thoughts and feelings. I asked Ana to discuss why they were ineffective and how they negatively impacted her overall functioning. Using this session’s narrative Ana was able to point out specific examples of avoidance (i.e. not attending one of her meetings with the social worker) and dissociation (i.e. almost burning her apartment down that) and how each of these impacted her life prior to treatment. Ana was also able to articulate several examples in her most recent life where she had chosen to refrain from avoidance; most notably she discussed being able to tolerate a marital argument between her neighbors; a situation she would find extremely activating in the past.

Being unprepared for end of treatment requests. After eight sessions of what would be accurately described as an intimate and intense treatment. Ana made an unexpected request. Ana

asked me if she could have my contact information. To say that I was taken by surprise does not quiet capture my in the moment reaction to that request. I engaged in a very brief inquiry of why Ana wanted my contact information and what she was hoping would come out of contacting me in the future. Ana explained how helpful she found the treatment, she described my presence as calming, and stated that my non-judgmental and continuously approachable nature had been noted and appreciated throughout the treatment. She expressed her gratitude for our time together and explained that she very much wanted her children to meet me and understand how and with whose help she had achieved some significant changes in her life. She stated that she wanted to contact me in the future when she was finally reunited with her children to arrange a very brief meeting so they could meet me. I was very touched by Ana's words and also expressed my fondness of her and how much the treatment had touched me (all of which was true) but nevertheless I declined to give Ana my direct contact information citing clinic policy and encouraged her to contact me through the clinic if she so wished to do in the future. Ana was aware that I am a graduate student in training and that my time at the clinic was limited. She did not push the issue and the discussion ended there. Although overall pleased with the outcome of this treatment, I was left perplexed by this last interaction. I couldn't help but shake the feeling that I had committed a faux-pas.

As this interaction was discussed and analyzed in supervision I quickly realized that my reaction and anxiety was in large part due to years of graduate training in which the importance of boundaries and the finality of a treatment termination had been emphasized. While I agree that accepting an invitation to have dinner at a client's house or an expensive gift is a clear ethical concern, this particular request did not appear to be similar, at least not in my opinion. I think in my effort to quickly relieve my anxiety and provide the "textbook appropriate" response to her

request I failed to weigh the nature of the request, the person who was making the request, as well as, possible cultural expectations underlying the request. At no point in my treatment of Ana did she ever cross therapeutic boundaries. From the moment I met Ana she made it explicitly clear how important her family, and particularly her children were to her. Given their history of trauma, Ana was very protective of them. Taking this into account, Ana's request seems to have been more about her sharing with me how much she trusted me and how much she wanted to have her children connect with the new life she had created here in the US. In retrospect I don't think that my handling of this situation was egregious nor do I think that it negated any benefit she obtained from this treatment, but I do regret how I handled it because I believe now that it was impulsive rather than a carefully thought out reaction. There have been times since this treatment ended that I have wondered how Ana and her children fared and perhaps if I had handled her request differently I would know the answer to that question.

CHAPTER VII

Therapy Monitoring and Use of Feedback Information

Throughout Ana's treatment, I received individual supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist with experience treating complex trauma and trained in NET. This supervision was collaborative and provided the adequate level of support needed when providing NET. This supervision was invaluable in my development as a psychologist in training and provided me with excellent guidance and feedback in my work with Ana. My supervisor provided weekly feedback and recommendations on how to utilize the therapeutic relationship to facilitate the NET process.

In addition, Ana's therapeutic progress was assessed through the use of three self-report measures the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5); the Outcome Questionnaire-45 (OQ-45); and the Quality of Life Inventory (QOLS). These measure were administered on three different occasions: in the pre-treatment session, in session four, and in session eight. Each of these measures was completed directly by Ana at the beginning of the pre-treatment assessment session, at the beginning of session four, and at the end of session eight. Ana's self-report on these measures was used in the assessment phase to better understand her symptomatology profile, as well as, the impact these symptoms were having on her level of functioning across different domains. Her self-report on these measures mid- and post-treatment were used to help my supervisor and I gauge Ana's progress. These qualitative measures gave me the ability to objectively and concretely discuss with Ana her treatment progress. Finally, it is also likely that the simple act of filling these measures out may have increased Ana's insight and self-awareness regarding her symptoms and overall changes made through the therapeutic process.

CHAPTER VIII

Concluding Evaluation of the Therapy's Process and Outcome

The Outcome of Ana's Therapy

The quantitative and qualitative data (see below) from Ana's case indicate a favorable therapeutic outcome. I believe that Ana's willingness to build rapport and fully engage in treatment despite experiencing significant discomfort allowed her to attain considerable therapeutic benefit.

Quantitative results. Table 1 presents Ana's PCL-5 Scores. Her initial score of fifty-five was indicative of clinically significant PTSD symptoms (as it exceeded the thirty three point cutoff). Over the course treatment, Ana's PCL-5 score decreased to twenty-nine, falling below the thirty-three point cutoff; this twenty-six point reduction would likely represent a clinically meaningful change. In addition, although she continued to report and rate some of her symptoms as moderately impairing, Ana no longer met full criteria for PTSD diagnosis at the end of treatment per her responses on the PCL-5. In contrast to her pre-treatment session PCL-5 answers where she endorsed multiple symptoms that met criteria A through E as "moderately" or higher, review of her PCL-5 scores at the end of treatment indicated that Ana no longer met criterion C nor E, and therefore no longer met full criteria for DMS-5 PTSD diagnosis (see Table 2).

Table 3 presents Ana's OQ-45 scores. Her initial score on the Total, Symptom Distress, Interpersonal Relations, and Social Role scales were all above the clinical cutoff points. By treatment termination, she continued to score above the clinical cutoff point in the Total, Symptoms Distress, and Interpersonal Relations scale. However, over the course of treatment Ana's OQ-45 scores decreased on all scales. In fact, her scores on the Total, Symptoms

Distress and Interpersonal Relationship scales decreased to a degree that far exceeded statistical significance, as measured by Jacobson and Truax's (1991) Reliable Change Index. Of note, however, is that although Ana's Social Relations subscale score decreased to below the clinical cutoff score, the change between her initial and final scores on this scale did not indicate a clinically significant "reliable change" (Lambert et al., 2004).

Table 3 presents Ana's QOLS scores. According to Burckhard and Anderson (2003) descriptive studies and experimental pretest data have found the average total score for healthy populations to be about ninety; the average total scores for Israeli patients with posttraumatic stress disorder was found to be sixty-one. At the start of treatment Ana's QOLS score was forty-eight, indicating lower perceived quality of life as compare to both healthy individuals and individuals with PTSD. At the end of treatment Ana's QOLS had increased to seventy-five; although this score was still lower than the average score found among healthy individuals it seems to indicate a significant change as it surpassed the average score found in the sample of individuals with PTSD. Burckhard and Anderson (2003) note that the means for quality of life scales including the QOLS tend to be quite negatively skewed with most patients reporting some degree of satisfaction in most domains of their lives therefore results should be interpreted cautiously.

Qualitative results. As previously described in Chapter VI, Ana and I discussed her subjective experience of the treatment and the gains she had observed over the course of the treatment. The following reflects a summary of the qualitative results of Ana's treatment.

1. Ana reported an improvement in her overall mood. She reported that her children and co-workers had commented in a visible improvement in her mood. She reported her children told her she looked happier because she was smiling more whenever they video chatted.

She also reported that a regular patron at her restaurant commented that she liked “this side of her” after Ana made a joke about a TV celebrity.

2. Ana expressed being better able to enjoy and engage in activities that interest her. She reported attending a free Zumba class in her local church.
3. Ana exhibited an increase in her optimism and hopes for her future. She reported going to the library and checking-out books on parenting teenagers, as well as, picking up brochures about local attractions in an effort to prepare herself for the pending arrival of her children. In addition, she expressed interest in starting a small, home based sewing/alterations business. Although she had been engaged in this type of work since she arrived in the US, she was considering advertising and increasing her clientele with the purpose of eventually devoting herself to it full time. Her view of it shifted from seeing it as a supplemental source of income, to a potential self-sufficient business venture.
4. Ana began experiencing a shift in her thinking—she began to move away from blaming herself for the abuse she endured, and also reported a decrease in her feelings of guilt related to the multiple losses she has experienced.
5. Ana was able to articulate a clearer understanding of her PTSD symptoms, particularly the role and consequences of avoidance. Ana stated that she was proud of herself for sticking to the treatment and confronting the difficult and painful memories.
6. Ana exhibited increased awareness of how her feelings, thoughts, and physical sensations are interconnected. She also described being better able to manage distressing memories and related thoughts and feelings in her daily life. She provided an example of overhearing a marital argument between her neighbors, identifying the memories of

abuse it brought up for her, and then recognizing the subsequent feelings of anxiety and fear that arouse. Ana stated that for the first time since her neighbors moved in she was able to stay in her kitchen and continue cooking even though they were arguing next door. She was able to do this without feeling distant or zoned out.

7. Although Ana required a lot of encouragement and gentle pushing to prevent avoidance throughout the NET process she fully engaged in the treatment and was able to tolerate the exposure piece in each session successfully. Furthermore, after reading the final version of her autobiographical narrative she commented on how such a document would have been a helpful example to look at when undergoing her asylum process, particularly when working on the affidavit. Although reluctant to share the details of her trauma with anyone at the start of treatment, at the end of treatment she stated she would consider allowing her lawyer to use her narrative as an example piece with other asylum seekers.
8. Ana also expressed desire and willingness to socially interact and build connections with other people. As previously mentioned she attended and enjoyed a Zumba class in her local church and expressed desire to continue attending. She also expressed interest in joining her church choir and discussed being more personable with patrons at work.
9. Ana reported improvement in her quality of sleep, particularly reporting a decrease in the frequency of nightmares; she reported 1 nightmare in the last 3 weeks of treatment. Ana stated that she was better able to sleep through the night and that she felt more refreshed throughout the day.
10. Ana reported a significant decrease in her experience of flashbacks, reporting that she had not experienced any flashbacks while engaged in treatment.

Results in the context of the original treatment plan. Based upon the quantitative and qualitative results listed above, it appears that Ana was successful in meeting most of the treatment goals (six out of seven goals) that were described in Chapter V.

Treatment Goal 1: To build rapport and create a safe therapeutic environment.

Treatment Goal 2: To provide a clear rationale for treatment.

Treatment Goal 3: To gain a clear understanding of Ana's diagnostic picture.

Treatment Goal 4: To create a cohesive autobiographic narrative

Treatment Goal 5: To decrease Ana's avoidance of trauma memories

Treatment Goal 6: To decrease Ana's PTSD symptoms below the PCL-5 suggested cut-off for PTSD (<33).

In summary, Ana experienced many significant changes throughout the course of treatment. She gained a clearer understanding of her PTSD symptoms and these symptoms decreased in severity. Ana's mood significantly improved, she expressed desire and made attempts to expand her social network, and experienced an overall improvement in her quality of life. Although Ana did not meet the therapeutic goal of decreasing her OQ-45 scores below the clinically significant range, she did experience a reduction in the scores of all the subscales in the OQ-45 and she exhibited a clinically significant change in her OQ-45 total score. Ana attained the majority of her treatment goals and expressed optimism about her future. Although treatment can be considered successful it did not eliminate PTSD completely; a milder form of the disorder was still present at the end of treatment. Nevertheless, it did greatly alleviate her symptoms and improve her quality of life.

Discussion of Broader Issues Raised by Ana's Case

Therapist reflections about implementing NET. I hope that as intended this study sheds light upon some of the key clinical issues that may arise when treating Latinx clients with

PTSD using NET. The composite case of Ana was used to highlight themes that may arise when working with this population. However, as Ana is representative of only one individual within the Latinx immigrant community her case is not intended to be generalized to all Latinx immigrants.

As the case of Ana illustrates there can important benefits of engaging in a short-term, trauma-focused, exposure based treatment that relies on oral tradition and a strong therapeutic alliance such as NET. Engagement in NET appeared to empower Ana by facilitating a transition from a narrative of victim to a narrative of survivor. It helped Ana see that although much had happened to her that was beyond her control, ultimately she has control over her reactions and is the writer of her life story.

NET truly embodies the concept of “bearing witness;” in other words sharing in the pain and putting into words the unspeakable. For the therapist delivering this kind of treatment it means tending to open wounds of the soul that for long have been ignored but that have never been treated. Given the short-term and intense nature of this type of treatment, I found it imperative to have the proper avenue for support and processing through quality supervision. As difficult as trauma-focused treatment, particularly exposure based treatment can be, it can also be extremely rewarding and humbling. In the treatment of Ana, helping co-create her autobiographical narrative not only brought to the forefront the atrocities one fellow human being can impose on another, but it gave me the opportunity to witness the incredible resiliency and strength found within the human spirit.

Advantages and limitations of using the hybrid case study design. There were several advantages of using a hybrid case in this study. Primarily, composite cases inherently provide maximum client confidentiality since they are not based entirely on the presentation of one

client, which is particularly important when working with vulnerable populations. Additionally, it allowed the writer to illustrate and discuss several key clinical issues that could emerge in the implementation of NET. Although useful, there are also some limitations to using hybrid case design in research. In particular, even though one aims to provide rich examples of real life experiences, the phenomenological experience of the individual is lost. Furthermore, although this hybrid case study of Ana adds to the knowledge base, larger conclusions and generalizations about the treatment of Latinx immigrants using NET cannot be made. Alternative approaches to studying the implementation of NET to treat PTSD in Latinx immigrants such as single case designs and randomized control trials are needed.

Difficulty recruiting Latinx immigrants for psychological research. Originally, I hoped to conduct a small pilot study or a single-case study of NET as the treatment of choice for Latinx immigrants with complex trauma backgrounds who were suffering from post-traumatic stress symptoms. Unfortunately, the reality of trying to recruit participants from a vulnerable population who often operate in the shadows and for whom therapy can be stigmatizing proved a real challenge. For example, after locating and obtaining permission from a local non-profit organization that provided counseling services to refugees and asylum seekers, the organization suddenly closed its doors. I abruptly lost the participants that had been identified for the pilot study, however, what was more concerning was the fact that hundreds of clients lost a valuable resource that provided access to mental health and legal services. Later, through the help of a pro-bono immigration attorney an asylum seeking woman being held at a detention center in Elizabeth, NJ was identified as a potential candidate for a single case study of NET was identified. The client was interested and willing to participate in the study and this clinician embarked in the necessary but long clearance process to be able to implement the treatment at

the detention center. However, just as clearance was obtained, the client was released from the detention center and transported to live with a family member in Baltimore. After hitting several walls, I learned firsthand how difficult it is not only to locate Latinx immigrants willing to participate in psychological treatment/research without the support of local agencies and/or providers. How to effectively access and recruit participants from Latinx immigrant communities is an area of research that needs to be further explored, perhaps even before best practices and treatment protocols can be studied.

Other areas of future research. There are several areas of future research that this study did not touch upon. The hybrid case of Ana illustrates the implementation of NET with a bilingual Latina client by a bilingual Latina clinician and does not explore key issues that could arise when the clinician and the client do not speak the same language. NET has been conducted and demonstrated to be effective in several populations even in the presence of language differences through the use of qualified interpreters. Nevertheless, the impact of having a third person in the room during the implementation of NET when working with Latinx clients should be studied.

As previously discussed this study could have been conducted in a detention center. Given the increase in CBP arrests and growth in the number of individuals, particularly Latinx immigrants being held in detention centers it would be helpful to study and further understand if effective implementation of NET treatment in a federal facility is possible.

It is also important to point out that Ana's treatment hypothetically took place in 2014, prior to the 2016 election of the current president. Since her treatment ended we have entered a political period where discrimination and anti-immigrant violence and hate has been on the rise. A large part of the analysis and writing of this study took place during the course of the Trump

campaign, his election, and his first year in office. This led to some parallel processing that included this therapist experiencing feelings of helplessness, horror, and fear. As such, it has really made me think about how this treatment implementation and the treatment outcomes would differ if the treatment was being implemented today. For many immigrants and ethnic minority individuals this is a difficult time fraught with fear and uncertainty. For women across the world the recent explosion of media coverage regarding sexual assault has made stories of sexual trauma more salient. I imagine that having experienced both sexual trauma and a difficult immigration process would be activating for individuals like Ana. Furthermore, I have wondered if Ana's actual experiences would have been different—for example would her experience in a detention center today be different than her experience in 2013? Perhaps even more importantly would Ana be granted asylum today? The asylum petition process in the United States varies greatly depending on the state where it is heard and the subjective opinion of the judge hearing the case. The Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse- Immigration (TRAC- Immigration), a data gathering, research, and distribution organization at Syracuse University conducted a judge by judge decision analysis of asylum cases between 2012 and 2017 which illustrates great variability in judges' decisions across the nation. For example, between 2012 and 2017 Judge Agnelis L. Reese of Oakdale presided over 198 cases and had a 100% denial rate, in other words, in the last five years, he has denied all asylum cases that have gone before him. In San Francisco, however, Judge Robert Yeargin presided over 193 cases in the same period of time and his denial rate was 51.3%. Finally in New York, Judge Sarah M. Burr presided over 192 cases with a denial rate of 12.5%. This data presented by TRAC illustrates how inconsistent and subjective immigration decisions in asylum cases can be, and raises the questions of whether and how judges will be influenced in their decision making under the current administration.

Clearly at this time, much research is needed to ascertain the mental health implications of this current political climate, as well as, to find effective therapeutic interventions to counteract this impact. Given Ana's positive response to treatment I believe NET shows strong promise as a culturally relevant trauma-focused treatment. Furthermore, I believe that NET's focus of placing the client's narrative within a socio-political context makes it uniquely equipped to effectively address not only past trauma but also current trauma and fears being triggered by the current political climate. More research that focuses on the effectiveness of NET to treat Latinx immigrants is desperately needed at this time.

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Table 1

Ana's Scores: PCL-5

Session	PCL-5 Score
Pre-Treatment Session	53*
Session 4	43*
Session 8	29

*Clinical cut-off 33

Table 2

Ana' PCL-5 raw data

Cluster	Item Number	Pre-treatment Session	Session 4	Session 8
B	1	2	2	1
B	2	4	3	2
B	3	2	1	0
B	4	4	2	2
B	5	4	3	3
C	6	3	2	2
C	7	2	2	1
D	8	2	2	1
D	9	3	2	2
D	10	4	3	2
D	11	3	2	2
D	12	2	2	1
D	13	3	3	2
D	14	2	2	2
E	15	0	0	0
E	16	0	0	0
E	17	3	3	3
E	18	3	3	1
E	19	3	3	1
E	20	4	3	1

Bolded scores indicate symptoms endorsed as “moderately” or higher.

Table 3

Ana's Scores: OQ-45

Session	Total Score	Symptom Distress Scale Score	Interpersonal Relationship Scale Score	Social Relations Scale Score
Pre-treatment Session	107*	66*	28*	13*
Session 4	99*	62*	25*	12*
Session 4	82*+	54*+	18*+	10

*Higher scores indicate symptoms and/or impaired functioning are above the clinical cut-off point as noted by Lambert et al., (2004) in the Administration and Scoring Manual for the OQ-45.2.

Clinical cut-off scores are the following:

Total Score of 63 or above

Symptom Distress Score of 36 or above

Interpersonal Relations Score of 15 or above

Social Role Score of 12 or above).

+ Change between pre-treatment and post-treatment scores are statistically significant via Jacobson and Truax's (1991) Reliable Change Index.

Table 4

Ana's Scores: QOLS

Session	QOLS
Pre-Treatment Session	48
Session 4	60
Session 8	75

Table 5

Ana's Diagnosis at the Beginning and End of Treatment





DSM-5 Diagnosis at the Beginning of Therapy	DSM-5 Diagnosis at the End of Therapy
309.81 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder V15.41 Personal history (past history) of spouse or partner violence, physical	V15.41 Personal history (past history) of spouse or partner violence, physical

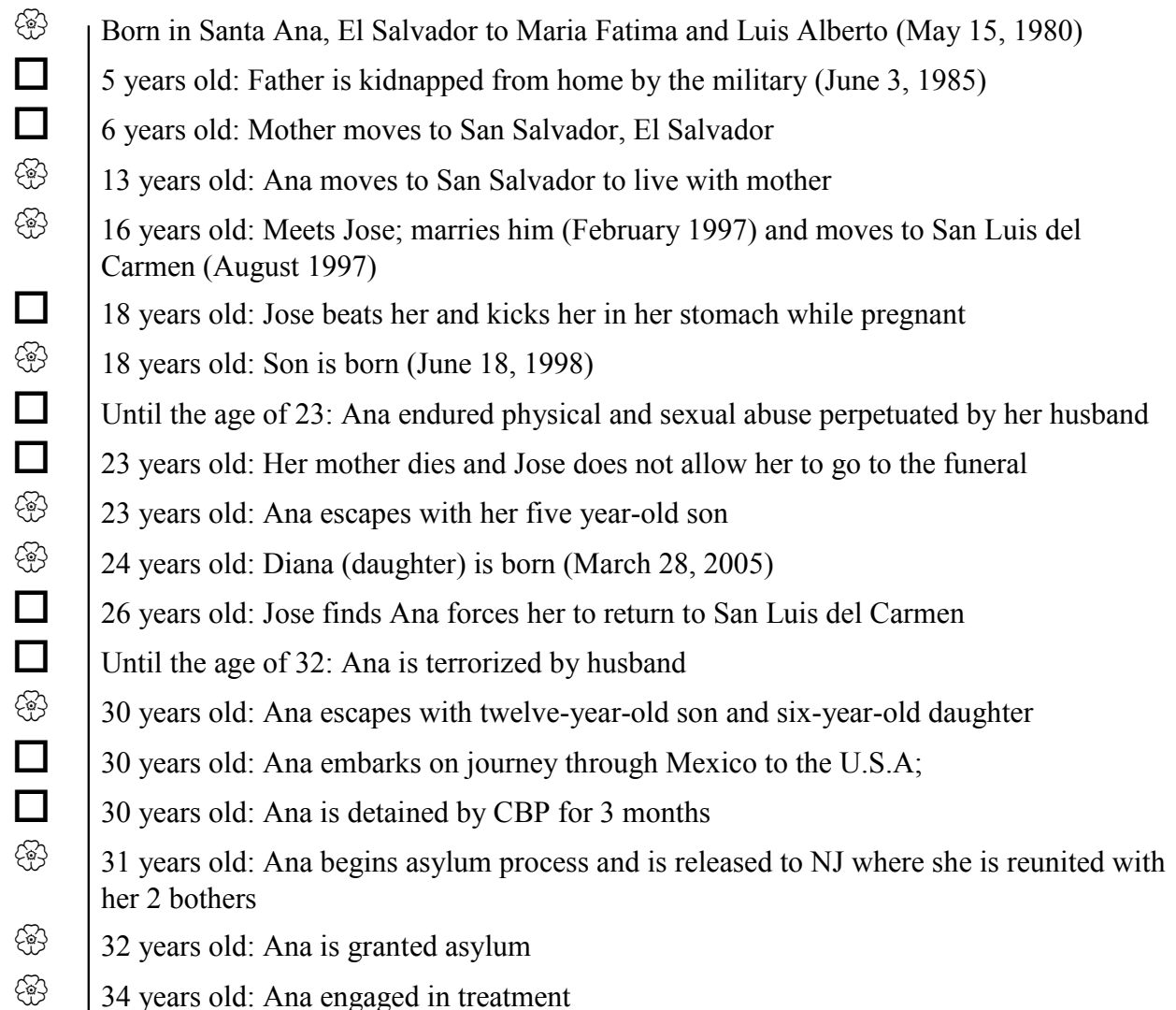
Table 6

Per session trauma breakdown

Session	Session focus	Length of session
Pre-treatment Assessment Session	Assessment and building rapport	90 minutes
Session 1- Lifeline creation	Creating Ana's lifeline	90 minutes
Session 2- Trauma begins early	<p>✿ Born in Santa Ana, El Salvador to Maria Fatima and Luis Alberto (May 15, 1980)</p> <p>□ 5 years old: Father is kidnapped from home by the military (June 3, 1985)</p> <p>□ 6 years old: Mother moves to San Salvador, El Salvador</p> <p>✿ 13 years old: Ana moves to San Salvador to live with mother</p>	90 minutes
Session 3- Abuse begins	<p>✿ 16 years old: Meets Jose; marries him and moves to San Luis del Carmen</p> <p>□ 18 years old: Jose beats her and kicks her in her stomach while 8 months pregnant; his family refuses to help or get her medical attention</p> <p>✿ 18 years old: Son is born (June 18, 1998)</p>	120 minutes
Session 4- Living with violence and deciding to leave	<p>□ until the age of 23: physical and sexual abuse from husband</p> <p>□ 23 years old: mother dies and Jose does not allow her to go to the funeral</p> <p>✿ 23 years old: Ana escapes with 5-year-old son</p>	90 minutes

Table 6 Continued

Session 5- New life away from Jose	 24 years old: Diana (daughter) is born (March 28, 2007)	120 minutes
Session 6- Reliving the nightmare	<input type="checkbox"/> 26 years old: Ana is kidnapped and returned to Jose <input type="checkbox"/> until the age of 30: Ana is terrorized by husband	135 minutes
Session 7- Journey for a safer life	 30 years old: Ana escapes with 12-year-old son and hides in sister's house <input type="checkbox"/> 31 years old: Journey through Mexico to the U.S.A; detained by ICE for 3 months	90 minutes
Session 8- Life in the US, missing her family	 31 years old: Begins asylum process and is released to NJ where she is reunited with her 2 bothers <input type="checkbox"/> 31-33 years old: life without her children  33 years old: receives asylum	120 minutes



Future: "I hope to be reunited with my children and create a safe and happy life for my family"

Figure 1 Ana's Lifeline

Appendix A

Ana's Autobiographical Narrative

I was born in Santa Ana on May 15, 1980. I am the third of six children. I have 2 sisters and 3 brothers. My parents were Maria Fatima and Luis Alberto. Mami was a stay at home mother until my father died. My father was a teacher and used to teach math in the same school my brother and sister went to. Our house was light green and it was surrounded by grass. I was always playing with my brothers, sisters, and cousins. My aunt Sonia lived nearby, just a few houses down the road. Our house was always full of people; my mom loved to cook for everybody. My dad was important, people would come visit and stay for hours. I was a child; I didn't really understand that he was politically involved or what that meant. All I knew was that he was very busy, important, and most of all kind. He had dark hair. He was very funny and always made us laugh. He was such a happy man. I never saw him get angry.

I was about 5 years old. We lived in the house where I grew up, it had a front yard with grass where I spent hours playing. We would see people walking by and say hello to them. We knew everyone who lived nearby. My parents were liked by everyone. It was October or November. It happened after lunch; my mom had made pupusas, you could smell them throughout the house. It was a sunny day; I was playing in front of our house when I saw 3 military trucks driving down the road. The cars were so fast, they kicked up so much dirt and dust that I was covered in it. The dirt hurt my eyes and I couldn't breathe. The soldiers were wearing green military uniforms and they had big guns. They stormed into my house and dragged my dad out; that was the last time I saw him. I was scared, the men that took my dad did not look nice, they were so serious. They hit him a few times, I saw blood dripping from the corner of his mouth. They dragged him out and my mom was yelling and crying. I was crying

too; I was hiding behind my brother Edgar. I was holding on to him so hard, I thought they might take him too. I was standing outside my house. They turned the cars on and drove away just as fast as they came. Leaving only a cloud of dust behind. Mami collapsed on the ground as she yelled, “no se lo lleven! Por favor, por favor” (don’t take him! Please, please!). All of our neighbors had come out, they surrounded us as they watched them drive away with my dad.

Things changed after that. People stopped visiting and my mom was always sad and she would cry as she prayed at night; she didn’t laugh or sing anymore, the house was quieter. I never asked about my dad. She would sit for hours just looking out the window, many times I would sit with her and she would let me brush and braid her hair. Her hair was dark black and thick. It was long and smooth, my small hands would easily slide in and out of each strand. I would make each braid over and over until it was perfect.

I remember looking for my dad whenever I heard that someone was left dead on the side of the road I would stop breathing and for a moment wonder if it was my dad. I would look to make sure it wasn’t him. The dead bodies were usually swollen and bruised but what was scary was the thought that it could be him. It was never him, so I just walked away relieved every time.

Eventually we moved to my aunt’s house and my mom went to the capital to work. We lived with my aunt Sonia and my cousins. Eventually mami came and took the girls with her back to the capital. Sometime later my brothers came to live with us. We lived in a small apartment, there wasn’t a lot of space to play and I wasn’t allowed to go outside unless my brothers were with me. I would go to mami’s restaurant after school and help out, mostly setting tables and refilling salt shakers. As I got a little older, maybe 10 or 11 I started buzzing tables at the restaurant too. I would go to school and then go straight to the restaurant. I would get there and the first thing we would do was eat, everything she made was delicious. I would buzz tables and I

would help her in the kitchen. I loved watching mami cook. That is how I learned how to cook. I watched everything she did. I would watch her cut potatoes, chop vegetables, and mix different spices together. She always looked happy when she was cooking. There was a radio in the kitchen that was always on and she would sing along as she cooked.

I met Jose at my mother's restaurant. I was 16 years old and he was 25; he was a police officer. He used to eat lunch at the restaurant every day. I thought he was handsome but I was too shy to speak to him. One day, he grabbed my hand and as he looked into my eyes he called me beautiful. I felt special. After that day I would go straight to the restaurant after school so I could be the one to wait his table. We would spend a few minutes talking each time he came in. My feelings for him grew. He started picking me up after school and walking me to the restaurant. Mami was not happy, she confronted him and asked him what his intentions with me were; he talked her into giving him permission to date me. He was my first and only boyfriend. Around the holidays we went to a local fair. We were having such a good time dancing and laughing that I stayed out later than I was supposed to, when he took me home it was dark outside. There was a big "discussion" between mami and Jose. I wasn't part of the conversation but at the end of the day, I was engaged to marry Jose and a wedding date was set. Two months later Jose and I got married. We got married in February of 1997; I was sixteen years old.

After we got married there was a big party. When the party ended he took me home with him. He was very drunk. His face was all red, he smelled like liquor and cigarettes, and he couldn't walk straight. He forced himself on me. He was rough as he took my clothes off. He kissed me and bit my lip until I bled. The taste of his mouth disgusted me. I tried to push him away but he held me tighter. I cried and asked him to stop but he slapped me and said "tu eres mi esposa y tienes que complacerme" ("you are my wife and you have to please me). I stopped

crying and protesting I just let him do whatever he wanted. He fell asleep on top of me and I felt like I was suffocating; his skin was hot and sticky and I had to push him off of me. He snored all night. I couldn't sleep, I just laid next to him all night without moving. The next day I had pain and some bleeding which made it difficult to walk or sit. I also had bruises on my arms and on my thighs. I hated what he did to me, it made me feel dirty.

Six months later I found out I was pregnant. I was happy, happy that I would have someone to love, someone to keep me company. Jose was annoyed that his life would be disrupted. He told me I had to go live in San Luis del Carmen, and his family would help me with the pregnancy. Jose dropped me off at the bus stop with my small bag and my father-in-law picked me up when I got to San Luis. It was a big change for me. His family was cold and distant. His mother, Clara would only speak to me when she wanted me to do something for her. I had to help her cook and I had to wash everyone's clothes. Jose visited a few times just for a few days. He spent most of his time visiting family and drinking with his cousins he did not spend time with me. It bothered me because I felt invisible. My birthday came and there was no celebration or acknowledgement. Mami always remembered our birthdays. She would wake me up singing Las Mañanitas (typical mariachi birthday song) and would prepare tamales colorados for me because they are my favorite. Although I was alone on my birthday I didn't feel lonely because I was pregnant.

When I was eight months pregnant I went to Sunday mass and bumped into Juan, Jose's brother-in-law; he offered me a ride home. When we got home Sara, Jose's sister was very upset to see me get out of her husband's car. She made a scene accusing him of cheating and she accused me of throwing myself at her husband. I was mortified, the entire family came out to see the commotion and heard what she was saying about me, I saw the look of disapproval in their

eyes. I was embarrassed and mad. My face felt like it was on fire, my cheeks were red. I wanted to shrink or become invisible. I didn't want them all to stare at me like they did. A few days later Jose came to visit and Sara told him what happened. He was furious, he yelled and broke things in the house; he kept saying that I had embarrassed him in front of his family and that he would make me pay. I sat in a corner of the house crying and shaking; I was scared but he left right away. He came back really late that night. I was in the bedroom sleeping. He was drunk. He came into the bedroom, turned the lights on and woke me up with his yelling; the light was so bright it was blinding and I couldn't really see him. He grabbed me by my arms hard. He dragged me out of bed and dropped me on the floor. He yelled at me and said that a whore like me did not deserve to share a bed with him. I hit the floor hard, I landed on my back. I cried and tried to get up but he kept pushing me back down. I begged him to stop, I reminded him I was pregnant. He kicked me with his hard black boots on my head, arms, and stomach. I tried to protect my stomach, I laid on my side and wrapped my arms around my belly, but I still felt the blows to the side of my stomach. I stared at the yellow wall in the bedroom. It was cold, the window was open and there was a breeze. The tiles on the floor were colorful and pretty but they were hard and cold. I was shivering and my teeth were chattering like crazy. Jose was angry and his face was red and scrunched up. I was shocked. I asked myself how could he kick me knowing I was carrying his child? It seemed to go on forever. He pulled my hair so hard I thought he was going to pull it out of my head. My head hurt so much. He pulled my face near his with his big hands hurting my cheeks; he yelled in my face and his spit landed on me. When he got tired he stopped, stumbled his way around me and passed out on the bed. I was too scared and in too much pain to move so I spent the rest of the night on the floor quietly sobbing and shivering. The floor felt cold and hard against my skin. My tears and blood merged into a sticky cold liquid that

dried on my face and my clothes. My eyes were swollen and hurt from all the crying; everything was blurry. I was afraid to move, to wake him up. I was so scared for my baby. When he moved inside me it made me so happy that I smiled while crying. The next day I woke up and got myself cleaned up as best as I could. Jose left without saying anything to me. I went over to the main house to help his mom with breakfast. My eyes were very swollen, my cheeks were red, and I had bruises all over my arms and legs. I know his mother saw them. She said to me, “no debes darle razón para enojarse, si tu marido se enoja es tu culpa” (“you shouldn't give him a reason to get angry, if he gets upset with you it is your fault.”) and I realized how alone I truly was. I felt trapped. Not long after that my son was born.

The night before my son was born I started feeling a lot of pain and had no idea what was happening to me, I was afraid something was wrong with the baby but I didn't want to bother my mother-in-law in the middle of the night. I waited until day break and slowly walked over to his parents' house. I had to stop every couple of steps because the pain was excruciating; it was warm outside and the sun was shining. His mother offered me some coffee and I sat in the kitchen patiently waiting, digging my nails into the palm of my hands when the pain came. The pain grew stronger and started coming more frequently; I cried out in pain. I was moved into one of the guest bedrooms and forced to lay down. Everything in that room was white. The pain felt like something was tearing me up from the inside, like someone was ripping my insides. I felt scared because the pain was so unbearable, I had never felt that kind of pain before. I was drenched in sweat as if I had been caught in an afternoon thunderstorm without an umbrella. I was in labor. I was not ready for my son, I wanted him to stay inside me as long as possible. I didn't want to share him with them and even less with Jose. But when I held him I felt indescribable love and also panic, I knew my baby needed me and I needed to protect him from

everything especially from his father. I focused on my son and made sure he was taken care of. I spent hours just watching him sleep. He was perfect and I was happy. Jose came to visit his son a week after he was born and was pleasant. He was proud to have a son and was in a good mood. He showed the baby off to his friends and family. I would pray every day that Jose would not visit often and when he was there I would pray that he did not stay very long. I did everything I could to stay out of his way and to prevent him from getting angry with me. I barely spoke to anyone, including his family, I did my chores and took care of my son. I enjoyed talking and playing with my son.

Javier brought me so much joy, he was such a good and beautiful baby. He didn't cry much. I spent all my time with him. I used to sing to Javier and tell him stories, like the stories my father used to tell me. Jose wasn't there most of the time. My son's first Christmas was such a bad Christmas. Javier was sick, he had a fever and a cough; he was so small I was worried about him. Since it was Christmas and Jose was home visiting he had specifically requested that I make him tamales and chiles rellenos for noche buena (the night before Christmas) but since my son was sick and I was so concerned with bringing his fever down, I didn't have enough time to prepare them. He got home from his parent's house just after midnight. He was drunk and stumbled in yelling. He was hungry so I warmed up some food and set up the table. When he sat down and looked at the food he got so mad he slammed his hands on the table and started yelling at me. He picked up the plates one by one and slammed them against the wall. I was scared, I was afraid to move and have him come after me, but I knew that the longer I sat in his range of vision the most likely it was that he would hit me. I got up quickly with the pretense of wanting to clean up the mess he was making. I almost made it out the door but he grabbed me by the hair and pulled me back into the dining room. He had a crazy look in his eyes, he told me I was going

to learn to respect him. He grabbed me by the hair again and slammed my face against the table. The pain was so excruciating that initially I could not see straight, everything was blurry. I tasted blood coming down from my nose. He dragged me by my hair. He threw me against the floor on top of the food and kicked me on my ribs because I had made a mess. He told me to clean it up and I did like a robot. After I finished cleaning everything up, Jose had finally fallen asleep. I sat on the kitchen table and I cried. I cried because I remembered how my previous Christmas had been so different; the holidays had always been a happy time for me but not anymore. Many nights after that ended the same. It would mostly happen when he was drunk. Whenever I knew he would be drinking I would feel nervous all day; holidays were really terrible. I would make sure to tire out my son so he would be able to sleep through whatever fight was coming. I accepted our marriage the way it was and did not think about leaving him until my mom passed away. Javier was almost 5 years old when I got a call from my younger sister Rosario letting me know mami was very sick. She had stomach cancer and was told there was nothing they could do for her. I wanted to go see her that moment but I knew I had to wait for Jose to come home. He was visiting home that weekend, so I waited anxiously for him. When Jose finally came home I begged him to let me go see her. He simply said no. I looked into his eyes and there was no compassion. That night he robbed me of the opportunity to say goodbye to my mother. She passed away two weeks later. I was angry. Just the sight of him would make my blood boil. I wished that it was him that was dead, not mami. I could not look at him without rage and resentment. I knew I could not live the rest of my life next to him; I could not let my son turn out like his father. That's when I decided to leave. I left two months later. I didn't pack very much just some clothes and my son's favorite toy. We left in the middle of the day around noon. We got to the bus station got on a bus and left. The bus was very crowded but I got a seat. When

we got to the bus terminal in San Salvador we took another bus to El Paste, where one of my great aunt's lived. It was a very rural and remote town but it was the safest place for us since Jose never met this aunt and didn't know anything about her. She was older and alone; her children had all moved away. I hadn't seen her or spoken to her in years. Gracias a Dios (thank God) mi tia Mela (my aunt Mela) recognized me. She saw something in my face and she gave me a big hug and said "Deja todo en las manos de Dios" (leave everything in God's hands). For the first time in a long time I felt safe. I stayed there for a few months. I grew very close to Tia Mela, she would listen to me for hours at a time and she never judged me. She was understanding and would tell me repeatedly how strong and brave I was even though I couldn't see it. We spent hours in the kitchen cooking and talking about life. She reminded me so much of my mom. Tia Mela was very active in her church community. I would accompany her to church every Saturday. I grew up Catholic but she was an Evangelical Christian. I quickly grew to appreciate and love their Christian community, they offered me support and love when I most needed it. They really welcomed us. For the first time since I left my home I felt like I belonged. I also really enjoyed the services, particularly the songs; they were lively but meaningful. We often sang about hope and courage, the things I thought I had lost while living with Jose. Since then I have considered myself evangelical and try to live my life accordingly.

I loved living with Tia Mela but as much as I liked living there, the little bit of money I had managed to save before leaving Jose was quickly dwindling and I knew I would have to get a job eventually. At first Jose and other police officers who were his friends tried to intimidate my family into telling him where I was. But after a while he would bother my family less frequently and about 6 months later he stopped looking for me, there were rumors that he had left the country.

At that point I really needed a job. My sister told me about a job at a clothing factory and helped me find a small apartment. I moved back to San Salvador, started working, sent my son to school and lived a simple but happy life for a few years. I worked at the factory and would pay an elderly neighbor to care for my son after school. At first I would only go out to go to work, I was afraid to bump into Jose. Eventually my brother Edgar got confirmation from a friend that Jose had left the police force and moved to the United States. That feeling of always watching my back and being constantly afraid started to go away and after a while I started to feel like myself again. Like the person I was before I met Jose. I was friendly with people, I would talk to everyone, and I laughed. I felt free. I didn't have to be careful about what I said or who I spoke to anymore. I didn't have to hide anymore.

Later I met German. He was a taxi driver who was often parked outside the factory. He pursued me for months but I was not interested in another relationship because I was scared. We became friends and he would often drive me home after work. He wasn't as handsome as Jose and he didn't have the domineering presence that I had first admired about Jose. But that was what I liked about him, he was a clown and would make me laugh all the time. One day he finally won me over. What I liked most about him was that he was gentle. He never raised his voice. He never treated me badly. I felt safe with him. After seeing each other for a few months I got pregnant with Diana. When I found out about it I was excited because I knew it would be different than my first pregnancy, I was near my family and I made sure to go to all my doctor appointments. I told Javier on a Sunday morning, I took him to the park, the sun was shining and I sat him down on a bench. I starting talking about all the kids that were on the playground and how lucky they were to have brothers and sisters to play with and then I told him he was going to be just as lucky because he was going to be a big brother. He was so excited that he jumped up

and down and kissed my stomach. We went to get ice-cream after the park; when it started raining we ran home. On our way home Javier pointed out a rainbow that had formed, it was beautiful. I felt like it was a sign from mami telling me everything was going to be alright. When I got home I started sewing a dress for the baby from this bright pink fabric I had found. That day was probably the happiest day of my life.

Towards the end of my pregnancy I found out German had lied to me, he was a married man. It didn't make me sad. I was angry when I first found out because he had lied to me. But he had never promised me marriage or anything like that and I had never painted a picture in my mind of us as a happy family. I was ok with the relationship ending. I would see German occasionally, he would visit Dianita and helped me out financially as much as possible. My main focus was spending time with my children. My son was getting older and he was such a big help with Dianita, he taught her how to walk. I spent all my time with my kids, visiting family, taking them to the park or just playing with them at home. We didn't have a lot but we were at peace and we were really happy.

It had been three years since I left Jose and I tried not to think about him or what I went through with him. But my peace didn't last because that bastard found me. One afternoon I was waiting on the bus stop after work with the girls I worked with, when Jose's old partner drove by. At first I couldn't place him, he looked familiar but it had been years since I last saw him, it wasn't until he walked up to me and talked to me that I realized who he was. I wanted to run away but I froze, it took me a few seconds to respond to him and when I did I could barely get any words out. I was scared. My co-workers grew concerned and told me that I looked like I had seen a ghost. I felt dizzy and had to find a place to sit because my head was spinning. The rest of

that day I was very nervous, afraid to leave my house. Eventually I was able to calm myself down because I thought Jose was still in the USA.

A couple of weeks went by and nothing happened so I began to feel better, less scared. I went back to my regular routine. I would wake up at 4:30am, cook for the day, pack our lunches and then get myself and the kids ready. We would leave the house at 6:00 am, I would leave my kids with the neighbor and I would take the bus to the factory. I would start work at 7:00 am and the day would go by very quickly. It was tedious work but I liked the girls I worked with. It was my co-worker Sandra's birthday and another co-worker Fatima made a cake for Sandra; we sang her happy birthday. That was the last day I saw them. That afternoon I was waiting for the bus and my worst nightmare came true. Across the street staring right at me was Jose. I did not know he had been deported a few months back and had resumed his search for me. He turned the car around and stopped at the bus stop. He got out of the car and walked up to me. I was paralyzed I wanted to run, I wanted to scream but I could not move. He smiled at my co-workers and introduced himself as my husband. The girls I had worked with for the past three years had no idea I was married. Everything moved in slow motion and did not seem real. My heart was beating fast, so fast it was hard for me to breathe. And it was so loud, the beating was so loud, and there was so much traffic, so much noise. I couldn't hear what anyone was saying. I couldn't move. It was like I was carrying bags of bricks that I couldn't put down. He put his arm around me and escorted me to the car. I got in his car.

As he drove away I sat silently in his car. At first he was angry and yelling, he said I had taken his son away and that he deserved to see him. He told me he knew where I lived and where I worked and that he wanted to see our son. Then all of a sudden he changed. He lowered his voice and told me he had missed us and that he was there to take us home. He told me that a

family needs to stay together and that my place was at home with him. When we got to my apartment he made me go inside and told me to pack. While I packed he walked around touching everything. It made me cringe. I didn't want him there I wanted to tell him to leave. I felt naked. Now he knew everything about my life. He found some of Dianita's toys and I had to tell him I had a daughter. He didn't say anything. I knew that would be the last time I would be in that apartment, as I left the apartment tears fell down my face. I felt like I was leaving a part of me behind. We went to my neighbor's house to pick up the kids. I had to pretend everything was ok because I didn't want to scare my kids. Jose introduced himself to my neighbor and told her a story about how he had been in the US and was now back so I didn't have to work anymore and we would be going back home to San Luis del Carmen. She looked worried but since I didn't say anything she didn't say anything either. When Jose saw Javier he forced him to give him a hug; Javier was reluctant but complied. He then picked up Diana and examined her, and without saying anything he handed her to me and said let's go. I sat in the back seat with my two children. They both fell asleep and I cried as he drove away, away from the safe life I had worked so hard to create. I felt defeated, like I had lost and Jose had won. I knew what awaited me in that house. I was angry with God for letting that happen. Once we drove into San Luis del Carmen I knew no one would help me. I was alone. It was dark when we arrived in his house, he unpacked the car and led us inside. The house looked the same inside, not much had changed since I left, except everything looked older, dirtier, and darker.

Jose looked older, worn out, just like the house he looked the same but different at the same time. Everything in the house was in the same place, it gave me a weird feeling, like I never left or like I belonged there. I hated everything in that house, it was like a prison to me. But I didn't fight it. Me resigne (I resigned myself to that life). I missed the life I had built but I chose

not to think about the factory or the friends I left behind. It was easier that way. I focused on trying to make the best of it. I spent most of my time with my children. Jose was not a police officer anymore and that seemed to have impacted him a lot. He helped his father run his business, but I don't think he contributed much; he spent most of his time drinking. His family blamed me for breaking Jose's heart. At first, the worst days were when he would come home drunk and forced me to sleep with him. Most of the time he was so drunk he couldn't perform and that would enrage him. He would blame me for his issues; he would slap me and grab me by my hair as he shoved me around until he would pass out or until he got bored. At first the abuse went on at night and never in front of the children. Later that also changed. He would get mad if the children were too loud or if Diana cried. He would yell at them and whenever Javier misbehaved he would make him kneel on rice. I didn't like it but I wouldn't say anything because I didn't want Jose to hit him instead. The children were scared of him and tried to avoid him whenever he was home which would make him angry. Every day went by slowly. I would think about running away but then quickly push the thought away, until the day he crossed the line.

It all started because of a stupid joke; some stupid drunk made fun of Jose for raising a child that wasn't his. Everyone knew Diana was not his daughter but no one had ever brought it up until that day. He came home and was so angry. He was drunk and his eyes looked like they were going to come out of his face as he yelled. He slapped me with the back of his hand; he hit me so hard that I stumbled backwards, tripped over the chair behind me and fell on the floor. He hit me with such force that he cut my lip open. The noise woke up the children and when Diana saw me on the floor bleeding she came running towards me. He didn't like that so he pulled Diana by her hair and called her "hija de puta" (daughter of a whore). Javier was twelve years old and loved his little sister; he stepped in and tried to shield Diana. He looked at Jose right in

the eyes and yelled “te odio” (I hate you). I tried to pull him away but it was too late to stop Jose. Jose got in Javier’s face and said “te crees un hombre? Vamos a ver que tan hombre eres” (You think you’re a man now? We’ll see how much of a man you really are) he grabbed Javier by the arm and dragged him out the door. I felt my heart sink, my worst nightmare was coming true. I yelled at Jose to let Javier go but he didn’t listen. It had rained earlier so it smelled like wet grass. It was pretty quiet except for the wind; it sounded like it was howling. I watched from the door as Dianita held on to my leg. It was pitch black outside and he walked far away from the house until I could barely see them. He made Javier kneel on the dirt in front of him. Then he turned around and yelled for us to go to him. I was scared and I shivered as I walked towards them because it was a windy night. He made us kneel as well. I was wearing a skirt and the wet grass stuck to my legs. It was dark but there was just enough light coming from the house to see what was going on. Jose reached behind his back, under his shirt, and pulled out his gun. I made an indescribable loud noise as I watched him point his gun to the back of Diana’s head. I tried to get up to protect her but he yelled for me to stay where I was otherwise he would shoot her. Javier had tears in his eyes but he did not cry. I felt horror. I really believed he would shoot her. I looked around and tried to find something to attack him with but there was nothing other than grass. There was nothing I could do to stop him. I was so angry, I wanted to throw myself on him and rip his eyes out. But I was afraid. I prayed that he would stop. I asked him to kill me and let her go but he ignored me. I felt like I couldn’t breathe, like I couldn’t move, like time stopped moving. I didn’t feel the wind anymore, I didn’t hear the wind hitting the leaves and branches on the trees anymore. I felt so hot. Like I had lava in my veins, my blood felt like it was boiling inside me. I felt hate towards him. I dug my nails into my hands hard. I didn’t feel any pain although I cut my palms with my nails. All of a sudden he looked directly at Javier and

asked him what he was going to do about it, telling him that if he was such a man he would protect his sister. Javier didn't answer him so Jose moved away from Dianita and hit Javier with the bottom of the gun on his head as he said "eso es lo que pensaba" (that's what I thought). He told Javier he could do anything to us because we all belonged to him, he was the head of the household, he was the king. I saw blood coming down the middle of Javier's forehead, it was like a shiny liquid when the moonlight hit it. I was on the ground holding Dianita. He grabbed me by my shirt and put me back into kneeling position. He was standing in front of me, he was so close. He held the gun to the front of my head. Jose was pressing it hard against my skin; the gun felt cold and heavy on my skin. I heard my kids, crying and yelling. I saw the fear in their eyes. I looked straight at them and told them everything was going to be alright. I didn't believe that. I thought—"al fin llego el moment" (the moment has finally come). I knew he was going to pull the trigger so I closed my eyes. I could still hear them crying and then I heard a click. Nothing happened. The gun was empty. I was afraid to open my eyes, I was confused. I kept my eyes closed for a while until my children hugged me. I pulled them close to me and kissed them over and over again, they were both crying quietly. I looked around for Jose and found him leaning against a tree some distance away. He was laughing hysterically; he looked like a crazy person. When he realized we were staring at him he yelled for us to go back in the house. He stayed outside by the tree drinking from his bottle of guaro (traditional liquor).

We ran back in the house quickly. I was angry for what he did to my kids. I was also tired, "sin animo" (without spirit). We were all dirty but I didn't care. The three of us got into Javier's bed and held each other. Eventually they fell asleep but I didn't sleep that night, I just kept waiting for Jose to come back in the house but he never did. The next day he just pretended nothing had happened like he always did. After that night I decided I was not going to stay and

let myself or my kids be his victims. I promised myself that was the last time I would let him hurt my kids. I didn't know how or when but I knew we had to leave him.

After Jose threatened us with his gun I didn't sleep much. When Jose wasn't home I didn't sleep well because I was worried about when he would get home and what mood he was going to be in; any little noise would wake me. When he was home, it was even worse because I had to stay up to make sure nothing happened to my kids. I knew we had to go but first I had to figure out where. No matter where I went in El Salvador, there was a risk he would find me. One day I decided to leave El Salvador. Two of my brothers, Hector and German left El Salvador many years before to work in America. From what I had heard it is a really big country where people could get lost. That's what I wanted to do, I wanted to get lost so he would never find me. I just had to wait for the right moment. After I knew I would leave things got better and worse at the same time. Better because my faith came back, I finally had something to look forward to; I saw light down my path. But every day my hate for Jose grew stronger until I couldn't even tolerate the sound of him breathing. I spent the next couple of months putting aside some of the money Jose gave me for food and a few times I even took money from his wallet when he was passed out drunk. I was scared. Scared of what would happen if Jose found out about my plan before I was able to get away. I was afraid he would kill us.

The day we left, Jose was sleeping out on the couch snoring loudly. He was a heavy sleeper when drunk. I woke up the children and told them we were going on a trip. It was a Wednesday morning, we left the house around 7:00am, I would normally take Javier to school at that time so if Jose woke up he wouldn't notice anything was going on at least for a little while. The first bus left at 9:00am; as we waited at the bus station time moved so slowly. I sat on a hard bench watching the seconds go by on an old clock they had at the station. It seemed like we

waited an eternity. I prayed the entire time, prayed that Jose would not wake up and notice we were gone. “Dios me escucho” (God listened). We took the bus to San Salvador and from there we went back to Tia Mela’s house. Jose never knew that is where I hid when I first left him so I was pretty sure he would not find us there. I was finally able to calm down when we got on the second bus.

The next couple of months are a blur, they went by fast as I was trying to arrange how to leave the country and what would happen to my children. I decided to leave Javier and Dianita in El Salvador. It was a hard decision; it was the last thing I wanted to do but I couldn’t afford to bring them and I knew it would be a hard trip for them to take. My plan was to come first and then send for them, like so many of our friends and neighbors had done. Tia Mela was too old to take care of them so I left them with Cecilia my sister-in law. The day I said goodbye to them Diana was wearing a pink dress I had sown for her; she looked so beautiful. They cried as they hugged me, and I tried very hard to keep a smile on my face. Javier told me “no te preocupes mami yo la voy a cuidar muy bien” (don’t worry mom I am going to take good care of her). Deep down it hurt so much to say goodbye to them; I had never been apart from them before.

I was scared and excited at the same time. It was like my life was starting over. There were ten of us who left together from El Salvador. I didn’t know anyone I was traveling with. We picked up more people along the way in Guatemala and Mexico; at one point there were twenty-two of us traveling together. Everyone quickly learned to watch their things very carefully. We slept holding on to our bags tightly to make sure no one stole our things, especially the coyotes (smugglers). I saw them go into people’s bags and take stuff, mostly food, water, etc when they thought no one was looking. One of the most difficult parts for me was when we crossed from Guatemala to Mexico through the Suchiate river. We crossed in the middle of the night on large

rubber tires with strips of wood on top held together by rope. It had rained for a few days before our crossing and the water was rough. I don't know how to swim and I had never been on a boat before. It moved around so much I was afraid I was going to fall off and drown. I sat on the wood strips with my legs towards my chest and with my hands to my side holding the wood so tightly I got a few splinters. I was cold. Water constantly splashed on me and my clothes were completely wet. It wasn't really cold but the night breeze made my wet clothes stick to me. I was so scared and cold that I shivered the whole time. The water was so loud. It sounded angry. After we crossed the river we stayed in a house near the water. It was hard for me to sleep that night because when I closed my eyes all I could hear was the river. We spent the majority of the journey in Mexico where we usually traveled at night. Most days we were given 1 meal. Medicine was hard to come by and expensive; if you got sick you could not continue to the next stop. They didn't want anyone slowing us down; they left behind some elderly people, as well as, a pregnant woman from Guatemala. We spent so many hours on the road with nothing to do except talk to each other. That's how we got to know each other. Everyone had a story, a reason to leave their country, but everyone was leaving loved ones behind in search of something better. Some people would talk about their dreams, fantasies of what their lives would be like in the US, others only talked about what they were leaving behind whether it was their mother, or their wife, or a new baby. I talked about my children. I grew to like a few of the members of my group, especially Manuel. Manuel was a fifty-seven-year-old man from El Salvador; he reminded me of my father, of what he would have been like if he were still alive. By the time we got to Tijuana there were only fifteen of us left. We stayed in an old and decrepit home for almost a week because "la migra" (CBP) had been conducting a lot of raids and the coyotes did not think it was a good time to cross the desert. One day they woke us up in the middle of the night and

hurried us into the truck. We were dropped off at the desert each with two large bottles of water, some snacks, and two smugglers who would help us cross. I remember being surprised because it was cold. The first night we walked for about two hours and then we rested until dawn but I couldn't sleep because I was too excited. When the sun came up the temperature quickly changed; we walked under the sun all day stopping every couple of hours to rest and drink water. It was hard to walk because the sand makes you feel like you are sinking with every step you take. The sun is on top of you the whole time and it is just so hot and there is no refuge from that. The wind would pick up the sand and smack you in your face with it. I had sand everywhere. No matter how much we walked it looked like we weren't going anywhere because everything looked the same out there. Manuel was with me in the desert and he was so afraid of running out of water that he went a long time without drinking any and he got really sick. He could barely keep up with the group, he fell down multiple times. We all took turns helping him walk until we got to our resting place for the night. We tried to help him drink water but he had trouble swallowing and would spit it out. He looked so different that day, he looked old and tired. His skin looked hard like leather. That night the leaders told us he was too sick to continue and that it would be better for the group if we left him there. He knew he was dying. When I said goodbye to him he squeezed my hand and kissed me on my forehead. His lips felt hard and dry against my sweat covered forehead. He told me to keep walking and not look back; I did as he asked and did not look back as I walked away with tears on my face. I feel guilty about leaving him and I wanted to go back for him but I didn't because I knew I would never survive out there on my own. I was afraid of dying so I chose to save myself and let him die alone in the desert. We kept walking. We walked and walked until the coyotes told us we had made it to the US side and instructed us to hide behind some dry bushes until midnight when three cars would come for us,

they would signal us by flashing their lights; the coyotes left us there. Later that night we heard cars coming closer and closer but their lights never flickered. A bunch of men in dark uniforms got out of the cars and started walking around. No one moved at first but then someone yelled la migra (CBP) and everyone started running in different directions. I froze and watched how these men grabbed people and threw them on the ground. I realized there was nowhere to run so I didn't even bother trying.

I was detained that night and taken to a detention center in Arizona. The detention center was like being in jail, we were treated like criminals. They yelled at us a lot. I was scared, I had no idea what to expect. Three days after being there I was given the chance to make a phone call. I called my brother and told him what happened. He was concerned about me but there wasn't much he could do because New Jersey was very far away from Arizona and he was also undocumented and was afraid of being deported. I felt completely alone. Then I met Olga, a woman from Honduras. She told me about asylum and encouraged me to apply for it. I didn't know anything about asylum but I was willing to try anything because I didn't want to be sent back and have Jose find me again. At my hearing I told the judge I would like to be considered for asylum. After three months in the detention center I was released to the care of my cousin in New Jersey. I'm very grateful to Olga, I owe my new life to her.

I was released from the detention center in Arizona and traveled directly to New Jersey. I arrived in Newark Airport around nine at night. I was picked up from the airport by my cousin who drove me to my brothers' apartment. My brothers and I have lived in a basement apartment in Union City since. It was a big change that took some time to get used; especially all the noise and all the people. At first I was overwhelmed by how much my life changed in one day. When I was in the detention center I felt like I was in jail. I was there for about three months and before

that I had been traveling through Central America for about three weeks so it had been a long time since I had slept in a place where I felt safe. It was nice to be free but it was also weird. For almost four months I had followed routines set by other people; I had been told when and where to sleep, when and what to eat, and all of a sudden that changed. I know it sounds strange, but being released from the detention center as good as it was, also made me feel more nervous and worried. I was finally in the United States, an unknown place for me; I didn't know many people and did not speak the language. Getting to this country was my goal for so long, but I never really thought about what it would be like to be here. I was finally able to stop worrying about hiding, or about surviving and making it to the next day. I started worrying about what the rest of my life would look like. I worried about getting a job and saving up so I could bring my kids here. I worried about my asylum case and how to find a lawyer. Thankfully my brothers helped me get a job at a nearby restaurant. I started working there as a waitress a week after I arrived in Union City. I also joined a church that is only a couple of blocks from our apartment. The majority of people I know I have met either at work or through the church. Eventually as I got to know people and they found out I had some experience sewing they started asking me to do alterations for them. Doing alterations has really helped me out financially, it also helps me forget. When I sew I concentrate in that piece of fabric or clothing and nothing else. I focus on it and I can stop thinking about the past; it distracts me. It's been hard to make friends, people always want to know where you are from and about your life before coming here; I don't feel comfortable talking about that stuff. The only exception is Olga; I trust her because she has helped me so much. I have kept in touch with Olga since we met at the detention center. She lives in New York with her sister and a cousin. She helped me find a lawyer who helped me with my asylum case for free.

So many things about the asylum process were hard, for example not knowing what the outcome would be, but what was the most difficult thing was having to relive and retell my story to different people multiple times. Each time I had to talk about what Jose did to me, I felt like whatever progress I had made in forgetting my past just evaporated. When I first got here I was doing ok, I kept busy and focused on saving money to send back home to my kids. I just wanted to forget about my life in El Salvador so badly. I didn't want to talk about it but I knew I had to otherwise I wasn't going to be able to stay here. When I started talking about it I began to feel trapped in my own body because I could not control myself. I couldn't control the shaking, the sweating, the nightmares, and the constant fear. I hate Jose for that, he took a very valuable thing away from me; he took away my peace. The first time I really had to talk about it was for an intake for the lawyer. I remember she had a list of questions she went through and I had to answer whether or not I had ever been through it and if the answer was yes I had to explain it. I tried to tell that lady as much as I could, but it was hard. I cried most of that meeting and I think she felt bad because there were certain things she didn't force me to talk about. She was nice but I was so embarrassed, I kept wondering what she thought of me the whole time I was with her; I couldn't even look at her face. But the hardest thing was working with the social worker who helped write the affidavit for my case. I couldn't do it all at once. We met three different times; it was the hardest month for me. I had nightmares almost every night. The last day we met was the worst. I did not show up to the previous appointment, I just couldn't leave the house I was too shaky, my heart was beating too fast and I was having a hard time breathing. So for the last appointment I asked Olga to go with me. Knowing someone was going to come with me pushed me to leave my house. I had a headache the whole day. That day was a sunny day, the sun was so bright which made it hard to keep my eyes open because the light made the headache worse.

When she read the affidavit to me I could see it all play out like a movie in my head. It did not seem real. It was like it had all happened to someone else. I was in a fog when I left the office. Olga took me home and told me I didn't talk the whole way home; she was worried about me but couldn't stay with me. That day I felt like everything around me was happening in slow motion, the volume of things, like others' voices were very low like they were very far away; I could barely hear. I think I tried to cook that day but I don't know what happened. I put a pot of water to boil and I must have forgotten about it. My brother came home later and told me the stove was on and the pot was black because it had burned. I remember looking at the pot and thinking I was just like that pot—damaged and useless. I went to bed early that day but I couldn't sleep. It took me a few days to get out of it, but eventually it got better. Until I had to go to court. The court process took a long time and it was terrifying. I was scared that they would ask me to retell my whole story in court, the last hearing was the most stressful one. I was a mess. I couldn't sleep for days before that. All I did was pace around all night. I didn't want to go but I also wanted to get it over with. It was June 24. I had to go alone because no one could come with me that day. I was so afraid that they would deny my request and that I would have to go back home. I didn't really have a plan in case that happened but I just knew I could never go back to El Salvador. It felt like it was judgment day, I was either going to be saved or not. The judge was male and I was scared to tell a man what happened to me, I was afraid he wouldn't believe me, or worse I was afraid he was going to side with Jose. Jose often told me it was my fault he got angry, what if the judge agreed with him and thought it was all my fault? That day I remember waiting in a cold hallway for hours before it was my turn. I met the interpreter a few minutes before I had to go in; she was an older lady, she was serious and professional but I could tell she was nice and she wanted to help me. The actual process was not as bad as I imagined, the judge

did not ask as much as I thought. The worst part was all the waiting, specially having to wait for a decision. When he read the decision I didn't understand what was happening. The judge spoke rapidly and used words I had never heard before, however, I remember seeing a smile across my lawyer's face and she reached over and squeezed my hand, that's when I knew my life was about to change. I was granted asylum after two long years of waiting. It has been about one year since that happened but it still feels like yesterday sometimes.

Things have moved even slower since I was officially granted asylum but I can't complain. I feel relieved because I can work here legally now and I have petitioned to bring my children. I wish they were here with me already but my lawyer tells me I should get approval any day now and they will be able to come soon. I cannot wait to see them again. I miss them so much; there isn't a moment that I don't think about them. Every birthday and holiday that passes and they are not with me I wonder if I did the right thing in leaving them. I have to remind myself that our separation is temporary. Aside from missing them it has also been difficult to worry about them and not be able to be there if or when something happens. When Dianita broke her arm while playing with some friends in the playground, it was hard not to be there to comfort her, to help her get dressed and help her do all the things she needed help with while she was in that cast. I also worry about Javier a lot. He is a boy and he is getting older. Gangs in El Salvador are very active and are a part of everyday life. I talk to him and warn him about them all the time. I know he is not interested, he is into sports and really enjoys playing soccer, but I also know that sometimes that doesn't really matter. If they want you to join, it doesn't matter whether you want to or not, they will threaten your family until you give in. I pray every day asking to keep them safe just for a little while longer. My lawyer tells me I should get approval to bring them soon, maybe just a few more months. She has been an angel sent from above. She has

been with me every step of the way; I owe her my life. Not only did she help me get asylum and is helping me reunite with my children, but she has helped me in so many other ways also. She began telling me about therapy and counseling from the beginning but I didn't think I needed it, I'm not crazy, if anyone is crazy it is Jose. But I guess she finally convinced me. She told me that I have done everything in my power to protect my children and give them a better life but that they also deserve a mother who is happy and able to enjoy life with them and not just someone who is in the background watching life go by. I feel like our life has been on pause for the past three years. I cannot wait until the day my children can come and join me. I want to hold them and tell them in person how much I love them. I want to be a better person for them. I don't want Jose to take anything else away from us. That is why I am here, to take control back, to write my own story and pave my own path. I have realized that as bad as some parts of my life have been there have been some good parts as well—mainly my children, and those are the parts I want to focus on. I am still living and writing the story of my life and maybe the next half will be better, happier.

Appendix B

Therapy Transcript: Session 2 Through 8

Session 2

Therapist: When and where were you born?

Ana: I was born in Santa Ana on May 15, 1980.

Therapist: Tell me about your family? What were your parents' names and what did they do for a living?

Ana: My parents were Maria Fatima and Luis Alberto. Mami was a stay at home mother until my father died. My father was a teacher and used to teach math in the same school my brothers and sisters went to. I don't remember much from when I was a child.

Therapist: How many brothers and how many sisters do you have?

Ana: I have 2 sisters and 3 brothers. I am the third of six children.

Therapist: That's ok. Can you tell me what you do remember about the house you grew up in? who were your neighbors? what did you like to do when you were a kid?

Ana: Our house was light green and it was surrounded by grass. I was always playing with my brothers, sisters, and cousins. My aunt Sonia lived nearby, just a few houses down the road. Our house was always full of people; my mom loved to cook for everybody. My dad was important I guess, people would come visit and stay for hours. I was a child; I didn't really understand that he was politically involved or what that meant. All I knew was that he was very busy, important, and most of all kind.

Therapist: You're doing great, go on.

Ana: I don't really remember what he looked he had dark hair I believe. He was very funny and always made us laugh.

Therapist: You were just smiling as you described him, but then you suddenly got very sad, what happened?

Ana: I smile when I think of him. He was such a happy man. I never saw him mad.... But it also makes me sad because I didn't really get to know him. I miss him.

Therapist: [Head nod]

Ana: Wow I haven't talked about this in such a long time, actually I have never really talked about it. It's hard to explain what happened, I'm still not sure what happened to him. He just disappeared one day.

Therapist: That's ok let's slow down and let's start with how old you were and where you lived.

Ana: I was about 5 years old. We lived in the house where I grew up, it had a front yard where I always played. I liked it because it had grass and whenever I fell it didn't hurt. I also liked that we could always see people walking by and say hello to them. We knew everyone who lived nearby. My parents were liked by everyone, well until he disappeared.

Therapist: Walk me through what you remember from the day he disappeared, let's start with what time of year it was.

Ana: I don't remember

Therapist: I know this is scary, but give it a try, I am right here with you.

Ana: It must have been October or November, my brothers and sisters were home which meant they were on break from school, and it was before the holidays I think, because I remember everyone being very sad during the holidays.

Therapist: Great, now in as much detail as you can tell me what did you see, hear, and smell?

Ana: I guess it happened around lunch time; my mom had made pupusas, you could smell them throughout the house. Maybe it was after lunch because my father always came home for lunch. It

was a sunny day; I was playing in front of our house when I saw 3 military trucks driving down the road. (Ana begins to breathe in a shallow manner).

Therapist: I notice that you're breathing changed a bit, can you tell me what's happening inside you as we start talking about your memory of that day?

Ana: I feel like I almost can't breathe, my nose hurts, my throat feels dry... and my heart is beating so fast.

Therapist: How would you describe this feeling you are having right now?

Ana: Scared, I think. I know what happens next. They take my father away. (Ana begins rubbing her eyes and blinking fast). I don't really know what happened, I don't understand, it was confusing.

Therapist: Your body remembers what happened that day and remembers how scared you were. What does your body remember?

Ana: There's dirt everywhere. My eyes hurt, it feels like something is in my eyes and my throat feels so dry. But I can't see, there's a cloud of dirt that makes everything look unclear.

Therapist: Your body is getting agitated just like it did that day. There was dirt everywhere, your eyes were hurting like something was in them, and your throat felt dry. What did you see while you were standing there in front of your house?

Ana: The cars were so fast, they kicked up so much dirt and dust that I was covered in it. The dirt hurts my eyes and I can't breathe. Everyone looks confused and can't keep their eyes off of them. Those men. The soldiers, I guess they were soldiers because they were wearing military uniforms, green uniforms I think, and they had big guns. They stormed into my house and dragged my dad out. That was the last time I saw him. That's it.

Therapist: Do you remember how you felt that day?

Ana: No it was so long ago, I was a little girl.

Therapist: Give it a try, you may remember more than you know. Go on.

Ana: I was confused I didn't know what was happening, it all happened so fast. I was also scared, the men that took my dad did not look nice, they didn't look happy either because they were so serious. They hit him a few times, I see blood dripping from the corner of his mouth. They drag him out and there is so much yelling; my mom is yelling and crying.

Therapist: Go on, you are doing great. Do you remember where you were? What were you doing?

Ana: I remember I was crying too; I was hiding behind my brother Edgar. I was holding on to him so hard, I thought they might take him too. [Ana gripped the chair so hard that her knuckles turn white]).

Therapist: I notice that you are holding on to the chair are you holding on to the chair like you held on to Edgar that day?

Ana: [Ana let go of the chair] I didn't notice I was doing that, Yes I was so scared I held on to him so tight. I want to scream and tell them to let him go, I want to run to him but I can't, I can't move.

Therapist: How does your body feel right now as you remember feeling that you couldn't move even though you wanted to run to him so badly?

Ana: I feel scared and paralyzed.

Therapist: Where in your body do you feel that and how do these parts feel? Do they feel cold or hot?

Ana: (Ana turned her hands around and slightly pulled them out in my direction) Here, and on my legs. I don't really feel them, they feel numb; cold maybe. I don't think I would be able to stand up right now. My legs feel so weak.

Therapist: Is that how your body felt that day?

Ana: Yes, I couldn't move. I'm mad I didn't do anything. I can see myself that day just standing outside my house watching a car drive away with my dad. I just let them take him! No one did anything!

Therapist: You were scared. Even though you were only 5 years old, you realized there wasn't anything you could do. Those men could have taken you or anyone else. What did it feel like to just stand outside your house and watch the car drive away with your dad?

Ana: I felt powerless. Now I feel very sad. I didn't know that would be the last time I would see him.

Therapist: Go on...

Ana: They turned the cars on and drove away just as fast as they came. Leaving only a cloud of dust behind. Mami collapsed on the ground as she yelled, "no se lo lleven! Por Favor, Por favor" (don't take him! Please, please!). I was confused because I wasn't sure what had just happened but when I heard mami cry I knew it was bad. All of our neighbors had come out, they surrounded us as they watched them drive away with my dad. If only someone had done something, but no one said or did anything. That's when everything changed.

Therapist: This was a crucial moment because it changed your life. But let's slow down for a moment, can you go back and tell me what it was like for you seeing everyone watching and crying and no one saying anything?"

Ana: It was confusing, why was everyone just standing there? Why didn't anyone help us? Why didn't anyone say he was innocent! I never found out why they took him or what they accused him of, I suspect they thought he as a political dissonant. I don't know if he was, all I know is that he was my father, he was the man who made us laugh and tickled us until we couldn't take it anymore. His place was at home with us and they took him from us. Everyone just watched it happen, it makes me so angry. There were so many people out there and only a few soldiers. They were all a bunch of cowards; they were supposed to be his friends but no one said anything.

Therapist: It was and still is painful to have had your dad taken away. How did things change after he was taken?

Ana: People stopped visiting and my mom was always sad and she would cry as she prayed at night. I never asked about my dad, I somehow knew I wouldn't see him again. It was like we were not allowed to talk about it. I remember being afraid that they would come back and take someone else, but they never did.

Therapist: Let's slow down again, what was is like to see your mom so sad and upset?

Ana: I hated it, she didn't laugh or sing anymore, the house was quieter. I just wanted to make her happy, I wanted to help. She would sit for hours just looking out the window, many times I would sit with her and she would let me brush and braid her hair.

Therapist: Do you remember what her hair looked like and what it felt like to braid her hair?

Ana: Her hair was dark black and thick. It was long and smooth, my small hands would easily slide in and out of each strand. I would make each braid over and over until it was perfect. I wanted her to like them, I wanted her to be proud of me... but she barely noticed, she just looked out the window, I think she was waiting for him to come back.

Therapist: What about you, were you waiting for him to come back also?

Ana: ...No, somehow I knew he wouldn't. I remember everyone cried so much after they took him, just like at a funeral so I knew.

Therapist: You knew he was dead?

Ana: Yes, I remember that whenever I heard that someone was left dead on the side of the road I would stop breathing and for a moment wonder if it was my dad. I just had to go look, I had to make sure it wasn't him. I wanted to know what happened to him but I was also afraid of finding him dead.

Therapist: What was it like seeing those dead bodies?

Ana: It was weird but you get used to it I guess. I saw a lot of them. They were usually swollen and bruised but what was scary was the thought that it could be him. It was never him, so I just walked away relieved every time. But when I think about it now it is heartbreaking to think that he died alone somewhere in some jail or even worse that he was tortured to death just like all those men I saw.

Therapist: What is it like for you knowing that he may have been tortured and killed?

Ana: It makes my stomach turn. It's terrifying to think that maybe they kept him alive for a long time and that he suffered. The worst part is not knowing; I will never know. All I can do is imagine what could have happened but I will never really know-- may be what actually happened to him was not so bad, or maybe it was worse than I can imagine. I just want to know.

Therapist: I know it is hard to accept that you will probably never know what happened to him, and I imagine you still wonder and think about it. But what is clear is that he was taken away from his family too soon and that you miss him.

Ana: Not a day goes by that I don't think about him and miss him.

Therapist: [Nodding my head] I would like to go back a bit if it is ok with you. What happened to you and your family after your father was taken?

Ana: Eventually we moved to my aunt's house and my mom went to the capital to work. At first it was just her. We lived with my aunt Sonia and my cousins, I liked it there, I never felt lonely but I missed my parents. Mami came back one day and took the girls with her back to the capital; I was so excited I had never been there before. Sometime later my brothers came to live with us. We lived in a small apartment, there wasn't a lot of space to play and I remember I wasn't allowed to go outside unless my brothers were with me. I would go to mami's restaurant after school and help out, mostly setting tables and refilling salt shakers. It was dangerous back then, people disappeared or were murdered all the time, especially the boys. The boys were recruited for the resistance; although I think papi had supported them, mami wanted nothing to do with them and made sure my brothers did not join by keeping them busy in her restaurant. As I got a little older, maybe 10 or 11 I started buzzing tables at the restaurant too. I liked it, I liked feeling useful, helping mami out because she worked so hard. I also liked meeting people, speaking to the patrons.

Therapist: I see you smiling, as you recall your time in the restaurant helping out your mom. Tell me more about what you remember about that time period.

Ana: I remember I would go to school and then go straight to the restaurant. I would get there and the first thing we would do was eat, I remember everything she made was delicious. Everyone always commented on how great her cooking was. I remember I always ate really fast; I wasn't allowed to help her unless I had finished everything on my plate.

Therapist: Do you remember how you would help her?

Ana: I would buzz tables and I would help her in the kitchen. I liked buzzing tables because sometimes the people I served would give me a few coins and I was able to buy candy in school the next day. I also liked helping out in the kitchen, I loved watching mami cook. That is how I learned how to cook.

Therapist: It sounds like you enjoyed watching her cook.

Ana: I did. I watched everything she did. I would watch her cut potatoes, chop vegetables, and mix different spices together. She always looked happy when she was cooking. There was a radio in the kitchen that was always on and she would sing along as she cooked. I catch myself singing sometimes when I cook as well.

Therapist: Those sound like some very happy memories. I think this is a good place to end for today. Tell me what today was like for you?

Ana: It was strange and hard. I have tried so hard to forget what happened to my dad, in part because I don't really know what happened and it was all so confusing. When I talk about it, it seems like yesterday but it has been so long. This was hard and I don't know if I will be able to talk about the other things I have been through.

Therapist: I know that it was hard to talk about what happened to your dad but you got through it. Every session, there will be memories that are really difficult to remember and to share but it is important that we explore them. As you can see from today Ana, what we are doing together is revisiting your life, kind of in “slow motion”, focusing on all these small small details that most of the time people may not notice. But for our work together, those small details are so important – that is how we will help you come to feel and think differently about all that has happened to you. This slowing down of memory will not make the memories disappear, but the memories

will have less power over you. I will be with you every step of the way and will make sure that we don't stop until you are feeling calmer like we did today. Does that make sense?

Ana: I guess

Therapist: I know it can feel a bit frustrating at times that I am always asking you to slow down a bit, so I want to hear from you what it feels like as we go through this together. It is also possible that you may experience strong and perhaps even overwhelming memories in between our sessions. Remember that those moments will not last forever and they will pass as they always have. Most importantly remember that it is sometimes normal to feel worse before you feel better, it is in no way a reflection of how you're doing in therapy or whether you are doing it "right;" this process is hard for everyone and it takes a lot of courage to be here in the first place. Remember that if the memories feel too overwhelming or intolerable you can use some of the deep breathing and visualization exercises we practiced before.

Ana: Ok, I will.

Session 3

Therapist: Let's start by spending a few minutes talking about how your week was?

Ana: It was ok. That night after our first meeting, I couldn't stop thinking about my father. I wondered what happened to him and sometimes I pray that he is still alive somewhere.

Therapist: It's really difficult to not know what happened to a loved one.

Ana: I know he's not alive but I wish he was. Also, you were right, I did have some nightmares. In one of the dreams I find my dad forgotten in a jail cell and try to help him escape. But just as we are about to leave, I see Jose and he puts us both in a jail cell and throws away the key. Next thing I remember papi is gone and I'm stuck there alone and all of a sudden I'm an old lady still

stuck in that hole. It was terrible, I woke up crying and screaming, it took me a while to realize it was just a dream. It was impossible to go back to sleep after that.

Therapist: I'm sorry you are having more active symptoms but like we have discussed, these will hopefully get better the more we talk. Why don't we pick up where we left off last meeting? [Re-read Ana's autobiographical narrative] So you began working at your mom's restaurant, what is the next major thing that happened to you?

Ana: What happened next is something I wish had never happened. I'm sure my life would have been so much better if it had never happened.

Therapist: I know it is difficult to talk about but try to tell me about meeting Jose?

Ana: I met Jose at my mother's restaurant. I was 16 years old and he was 25; he was a police officer. He used to eat lunch at the restaurant every day with other police officers. I thought he was handsome but I was too shy to speak to him in front of all his friends, I would just watch him from the corner of the room and smile if he ever looked in my direction. One day, as I served him his lunch he grabbed my hand and gave me a compliment; he called me beautiful as he looked into my eyes.

Therapist: How did that compliment make you feel?

Ana: I was shocked I didn't even think he had ever noticed me. He made me blush and I felt special.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana; After that day I made sure to go straight to the restaurant after school so I could be the one to wait his table. We would spend a few minutes talking each time he came in. My feelings for him grew, I used to daydream about him in class and what it would be like to be his girlfriend. He started picking me up after school and walking me to the restaurant. That's when my mother

noticed and was not happy. She confronted him and asked him what his intentions with me were, I remember eavesdropping on their conversation and feeling so happy as I heard him tell her he would like to officially date me. My mother did not seem pleased at first, but he was charming and talked her into giving him permission to date me. Of course there were many conditions, I was only allowed to see him during the day and only in public. He would take me to the local ice cream shop, or for a walk around the park; he was my first and only boyfriend.

Therapist: It sounds like you enjoyed spending time with him?

Ana: I did, but I didn't really know what a monster he was. He was handsome and older which made my school friends jealous of me. No one had ever been jealous of me, I never had anything for others to envy.

Therapist: And then what happened?

Ana: Around the holidays we went to a local fair. We were having such a good time dancing and laughing that I stayed out later than I was supposed to, when he dropped me off it was dark outside. I knew mami would be angry, but I didn't care. I just wanted to spend time with Jose. When he dropped me off at home there was a big "discussion" between mami and Jose. I wasn't part of the conversation and couldn't really hear most of it, all I know was that mami was angry and accusing him of things I didn't really understand then. At the end of that discussion, I was engaged to marry Jose and a wedding date was set. Two months later Jose and I got married.

Therapist: How old were you when you were told to marry him?

Ana: I don't remember... maybe 16. We got married in February and my birthday is in January so definitely 16.

Therapist: What was that like for you? How did you feel about getting married?

Ana: No one asked me what I wanted so I didn't really think about it. But I was scared, I didn't know what to expect. But I loved Jose and he loved me so I was excited; I didn't really know how bad it would be. But I should have known better.

Therapist: It seems like you blame yourself?

Ana: I do, I was stupid for believing him.

Therapist: You were a child and it doesn't sound like you had a lot of choice in the matter. He was a charming adult; not even the adults in your life were able to see him for who he really was. I'm not sure anyone in your position could have done anything differently. Tell me when did things change with Jose?

Ana: The night of our wedding. The whole thing was confusing and scary, I didn't know what it meant to be a wife, nor what the expectations would be. No one talked to me about sex and I didn't know what was happening [Ana's hands began shaking and her eyes got watery].

How are you feeling right now?

I don't want to talk about what happened. It was so long ago. I was too naïve, I had been sheltered, I didn't know what was happening but I should've... it's my fault.

Therapist: You were young and this was your first sexual encounter, you cannot be at fault for something you didn't even understand. I understand it is difficult but it is necessary that we talk about it. Tell me what you remember?

Ana: We made love that night, like you're supposed to on your wedding night.

Therapist: Ok, but remember we have to go slowly, moment by moment. Let's start with the party and then we'll go through the rest of the night. Remember to go slowly.

Ana: After we got married there was a big party. My family and his family were there. There were a lot of people there, I didn't recognize most of them. When the party ended he took me home with him.

Therapist: What was his home like?

Ana: He lived in an apartment. That night was my first time there. He had brought my things to his apartment earlier that day. It was my new home. It had green walls and it was messy, things were not in their place but it wasn't exactly dirty.

Therapist: What do you remember about Jose that night?

Ana: He was wearing a blue suit. He was very drunk; he didn't have a tie anymore. I had never seen him like that before. His face was all red, he smelled bad like liquor and cigarettes, and he couldn't walk straight. He took me to the bedroom and [Ana covered her eyes with her hands.]

Therapist: Tell me what you remember of the bedroom.

Ana: It was medium sized and had white walls. The bed had a soft red cover on it, I remember it felt like fur.

Therapist: What happened when you went in the bedroom?

Ana: [With tears in her eyes] He was rough as tried to take my dress off. The dress had many little buttons down my back and he got mad because he couldn't open them. He ripped it open and the buttons went flying everywhere. He took my dress off. He kissed me and bit my lip until I bled. The taste of his mouth disgusted me. I tried to push him away but he held me tighter. I cried and asked him to stop but he slapped me and said "tu eres mi esposa y tienes que complacerme" ("you are my wife and you have to please me). The sweet and handsome man I had met was gone.

Therapist: What happened after he slapped you and told it was your job to please him?

Ana: He was right, I was his wife so I stopped crying and protesting I just let him do whatever he wanted. We had sex.

Therapist: How did you feel in that moment?

Ana: I was scared. At first it hurt so much, but then it was like I went away.

Therapist: You went away?

Ana: Yes. I was there, I mean my body was there but my mind was somewhere else.

Therapist: Where did your mind go?

Ana: It didn't go anywhere. My mind just stopped thinking, like it was sleeping. And then it was over.

Therapist: What about your body?

Ana: I don't know... I didn't move. But I can't remember.

Therapist: That's ok, let's just try. How does your body feel right now?

Ana: I feel hot, like I can't breathe. Can we open a window?

Therapist: Tell me more about your breathing, what are you feeling?

Ana: [pulling at the neck of her sweater] It's like I'm suffocating. I feel all this pressure on my chest.

Therapist: Did you feel any pressure on your chest that night?

Ana: I can't remember. I don't know.... Maybe. Jose was on top of me. He was heavy, all that weight on top of me.

Therapist: Is it possible that his body weight was causing you to feel pressure against your body and on your chest?

Ana: Yes, I felt like he was... me estaba aplastando (he was crushing/squishing me).

Therapist: And were you feeling hot?

Ana: It was hot in the room. He was hot and sweaty. His sweat was dripping all over me.

Therapist: So Jose was on top of you squishing you with his sweat dripping on you couldn't move. What happened then?

Ana: When he finished. He fell asleep on top of me, I had to push his sweaty body off of me. He snored all night. I remember because I couldn't sleep that night. I just laid there without moving. I stared at a crack on the ceiling. I just thought about all the different way that crack could have happened... maybe someone dropped something heavy on the floor above, or maybe Jose hit the ceiling with a broom trying to kill an insect.

Therapist: How did your body feel?

Ana: It felt heavy, it felt weird, different. Like it wasn't my body anymore... I guess it wasn't my body anymore it was his.

Therapist: What happened next?

Ana: Nothing. I got out of bed early and made breakfast. When he got up he ate and then we went to play soccer like he did every weekend after that.

Therapist: How did you feel the next day?

Ana: Fine, I kept busy there was so much cleaning to do in that apartment.

Therapist: How about your body, how did it feel?

Ana: [Ana was shaking her leg vigorously] I had some pain and some bleeding which made it a little hard to walk or sit but that only lasted for a day or 2. I also had some bruises on my arms from when he held me down and on my thighs but they weren't a big deal. I was fine.

Therapist: Let's slow down for a moment. It sounds like the night before was confusing, scary, and upsetting.

Ana: Yes I was upset that night because I wasn't prepared but I was fine the next day. I understood it was part of my job as a wife.

Therapist: Your words are telling me you were fine but your body it telling me maybe you weren't.

Ana: [Ana began crying and then yelled.] What do you want from me? Do you want me to sit here and tell you that I hated what he did to me? That it made me feel dirty. That I knew I would never be the same after that night! [After a moment of silence] I'm sorry I didn't mean to yell.

Therapist: It's ok, you are angry.

Ana: Of course I'm angry. I'm angry at Jose for what he did to me that night and so many nights after that. And at mami.... how could she marry me off to him? I would never do that to my daughter.

Ana: I didn't mean that. I'm not mad at mami, she didn't know.

Therapist: It can be very hard to have negative feelings about the people we love. But I am going to ask you to stay with that feeling. Where do you feel that anger?

Ana: right here in my stomach.

Therapist: How does your stomach feel right now?

Ana: It feels tight, like this [she made a fist]. Like I have rock in my stomach.

Therapist: Tell me about that rock feeling, is it large or small?

Ana: It's big and heavy, I feel like it's weighing me down.

Therapist: Does it feel hot, cold, warm, or wet? How does it feel inside of you?

Ana: It feels hot

Therapist: Stay with that, tell me about that heat you feel?

Ana: It's like a big ball of fire burning up inside of me.

Therapist: You feel this heavy ball of fire burning up in your stomach, do you feel it anywhere else?

Ana: Yes, everywhere, it's like the fire is traveling through my blood.

Therapist: How does your body feel right now?

Ana: Hot, I feel hot, like my blood is boiling.

Therapist: I notice your hands are balled up into fists right now, tell me about that?

Ana: It's like the fire inside me wants to come out. I don't want it to come out. I have to keep it inside.

Therapist: This fire you feel wants to come out, what would happen if it did?

Ana: It won't, I can't. I don't know what would happen.

Try to imagine.

Ana: [crying] It makes me want to scream, and yell, and break stuff.

Therapist: The anger that you feel when you think of what Jose did to you, is big and heavy. It is burning up inside of you and weighing on you but you feel like you can't let it out, just like you couldn't let it out then.

Ana: [Sobbing] It makes me so angry that he did that to me and then the next day it was like nothing ever happened. I had to act the same, pretend he didn't hurt me. I hate him so much and I was never able to say it or show it, it would have been worse for me if I did.

Therapist: Ana, I would like to go back to what you said about feeling angry at your mom. It must be hard for you to acknowledge this anger, but it seems to me like it is understandable to be angry with the adults that made decision about your life, and this includes her. This does not mean that you love her any less.

Ana: I loved her so much. I know she loved me. But she just let me go with a stranger.

Therapist: You are angry that she let you marry someone that neither of you really knew.

Ana: Yes, I would never do that to my daughter. It's my job to take care of her to protect her.

Sometimes it's hard for me to understand why she did it. But I do understand, she thought I had found a man to take care of me, and she had so much to worry about with my siblings and the restaurant.

Therapist: Even when we understand why someone did something it does not mean it didn't hurt us or that we can't be angry about it.

Therapist: How do you feel talking about this with me right now?

Ana: [With tears in her eyes] sad, all I ever wanted to do was to make her happy and protect her but she couldn't protect me.

Ana: I also feel bad... guilty. I am sitting here talking badly about the woman that raised me and sacrificed so much for me.

Therapist: I know that it is difficult to talk about all of this and that you may feel like you're betraying her but I want you to know that I don't think badly of you or her as you share all that you have been through with me. No one is all good or all bad and it is normal to feel a mixture of feelings towards the people we love. I also think we can find a way to talk about all you have been through honestly and without betraying her memory. Would that be ok with you?

Ana: Yes

Therapist: Let's continue. What happened in your life after your wedding night?

Ana: A few months... maybe 6 months later I found out I was pregnant.

Therapist: What was your reaction when you found out you were pregnant?

Ana: I didn't really know what being a mother would entail but I was happy, happy that I would have someone to love, someone to keep me company. When Jose found out he wasn't happy or

mad, he was annoyed, annoyed that his life would be disrupted. Now that I was pregnant the apartment we were living in was too small and he didn't have the time nor patience to deal with a pregnant woman. He told me I would go live in San Luis del Carmen, the town where he was from and where his family still lived. He had a house adjacent to his parents' land. I had not seen his family since the wedding but I was now to live next door to them so they could help me with the pregnancy. Mami wasn't happy that I was leaving and she cried when we said goodbye; I didn't know it would be many years before I would see her or the rest of my family again. Jose didn't drive me, he dropped me off at the bus stop with my small bag and told me my father-in-law would pick me up when I got there. I was young and I was afraid to ask any questions, questions I didn't even know I had. We didn't discuss much, I had no idea how long I would be there or that the plan was for me to permanently live there while he lived and worked in the city.

Therapist: What was the move like for you?

Ana: It was a big change for me. I mostly interacted with Jose's family unless I went to the town square on Sundays for mass. I wouldn't say his family disliked me (except for his youngest sister Sara) but they were cold and distant. His mother, Clara would only speak to me when she wanted me to do something for her, which was often. Although his parents and siblings each had their own home, they all lived very close by and came together for lunch and dinner every day. I was expected to help his mom cook and was also responsible for washing everyone's clothes. I never understood why Sara, Jose's youngest sister, was excused from most chores but she was and I did not dare complain. Jose visited a few times just for a few days. When he did visit he spent most of his time visiting family and drinking with his cousins not really with me. At first it bothered me, he was my husband and I wanted to take walks together to get ice cream and hold hands like we used to but it often felt like I was invisible.

Therapist: Tell me more about what made you feel invisible?

Ana: Well, my birthday came and went, Jose was not home and there was no celebration or acknowledgement. It's not like we celebrated birthdays with gifts or big parties when I was growing up, but mami always remembered. She would wake us up on our birthdays singing Las Mañanitas and would prepare our favorite meal that day; I always asked for tamales colorados. Although I was alone on my birthday I didn't feel lonely, I was pregnant and I felt like I had company with me. I have never truly felt alone after having my son, even when I am not physically with my children I carry them in my heart, they are a part of me.

Therapist: Tell me more about your pregnancy?

Ana: It was a happy time as long as Jose wasn't around.

Therapist: Why is that, what happened when Jose was there?

Ana: When I was about 8 months pregnant I went to Sunday mass and bumped into Juan, Sara's husband in the town square, he offered me a ride home which I gladly accepted. Had I known what I was getting myself into I never would have accepted. When we got home Sara was very upset to see me get out of Juan's car. She caused a scene where she accused him of cheating and accused me of throwing myself at her husband. Of course nothing had happened between Juan and me but she was convinced otherwise and there was no changing her mind. I was mortified, the entire family came out to see the commotion and heard what she was saying about me, I saw the look of disapproval in their eyes. I felt like I had just been caught doing something wrong, but I had not done anything.

Therapist: How did you feel in that moment standing in front of all of them?

Ana: I was embarrassed and mad.

Therapist: Try to picture it, where in your body did you feel it?

Ana: My face felt like it was on fire, I am sure my cheeks were red. I wanted to shrink or become invisible. I didn't want them all to stare at me like they did. I tried to deny it and explained that he was simply doing me a favor, but she would not hear it.

Therapist: Tell me what happened after?

Ana: A few days later Jose came by and the first thing Sara did was tell him what happened. Jose was furious he yelled and broke things; he kept saying that I had embarrassed him in front of his family. I just sat in a corner of the house crying. Eventually he left and I thought the worse was over, I had no idea how evil he could truly be.

Therapist: What do you remember about that day?

Ana: I try not to think about it. But I remember that day like it was yesterday. It was the first time he hit me, and it was the first time I felt genuine fear for my life.

Therapist: Ok, let's slow down. What time of the day was this?

Ana: It was late, it was the middle of the night. I was already asleep when he got home drunk that night.

Therapist: He got home in the middle of the night drunk, what did he do next?

Ana: He stormed into the room and turned on the light. The light was so bright it was blinding. I couldn't see him. He dragged me out of bed and started hitting me.

Therapist: Remember to go slowly, moment by moment in as much detail as possible. Jose turned on the light and then what happened?

Therapist: He was yelling at me saying that a whore like me did not deserve to share a bed with him. He grabbed me by my arms hard. He pulled me out of bed and dropped me on the floor, I landed on my back. I hit the floor hard and started crying which only made him angrier.

Therapist: He was yelling and pulled you out of the bed and dropped you on the floor. You landed on your back and then what happened?

Ana: I tried to get off the floor but he kept pushing me back down. I started pleading with him reminding him I was pregnant but that only seemed to enrage him further. He began kicking me as he repeated all the things Sara had told him. He kicked me.

Therapist: How did he kick you, where did he kick you?

Ana: He kicked me hard. Everywhere with his hard black boots. On my head, arms, legs, and stomach.

Therapist: What do you remember about that moment when he was kicking you?

Ana: I was on the floor in the in the bedroom. I tried to protect my stomach and wrapped myself up like a baby, but I still felt the blows to the side of my stomach.

Therapist: Tell me about the bedroom--the walls, the floor, what do you remember seeing?

Ana: The walls were painted yellow. I remember it was cold, the window was open and there was a breeze. The tiles on the floor were colorful and pretty, they formed pattern, an indigenous pattern but I hated them in that moment because they were hard and cold. I was shivering and my teeth were chattering like crazy. I remember Jose's face, it was red and scrunched up, he was so angry.

Therapist: Try to go back to that moment, how did you feel looking at Jose's face?

Ana: Shocked. It's so surreal, how could the same man who used to tell me jokes and open doors for me be doing this to me? How can the father of my child kick me on my stomach knowing I was carrying his child?

Therapist: Jose kicked you on your stomach even though you were pregnant. Can you tell me about the pain you felt? Where do you feel it?

Ana: It seemed to go on forever and I can still remember every blow. He kicked me right here (holding the side and front of her stomach) with his hard boots.

Therapist: Did he do anything else to you?

Ana: He also pulled my hair so hard I thought he was going to pull it out of my head. My head hurt so much. He pulled my face near his with his big hands; that hurt my cheeks so much. As he yelled his spit would land on me [Ana wiped her face].

Therapist: He kicked you hard on your stomach, head, arms, and legs, as you laid on the cold floor trying to protect your stomach. He pulled your hair so hard you thought he was going to pull it out. He grabbed you by your cheeks and yelled so closely that his spit landed on your face. Then what happened?

Ana: Eventually he stopped, stumbled his way around me and passed out on the bed. I was too scared and in too much pain to move so I spent the rest of the night on the floor quietly sobbing.

Therapist: Slow down tell me what you remember about being on the floor that night

Ana: I will never forget how the hard, cold floor felt against my skin, and how tears and blood merged into a sticky cold liquid that eventually dried on my face and my clothes. I think my eyes were swollen from all the crying because they hurt and after a while I couldn't really see clearly.

Therapist: How did you feel in that moment?

Ana: I was terrified. I didn't move. I was afraid he would wake up. I was so scared for my baby. When he moved inside me it made me so happy that I smiled while crying.

Therapist: You were terrified to move because you didn't want to wake Jose up. You were also afraid something happened to your baby until you felt him move and you felt so happy, you smiled even though you were crying. What happened after that night?

Ana: The next day I woke up and got myself cleaned up as best as I could. Jose left without saying one word to me. I headed over to the main house to help his mom with breakfast. I intended to talk to her to ask her to help me, to talk to Jose for me, to make him understand that what he had done was wrong. My eyes were very swollen, my cheeks were red, and I had bruises all over my arms and legs. I know his mother saw them. We worked quietly in the kitchen, but before I had the courage to talk to her she said to me, “no debes darle razón para enojarse, si tu marido se enoja es tu culpa” (“you shouldn't give him a reason to get angry, if he gets upset with you it is your fault.”)

Therapist: You hoped to ask your mother-in-law for help but she blamed you for what happened. How did that feel?

Ana: It was in that moment that I realized how alone I truly was. I felt alone and trapped. Everyone could see my bruises but no one cared. I felt invisible. But she was also right.

Therapist: How was she right?

Ana: If I did things exactly how Jose wanted, then he wouldn't get angry. I stopped going out unless I had to. I didn't speak to anyone unless I had to. I definitely didn't speak to any men.

Therapist: You adjusted your behavior to please Jose. Did it help?

Ana: It seemed to help for a while, but then it got worse.

Therapist: I believe his anger had nothing to do with what you did or did not do.

Therapist: What happened then?

Ana: Not long after that my son was born.

Therapist: Tell me about your son's birth. Do you remember what kind of day it was?

Ana: It was a warm day. The night before he was born I started feeling a lot of pain and had no idea what was happening to me, I was afraid something was wrong with the baby but I didn't

want to bother my mother-in-law in the middle of the night. I waited until day break and slowly walked over to his parents' house. I had to stop every couple of steps because the pain was excruciating. I told his mother what was happening and asked her to ask her husband to take me to the local doctor. She did not seem as concerned as I felt, they said it was normal. His mother offered me some coffee and told me that just this once I didn't need to help her make breakfast. I sat in the kitchen patiently waiting for the water to boil and digging my nails into the palm of my hands when the pain came. But the pain grew stronger and started coming more frequently, so much so that I had to break the silence and I cried out in pain. Other family members heard the commotion and suddenly everything became very chaotic and a blur for me. I was moved into one of the guest bedrooms and forced to lay down.

Therapist: How did you feel in that moment, what was the pain like?

Ana: It was like something was tearing inside me, like someone was ripping my insides. But what I remember the most is feeling scared because the pain was so unbearable. I also remember that I was drenched in sweat as if I had been caught in an afternoon thunderstorm without an umbrella. Somehow I knew I was in labor although no one confirmed it until the doctor got there. I was not ready for my son, I wanted him to stay inside me as long as possible. I didn't want him to be born in that house, I didn't want Jose's family to be the first people he ever saw, I didn't want to share him with them and even less with Jose.

Therapist: What was it like seeing him for the first time?

Ana: When I held him I felt indescribable love and also panic, all I knew was that this baby needed me and I needed to protect him from everything but especially from his father. From that point forward everything I did, I did for him. I didn't think much about what Jose had done to me, I was so focused on my son. I wanted to make sure he was taken care of. I would spend hours

just watching him sleep. He was perfect. And I was finally no longer alone and I was happy.

[Ana smiled]

Therapist: How did Jose respond to the baby?

Ana: Jose came to visit his son a week after he was born and that was probably one of the few pleasant visits we received. I wouldn't say Jose treated me well, he was still angry but he seemed proud to have a son and therefore was in a good mood. He showed the baby off to his friends and family and when talking to him would tell him he would grow up to be a strong manly man just like him; this made me wince and caused tremendous pain in my heart. In retrospect I don't know why I didn't leave then, I guess as a 16-year-old girl the idea of being on my own was impossible to imagine, so I stayed. I would pray every day that Jose would not visit often and when he was there I would pray that he did not stay very long. I did everything I could to stay out of his way and to prevent him getting angry with me. I barely spoke to anyone, including his family, I just did my chores and took care of my son. The time I spent playing with my son was my refuge; since I didn't have anyone to talk to I would talk to him, he knew everything that was in my heart.

Session 4

Therapist: Let's review your life narrative so far. Remember to add any details that you have since remember or that you think are important.

Therapist: Ana, I want you to continue telling me about your life when your son was a baby.

Ana: He brought me so much joy, he was such a good and beautiful baby. He didn't cry much. I spent all my time with him. Jose wasn't there most of the time. I remember I used to sing to Javier and tell him stories, like the stories my father used to tell me.

Therapist: What were holidays like?

Ana: Most of the time they were just regular days unless Jose was visiting, sometimes we would go see his family. I remember my son's first Christmas; it was such a bad Christmas. (Ana anxiously shifted around in her chair).

Therapist: Tell me about that Christmas?

Javier was sick, he was so small still and I was worried. I didn't really have any experience with children and didn't really have anyone to ask from, so any little thing that happened to him made me very worried. He had a fever and a cough, I was so worried because he was so tiny.

Therapist: It was a bad Christmas because he was sick and you were worried?

Ana: Well yes, in part. Jose got mad and he hit me that night. But I prefer to remember the happy times with my son.

Therapist: I understand it's not always easy to talk about unpleasant and painful memories but the more we avoid them the more power we give them. It is important to slow down and talk in detail about the good and bad memories from your life like we have done in other sessions. Why don't you give it a try? Walk me through what happened that day.

Ana: It was Christmas and Jose was home visiting. A few days earlier he had specifically requested that I make him tamales and chiles rellenos for noche buena (Christmas Eve); both plates take some time to make. Since my son was sick and I was so concerned with bringing his fever down, I didn't have enough time to prepare them. I knew Jose would be upset but I also knew he was going to his parents' big holiday party so I did not think it would be a big deal.

Therapist: What happened when he got home?

Ana: He got home after midnight. I had just finished putting my son to bed after hours of trying to bring down his fever. He was drunk and stumbled in yelling. He was hungry. It was expected that I would sit and eat with him at the table no matter what time he got home, so I warmed up

some food and set up the table. When he sat down and looked at the food he got so mad. He got slammed his hands on the table and started yelling at me. He compared me to his mother. He always told me his mother was a saint who treated the men in their family like kings and fed them like kings, and no matter what I did I would never be half the woman she was.

Therapist: Jose got home drunk and expecting the dishes he had requested, when he sat down to eat and realized it wasn't what he was expecting he got really mad, slammed his hands on the table and told you, you would never be half the woman his mother is, what was that like for you?

I didn't really care about him comparing me to his mother, he did it all the time.

Therapist: What happened then?

Ana: He wasn't happy with what I had made so he picked up the plates and slammed them against the wall. As the porcelain plates hit the wall they made a loud explosive noise and the food splattered in all directions. I had put down the baby before he got home and I was afraid the noise would wake him, but thankfully it didn't. The dishes he broke that night were given to us by his mother when we got married; they had belonged to her mother. That gift was the only kindness his mother ever offered me but I did not dare say anything to him. I just watched each beautiful dish turn to dust against the wall and there wasn't anything I could do.

Therapist: Do you remember how you felt in that moment?

Ana: I was scared, I was afraid to move and have him come after me, but I knew that the longer I sat in his range of vision the most likely it was that he would hit me. I wished that I could shrink or disappear to get away from him. [Ana's voice got softer] I got up quickly with the pretense of wanting to clean up the mess he was making. I almost made it out the door but he grabbed me by the hair and pulled me back into the dining room, he told me I was never to leave a room unless he had dismissed me. He told me that night I was going to learn to respect him. He had a crazy

look in his eyes, he looked like the devil. [Ana stared at the wall out as her eyes welled up with tears].

Therapist: Ana, are you thinking about what happened that night?

Ana: [for a while Ana did not respond, slowly she shook her head yes]

Therapist: I notice that you are withdrawing into yourself, perhaps the memory of what happened is taking over, but I want you to stay with me Ana, in this room. Can you tell me where you are right now, what is this place?

Ana: I am at the clinic.

Therapist: Very good, we are the clinic. What is this room that we are in?

Ana: An office?

Therapist: Right, now what I am going to ask you to do may seem odd, but I think this exercise will help you remember you are here, in this room with me and not in the past with Jose.

Ana: I know I'm here, I'm on crazy

Therapist: I know you're not crazy. It's just that sometimes our memories can be so strong that they can confuse us and I don't want that to happen to you, so will you participate in this exercise with me?

Ana: Ok

Therapist: Ana, I want you to get up to stretch your legs, walk around the office noticing everything that is in the office. I want you to tell me everything you see, describe it to me in as much detail as you can, for example, tell me the size, color, etc.?

Ana: Ok, I see two chairs

Therapist: What color are the chairs?

Ana: One is green and the other one is blue.

Therapist: Why don't you touch them and tell me what they feel like, what's the material like?

Ana: The green chair feels soft like a velvety material. The blue chair is sturdier, and the fabric is rougher, it doesn't feel as smooth as the other one.

Therapist: What else do you see in here?

Ana: There's 4 walls, they're half white and half blue. There is also 1 large window.

Therapist: Keep going

Ana: There is carpet in this room

Therapist: What else?

Ana: There is a small table, it's grey and it has a lamp. The lamp is turn on and it's beige with some designs. There is also a small tissue box and a red candle on the table.

Therapist: Pick up the candle what does it smell like?

Ana: It smells like apples

Therapist: What does it feel like in your hand?

Ana: It's a little heavy, and the glass feels smooth in my hands, it's a little cold.

Therapist: You can take a seat. How do you feel right now?

Ana: Like I am more awake, I was getting tired before

Therapist: Before you got up and walked around what was happening for you inside?

Ana: I don't know I just got very scared.

Therapist: What did that feel like in your body?

Ana: My heart started racing, it felt like it was going to come out of my chest. I don't like that feeling, it feels like I am going to die. If I stay really still and focus on looking at only one spot it goes away.

Therapist: What does it feel like when the feeling goes away?

Ana: I start to get sleepy, I don't feel anything, I don't think. I just feel like my mind went away. Went someplace else.

Therapist: I know that what you have been through has been so scary at times, that the only way you knew how to deal with it was to zone out, to disconnect your mind from your body. What we are trying to do here is the opposite. In order for you to heal we have to make that connection between the two. But unlike other times, this time you are not alone. I am right here with you, I'll be here every step and I won't let anything happen to you. Do you think we can give it another try?

Ana: Ok

Therapist: Now before you continue telling me what happened that Christmas night on 1998, I want you to remember that if you start to feel like you are zoning out, like your mind is leaving you, I want you to pick up the candle, notice the weight of it in your hand, notice the smooth, cool glass, and I want you to smell. If I notice that your mind is leaving I will gently remind you to do the same ok?

Ana: Ok

Ana: He grabbed me by the hair again and slammed my face against the table. The pain was so excruciating that initially I could not see straight, everything was blurry. I felt hot liquid coming down from my nose and when it reached my lips I tasted it, it was blood. I knew better than to cry out in pain or plead with him, which would only make the beating worse. I don't remember exactly what happened next, I was numb I didn't feel anything.

Therapist: Try to remember what else happened that night.

Ana: I think he dragged me by my hair because I remember by head hurt so much for a few days after. He threw me against the floor on top of the food and kicked me on my ribs because I had

made a mess. He told me to clean it up and I did. I didn't think or cry I just cleaned, I was like a robot.

Therapist: Your body was in shock and you were trying to survive, to make it past that beating. Try to think about how you felt right after?

Ana: After I finished cleaning everything up, Jose had finally fallen asleep. I sat on the kitchen table and I cried. But I didn't cry because I was I afraid or because everything hurt; I cried because I remembered how my previous Christmas had been so different.

Therapist: It sounds like it was painful to see how much your life had changed.

Ana: Exactly, the holidays had always been a happy time for me. My whole family would get together during the day and at night everyone in the neighborhood would go outside to light fireworks. My favorite part was when we sang villancicos (Christmas carols) while drinking hot chocolate. I had not felt alone since my son was born, but that night was different, that night I felt so alone although both my husband and my son slept in the next room.

Therapist: Where in your body did you feel that pain, that loneliness?

Ana: Right here (she pointed to her heart). It felt like a sharp pain, like someone was stabbing my heart. It hurt so much I could barely breathe in between sobs (after long pause)

Many nights ended like this, the reason was always different of course but what he would do to me was the same. It would mostly happen when he was drunk. Whenever I knew he would be drinking I would feel nervous all day; holidays were really terrible. I would take my son out and play with him, I would let him run and climb, I wanted to make sure he would be tired and be able to sleep through whatever fight was coming. I learned to hide anything that he could break whenever he went out drinking. I made sure to make him his favorite dish and to keep some cold beers in the fridge; sometimes this would save me and he would just eat and fall asleep. But

sometimes no matter what I did he would find a reason to get mad. I had accepted our marriage the way it was and did not think about leaving him until my mom passed away.

Therapist: Can you remember when that was?

Ana: It was a long time ago, Javier was almost 5 years old. I remember it was around mother's day. It was a Monday afternoon when I got a call from my younger sister Rosario letting me know mami was very sick. Yes, it was right before mother's day because I was planning on calling her for mother's day; I didn't speak to my family very often. I did not know that she had been sick for a while; she had been having ongoing stomach issues for months. By the time she went to see a doctor, it was too late. She had stomach cancer and was told there was nothing they could do for her. I remember the day I found out like it was yesterday, after my sister broke the news her voice sounded so distant and I couldn't make out most of what she was saying.

Therapist: Can you remember what you felt in that moment?

Ana: Scared, I think. All of a sudden I grew very cold but had sweat coming down my neck. I wanted to go see her that moment but I knew I had to wait for Jose to come home. He was visiting home that weekend, so I waited anxiously for him. I didn't try to contact him during the week because he did not like when I called him unless it was an emergency; he wouldn't have considered my mother dying an emergency. I was worried I knew she would not make it much longer and yet all I could do was wait. It had been a few years since I had last visited. I remember my last visit. Jose had to go to a 3 week specialized training. He felt so proud of himself for having been one of the few police officers chosen for this training. He was actually in a good mood and let me stay with my family while he was away training. My son was 2 years old when he met and last saw his grandmother.

Therapist: What happened when Jose got home?

Ana: When Jose finally came home I knew it would not be easy to convince him to let me go see her. From the moment he walked in, it was clear he was in a bad mood. He complained about the long trip, the terrible road conditions, and how hot it was. But I had been waiting all week and I just couldn't contain myself, I had to tell him. I begged him to let me go be by her side, this was the first time I begged him. Not even when he would hit me or threw himself on me did I beg him to stop but being by my mother's side was different; the little bit of dignity I had left was gone in that moment. But at the end it didn't matter because he simply said no; actually I think my begging made him angrier. He told me that my place was at home and that I probably wanted to go so I could whore around and party away from him. I remember realizing how crazy he was in that moment, my mom was dying and all he was worried about was me cheating on him? I looked into his eyes and there was no compassion; I knew he was not going to change his mind. That night he didn't hit me but he did something much worse. He robbed me of the opportunity to say goodbye to my mother, and I will never forgive him for that. She passed away 2 weeks later, just fell asleep and never woke up; at least she went peacefully.

Therapist: How did you feel about not getting to say goodbye to your mom?

Ana: I regret it every day. I should have left then. I should have just picked up my son and left. What could he have done that he had not already done? I cried every day for months. He had no idea what it was like for me because he still had his mother.

Therapist: It sounds like you were angry with him, tell me more about that.

Ana: Of course I was angry. Just the sight of him would make my blood boil. God forgive me, but many nights I would pray that it was all a dream and that I would wake up to find out that it was him that was dead not mami. Nothing was the same after that day. I could not look at him without rage and resentment; I knew I could not live the rest of my life next to him; I could not

let my son become like his father. That's when I decided to leave. I preferred to hide out than spend the rest of my life with him.

Therapist: So you left soon after your mom passed away, do you remember how long you waited?

Ana: Not that soon after, maybe 2 months later. I didn't pick a special day I just told myself tomorrow we are leaving and we did. I didn't pack very much just some clothes and my son's favorite toy. The truth is there was nothing in that house that I really wanted and I didn't want any reminders of the time I spent there. I was scared, but for the first time I also felt like I was doing something. I was confronting him without actually confronting him.

Therapist: Tell me about your journey the day you left him?

Ana: We left in the middle of the day around noon, I thought it was the safest plan in case I bumped into someone I could always tell them I was going into town to go to church. I would do that sometimes you know, just sit in church, pray, imagine a different life, think about my family, think about everything Jose had done to me, that was the only place where I allowed myself to cry. (Ana's voice got lower and she was staring off into the distance).

Therapist: You left in the middle of the day?

Ana: Yes, we got to the bus station got on the bus and left. I wanted to see my family very much but I knew that was the first place where he would look.

Therapist: If it's ok with you, I am going to slow you down. I want to you to tell me about your trip in as much detail as possible. Tell me anything you remember seeing, smelling, and feeling?

Ana: I don't really remember much; it was such a long time ago.

Therapist: Give it a try, whatever you remember.

Ana: I remember the bus was crowded, there were a lot of people, people everywhere. I was sitting towards the front of the bus. We were lucky to get one seat. There was an old man that slept most of the way sitting next to me and to my left there was a lady who smelled really bad. That lady was carrying some chickens in a cage and they made a lot of noise. Javier sat on my lap the whole ride and he was scared of the chickens because they were loud and their feathers kept flying everywhere. I remember praying the whole ride. It felt like an eternity. I didn't really have a plan when I left but I knew I couldn't go to see my sisters or brothers because Jose would find me. When we got to the bus terminal in San Salvador we took another bus to El Paste.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: I decided to go to El Paste because that's where one of my great aunt's lived. It was a very rural and remote town but I imagined that was the safest place for us since Jose never met this aunt or heard much about her. She was older and alone; her children had all moved away. I figured if she would let me stay then I would help her out. That's as far as my plan went, I had no idea how long I would stay there or what I would to earn money for us. Talking about it now I realize how crazy of an idea it was; I hadn't seen her or spoken to her in years. Gracias a Dios (thank God) mi tia Mela (my aunt Mela) recognized me. I think that when she opened the door she saw something in my face because she gave me a big hug and said "Deja todo en las manos de Dios" (leave everything in God's hands).

Therapist: What was that like?

Ana: I felt so relieved. For the first time in a long time I felt safe. I remember that when she hugged me I cried. I wished that it had been mami who hugged me and told me everything was going to be alright, but in that moment a hug from tia Mela felt just as good.

Therapist: Tell me as much as you remember about your time with your aunt.

Ana: I stayed there for a few months. I grew very close to Tia Mela, she would listen to me for hours at a time and she never judged me. I was afraid that her reaction would be to side with Jose and tell me to go back to my husband; you hear about things like that often in my country, but she didn't do that. She was understanding and would tell me repeatedly how strong and brave I was; I didn't feel like either of those things and couldn't see what she saw in me but I was grateful to have her love and support. We spent hours in the kitchen cooking and talking about life. She reminded me so much of my mom. Tia Mela was very active in her church community. I would accompany her to church every Saturday; I grew up Catholic and she was an Evangelical Christian but I quickly grew to like it. I grew to appreciate and love their Christian community, they offered me support and love when I most needed it.

Therapist: Tell me more about your experience with that community.

Ana: They really welcomed us. For the first time since I left my home I felt like I belonged. I also really enjoyed the services, particularly the songs. They were lively but meaningful. We often sang about hope and courage, the things I thought I had lost while living with Jose. Since then I have considered myself evangelical and try to live my life accordingly.

Therapist: It sounds like you found what you needed just when you needed it. Before we end for today I will like for you to fill out some forms. These are the same forms you filled out in our first meeting. You will also fill them once again in our last meeting.

Session 5

(Ana looked very upset as she entered the room. Immediately after sitting down she begins without waiting for a prompt). I lost my brother Edgar last week.

Therapist: Ana I am so sorry for your loss. What happened?

Ana: My brother was an alcoholic and he drank himself to death.

Therapist: Ana, you have just suffered a major loss and if it is ok with you I would like to pause our regular session and spend some time talking about Edgar before we continue with your narrative.

Ana: Ok (crying)

Therapist: I can see that this is very upsetting for you

Ana: I can't believe he is gone. I will never see him again, I will never hear his laughter again, I will never hear his stupid jokes again. The worst part is that I didn't even get to say goodbye.

Therapist: It must be hard to be so far from your family at a time like this.

Ana: It's just like when mami died. I wasn't there to say goodbye to her and I wasn't able to say goodbye to him. Maybe if I had never left El Salvador he would still be alive.

Therapist: It sounds like you may have some feelings of guilt?

Ana: Edgar and I were very close growing up, we did everything together. I know it is not my fault he drank again but maybe if I had been there I could have spoken to him. He was sober for 5 years! We all knew what the doctor told him, if he drank one more time his liver would not be able to take it. And after staying away from that poison for 5 years he drank for 3 days straight! He ended up in the hospital and there was nothing they could do for him... but maybe if I had been there I could've stopped him from drinking so much.

Therapist: Ana it is normal for people to feel bad and even guilty after they have lost a significant person in their life. Sometimes people focus on the what ifs and dwell on what they could have done to save their loved one in order to feel like they had control over the situation. But the truth is that he is gone and there is nothing you can do so it hurts terribly.

Ana: It does hurt. It feels like someone took a part of my heart. It's just not fair, he was a good person. Why couldn't he take Jose instead!

Therapist: Bad things don't just happen to bad people they happen to good people too. It is normal and ok to feel angry right now.

Ana: It's just not fair. It's all his fault.

Therapist: Whose fault?

Ana: Jose's fault! He didn't let me be by my mother's side when she died and now because of him I am so far away from everyone, I can't even see my children. He keeps hurting me even in the distance.

Therapist: You're angry with Jose for robbing you of time with your loved ones. But you are not the same 16-year-old girl you were when you married him. You are strong and you are taking control of your life—that is why you are here.

Ana: Some days it doesn't feel like that, it feels like I have no control over my life. I don't even have any control over whether or not I stay here, I have no control over when I will see my children again.

Therapist: How does not having control over your life make you feel?

Ana: Powerless... angry. I want to yell at times, other times I just cry because there is nothing I can do to change my situation. It's like no matter what I do, I feel stuck.

Therapist: I know that it feels like all the major decisions in your life have been made and continue to be made by others. But you are here because you decided and had the strength to seek a better future for you and your children. You are fighting and doing everything in your power to make sure you can start a new life with your children, here. I believe you have gained some control back and you will continue to do so.

Ana: I just don't feel like that today.

Therapist: That's ok. You just lost your brother suddenly and you're feeling that pain, on top of the pain of being separated from your loved ones. If it is ok with you, today I will hold that hope for the both of us.

Ana: Ok

Therapist: I want to check-in with you, I would like to resume where we left off last session but only if you think you're up for it. I think it's important that we continue with the treatment and perhaps it will help you feel a little more in control of your life, what do you think?

Ana: I'm not sure, I don't even want to think about that man.

Therapist: I know it's hard to talk about him and what happened to you in general, and it is particularly difficult today, but it seems to me like he is on your mind anyway since you have mentioned him a few times. Why don't we give it a try and if you really can't do it we will stop.

Ana: Ok

Therapist: Let me recap where we left off.

Ana: I loved living with Tia Mela but as much as I liked living there, the little bit of money I had managed to save before leaving Jose was quickly dwindling and I knew I would have to get a job eventually. At first Jose and other police tried to intimidate my family into telling him where I was. But after a while his visits were less frequent and about 6 months later he stopped looking for me, there were rumors that he had left the country. At that point I really needed a job. My sister told me about a job at a clothing factory and helped me find a small apartment. I moved back to San Salvador, started working, sent my son to school and lived a simple but happy life for a few years. I worked at the factory and would pay an elderly neighbor to care for my son after school. At first I would only go out to go to work, I was afraid to bump into Jose. Eventually one of my brothers' got confirmation from a mutual friend that Jose had left the

police force and moved to the United States. That feeling of always watching my back and being constantly afraid started to go away and after a while I started to feel like myself again.

Therapist: Tell me more about that, how did you feel more like yourself?

Ana: I guess like the person I was before I met Jose. I was friendly with people, I would talk to everyone, and I laughed. I felt free. I didn't have to be careful about what I said or who I spoke to anymore.

Therapist: It sounds like, you enjoyed interacting with people.

Ana: I did. That's how I met German. He was a taxi driver who was often parked outside the factory. He pursued me for months but I was not interested in another relationship because I was scared. We became friends and he would often drive me home after work. He wasn't as handsome as Jose and he didn't have the domineering presence that I had first admired about Jose. But that was what I liked about him, he was a clown and would make me laugh all the time. One day he finally he won me over.

Therapist: Do you remember how he won you over?

Ana: I think what I liked most about him was that he was gentle. He never raised his voice. I felt safe with him. I got pregnant with Diana and that was a happy pregnancy for the most part.

Therapist: Tell me what you remember about the pregnancy.

Ana: I remember when I found out about it I was excited because I knew it would be different than my first pregnancy, I was near my family and I made sure to go to all my doctor appointments. I remember the day I told Javier he was going to have a little sister.

Therapist: Tell me about that day in as much detail as you can remember.

Ana: It was a Sunday morning, I took him to the park, the sun was shining and I sat him down on a bench. I starting talking about all the kids that were on the playground and how lucky they

were to have brothers and sisters to play with and then I told him he was going to be just as lucky because he was going to be a big brother. He was so excited that he jumped up and down and kissed my belly. We went to get ice-cream after the park and when I got home I started sewing a blouse for the baby. That day was probably the happiest day of my life.

Therapist: You mentioned you were happy for the most part, what did you mean?

Ana: Towards the end of my pregnancy I found out German had lied to me, he was a married man.

Therapist: I'm sorry he lied to you, what was that like for you to find out?

Ana: I wasn't sad; yes, I'll admit I was a little angry, but the truth is I had never painted a picture in my mind of us as a happy family. Back then when I thought about my future, and even now when I think of my future, I think of my children and I that's it, there is no man in the picture. I was ok with the relationship ending

Therapist: What happened then?

Ana: I still saw him occasionally, he would visit Dianita and he tried to help me out financially as much as possible. My main focus was spending time with my children. My son was getting older and he was such a big help with Dianita, he taught her how to walk. I spent all my time with my kids, visiting family, taking them to the park or just playing with them at home. We didn't have a lot but we were at peace and I was really happy.

Therapist: It sounds like you were able to take charge and create a life that you very much enjoyed. Even then things weren't always easy, you were a single mother but you were safe and happy.

Ana: Yes I did

Session 6

Therapist: I will read you the narrative up to last week, feel free to add or correct anything that you feel is necessary. Re-cap of narrative

Therapist: You enjoyed a peaceful and quiet life with your children and you were happy. What happened then?

Ana: At that time, my main focus was spending time with my children, my son was getting older and Dianita was learning to walk. It had been 3 years since I left Jose and I tried not to think about him or what I went through with him. But my peace didn't last because that bastard found me.

Therapist: Tell me about that day.

Ana: Maybe I should've hid better, I got too relaxed how could I have been so stupid?

Therapist: I know that remembering all of this makes a lot of feelings come up including feelings of guilt and self-blame. But let's slow down and tell me as much as you can about how Jose found you.

Ana: Ok

Therapist: Start with what the day was like before you saw him and tell me in as much detail how it happened.

Ana: One afternoon I was waiting on the bus stop after work with the girls I worked with, when Jose's old partner drove by. At first I couldn't place him, he looked familiar but it had been years since I last saw him, it wasn't until he walked up to me and started making conversation that I realized who he was.

Therapist: What did you do when you realized who he was?

Ana: I panicked, I have never wanted to disappear as much as I did that day. I wanted to walk, actually run away but I froze, it took me a few seconds to respond to him and when I did I could barely get any words out; we exchanged some pleasantries and he left.

Therapist: How did you feel in that moment?

Ana: I was scared. My co-workers grew concerned and told me that I looked like I had seen a ghost. I couldn't tell them why I was scared; no one knew about my past because I was embarrassed of it. I felt dizzy and had to find a place to sit. My head was spinning.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: I snapped out of it and pretended everything was ok because I didn't want to answer their questions but inside I was scared. [Speaking rapidly] I couldn't stop thinking about how Jose's partner had seen me near my job and wearing my work uniform, I was certain he now knew where I worked. He was going to tell him, Jose would find me. I wondered if he saw what bus I got on, maybe he followed me home. What if Jose had been with him. I had to find a new job, I had to move, I wanted to just pick up my kids and go far away.

Therapist: It sounds like you had a lot of thoughts and worry happening at once.

Ana: Yes, the rest of that day is a blur. I was very nervous, afraid to leave my house. I just kept coming up with all the possible scenarios. Eventually I was able to calm myself down because I convinced myself that Jose could not hurt me because he was in the USA.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: A couple of weeks went by and nothing happened so I began to feel better, less scared.

Therapist: So you didn't see Jose that day?

Ana: No, that happened later.

Therapist: Tell me about that day. The day Jose found you. Start from the beginning of the day and walk me through the day in as much detail as you can remember.

Ana: My routine was pretty similar from day to day. I would wake up at 4:30am, cook for the day, pack our lunches and then get myself and the kids ready. We would leave the house at 6:00 am, I would leave my kids with the neighbor and I would take the bus to the factory. I would start work at 7:00 am and the day would go by very quickly. It was tedious work but I liked the girls I worked with. I remember it was Sandra's birthday, she was one of the girls I worked with. That day one of the other girls, Fatima made a cake for Sandra and we sang her happy birthday. I remember because that was the last time I saw them.

Therapist: You had a regular day at work and then what happened?

Ana: That afternoon I was waiting for the bus and my worst nightmare came true. Across the street staring right at me was Jose. I did not know he had been deported a few months back and had resumed his search for me. He turned the car around and stopped at the bus stop. He got out of the car and walked up to me. I was paralyzed I wanted to run, I wanted to scream but I could not move. He smiled at my co-workers and introduced himself as my husband. The girls I had worked with for the past 3 years, all looked at me in disbelief, they had no idea I was married. I am not sure what he said because in that moment I could not hear anything, everything was moving in slow motion and did not seem real.

Therapist: It sounds like you were in shock. Do you remember how your body felt?

Ana: Not really... but I remember my heart was beating fast, so fast it was hard for me to breath. And it was so loud, the beating was so loud, and there was so much traffic so much noise, cars honking. I couldn't hear what anyone was saying.

Therapist: Your heart was beating fast and loud, and there was a lot of noise around you. Stay with that, when you think back on that day, what else do you remember feeling in your body.

Ana: I told you I felt paralyzed.

Therapist: What did feeling paralyzed feel like in your body?

Ana: I couldn't move. It was like I was carrying bags of bricks that I couldn't put them down. So heavy I couldn't move. My body felt heavy but also like.... Like gelatina (gelatin) at the same time.

Therapist: Like gelatin?

Ana: Yes, I couldn't move my body but anyone else could move it. Like I could be pushed and I would fall right over.

Therapist: I see. What else do you remember from that moment?

Ana: I remember him motioning for me to get in to the car but I couldn't move. He put his arm around me and escorted me to the car. I got in his car. As he drove away I sat silently in his car.

Therapist: What happened when you were in his car?

Ana: At first he was angry and yelling, he said I had taken his son away and that he deserved to see him. He told me he knew where I lived and where I worked and that he wanted to see our son. Then all of a sudden he changed. He lowered his voice and told me he had missed us and that he was there to take us home. He told me that a family needs to stay together and that my place was at home with him.

Therapist: What was that like for you to hear?

Ana: I knew it was an act. He was just pretending to be nice. But I knew he meant it, he wanted me to go back with him. I didn't know what to do, but I decided that I would do whatever I needed to do to keep my children safe, even if it meant going home with Jose.

Therapist: Then what happened?

Ana: When we got to my apartment he made me go inside and told me to pack. While I packed he walked around like he was inspecting my house, he touched everything.

Therapist: What was it like for you to have Jose in your house touching your things?

Ana: [Lifting her shoulders up and bringing them close to her body] It made me cringe. I didn't want him there I wanted to tell him to leave, to put down my stuff to not touch anything.

Therapist: He was invading your space.

Ana: That apartment was full of happy memories and now he was in there seeing the memories, seeing my life, seeing who I was. I felt naked. Now he knew everything about my life. I was also scared, I didn't want him to know about my daughter but of course he found some of Dianita's toys and while holding one up he asked me 'what is this?'

Therapist: Go on

Ana: I wanted to lie, but there was no point. I had to tell him, sooner or later he was going to find out I had a daughter. There was no point in fighting the inevitable. After I answered him he didn't say anything and I continued packing.

Therapist: What was it like for you to be packing up?

Ana: I knew that was the last time I would be in that apartment; I tried to pack my children's favorite toys and as much of their clothing as I could. He just stood there watching me in silence, eventually he broke the silence to say 'let's go pick up your children.' As I left the apartment tears fell down my face, I know it sounds silly but I was sad to say goodbye to my home and my possessions. I felt like I didn't have enough time. Once again he just decided and I had to leave everything behind.

Therapist: It doesn't sound silly at all. You built this home and it was important to you.

Ana: It wasn't just important, it was a part of me. I felt like I leaving a part of me behind.

Therapist: You were leaving the new life you had created for yourself and your children behind.

Ana: (quietly crying) exactly

Therapist: What happened after you left the apartment?

Ana: We went to my neighbor's house to pick up the kids. I had to pretend everything was ok because I didn't want to scare my kids. Jose introduced himself to my neighbor and told her a story about how he had been in the US and was now back so I didn't have to work anymore and we would be going back home to San Luis del Carmen. She looked worried but since I didn't say anything she didn't say anything either. When he saw Javier he forced him to give him a hug; Javier was reluctant but complied. He then picked up Diana and examined her, and without saying one word he handed her to me and said let's go.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: I sat in the back seat with my two children. They both fell asleep and I cried as he drove away, away from the safe life I had worked so hard to create.

Therapist: How did you feel driving away?

Ana: Defeated, like I had lost and Jose had won.

Therapist: Tell me more about that.

Ana: I knew what awaited me in that house. I was angry, I was angry with God. I knew I shouldn't question his plan but how could he let that happen to me? How could he let Jose win? Why didn't he protect us?

Therapist: How did that make you feel?

Ana: Before that day I felt so connected to God, I prayed often and was always thankful for everything he gave me. But that day, that day I couldn't feel him. I felt like he had abandoned me. I was all alone again.

Therapist: It sounds like you were questioning your faith?

Ana: I guess you can say that. It just wasn't fair. I did everything right. I tried to lead a good life, I was a good person and God didn't help me. Once we drove into San Luis del Carmen I knew no one would help me. I was alone.

Therapist: What happened when you got to San Luis del Carmen?

Ana: It was dark when we arrived in his house, he unpacked the car and led us inside. The house looked the same inside, not much had changed since I left, except everything looked older, dirtier, and darker. The first thing he said to me was that he was hungry and that I should make him dinner. The four of us sat on the dining room table and had dinner just like we did every day after that.

Therapist: What else do you remember about that day?

Ana: Jose looked older, worn out, just like the house he looked the same but different at the same time. Everything in the house was in the same place, it gave me a weird feeling, like I never left or like I belonged there. I hated everything in that house, I hate that house, it was like a prison to me.

Therapist: You felt like you belonged there?

Ana: I didn't want to but it felt like life was telling me that my place was next to Jose and no matter how hard I fought it I would always end up back there. I really started to believe that, I gave up... me resigne (I resigned myself).

Therapist: What did that look like for you?

Ana: I didn't fight it. I missed the factory; it was hard to sit in front of a sewing machine for nine hours everyday day but I had friends there, I would laugh there, and thanks to that job I was able to support my children. Once again everything in my life changed so quickly; I had no friends and I did not laugh anymore. I chose not to think about the factory or the friends I left behind. It was easier that way. Instead I focused on trying to make the best of it. I spent most of my time with my children.

Therapist: It sounds like you were trying to accept the situation?

Ana: I had to, there was nothing else I could do. But things were different the second time, worse than I remember.

Therapist: Tell me more about that.

Ana: Jose was not a police officer anymore and that seemed to have impacted him a lot. He helped his father run his business, but I don't think he contributed much; he spent most of his time drinking. His family blamed me, they believed I had broken Jose's heart when I left him and would say he was never the same after that. I tried to see them as little as possible, and spent most of my time at home with my children. At first, the worst days were when he would come home drunk and forced me to sleep with him. Most of the time he was so drunk he couldn't perform and that would enrage him. He would blame me for his issues; he would slap me and grab me by my hair as he shoved me around until he would pass out or he until he got bored. The abuse went on at night and never in front of the children and for that I was grateful.

Therapist: But that wasn't the worst of it was it?

Ana: No. Later that changed also. He would get mad if the children were too loud or if Diana cried. He would yell at them and whenever Javier misbehaved he would make him kneel on rice.

Therapist: What was it like for you to see him treat your children like that?

Ana: I knew it was uncomfortable but I wouldn't say anything; I knew it could be worse and I didn't want Jose to hit him. The children were scared of him and tried to avoid him whenever he was home. I think he knew this and sometimes it would make him angry. He would force them to sit with him in the living room and watch television with him. To me it seemed like every day went by slowly. I would think about running away but then quickly push the thought away, he was always around now and it would be just too hard. So I didn't think about it seriously until that day. The day he crossed the line, the day I thought we were going to die.

Therapist: Let's talk about that day. Remember to slow down and tell me in as much detail as possible what you remember from that day. Start with where you were, what time of the day it was, etc.?

Ana: It was a Saturday night, Jose had been gone all day. It was late maybe 11pm. The kids were in bed.

Ana: It all started because of a stupid joke; some stupid drunk made fun of Jose for raising a child that wasn't his. Everyone knew Diana was not his daughter but no one had ever brought it up until that day. He came home and was so angry.

Therapist: What clued you in that he was angry?

Ana: He was screaming. He was drunk of course and his eyes were red but I swear it was more than that. His eyes, his eyes looked like they were going to come out of his face as he yelled. He slapped me with the back of his hand; he hit me so hard that I stumbled backwards, tripped over the chair behind me and fell on the floor. He hit me with such force that he cut my lip open.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: The noise woke up the children and when Diana saw me on the floor bleeding she came running towards me. I did not know how he would react but I never imagined what would happen next.

Therapist: What happened when Diana ran towards you because she saw you on the floor bleeding?

Ana: He pulled Diana by her hair and called her “hija de puta” (daughter of a whore). Javier was 12 years old and loved his little sister, when he saw what Jose did he stepped in and tried to shield Diana. He looked at Jose right in the eyes and yelled “te odio” (I hate you). I tried to pull him away but it was too late.

Therapist: What was too late?

Ana: It was too late to stop Jose. Jose got in Javier’s face and said “te crees un hombre? Vamos a ver que tan hombre eres” (you think you’re a man now? we’ll see how much of a man you really are) he grabbed Javier by the arm and dragged him out the door. I felt my heart sink, my worst nightmare was coming true. I yelled at Jose to let Javier go but he didn’t listen. I ran out the door behind them.

Therapist: Tell me what you remember about that night outside of your house?

Ana: It was pitch black outside and he walked far away from the house until I could barely see them.

Therapist: Do you remember anything about the air, the smell of that night? How about any sounds?

Ana: It had rained earlier so it smelled like wet grass. It was pretty quiet except for the wind it sounded almost like a howling.

Therapist: What did you see?

Ana: I saw how Jose and Javier walked away from the house and into the darkness of the night towards the trees.

Therapist: You were standing at the back door watching them walk towards the darkness. You smelled the wet grass from the earlier rain and you heard the loud howling wind. What happened next?

Ana: The further they walked away from the house the harder it was to see. I watched from the door as Dianita held on to my leg. He made Javier kneel on the dirt in front of him. Then he turned around and yelled for us to go to him. I didn't want to but I was afraid of what he would do to Javier if we disobeyed him. I wished it was a dream, I still wish none of it would have happened.

Therapist: I know it is hard but it's important that you keep going. Tell me what you remember about walking away from the house and towards Jose?

Ana: The walk towards them took forever, I remember I was shivering because it was a windy night but mostly I think it was because I was so scared, I had never seen Jose like this and I could not figure out what he was doing, why did he want us out there?

Therapist: You walked with your daughter away from the house into the windy cold night towards Jose and Javier who was kneeling on the ground, what happened next?

Ana: When we got to him he made us kneel as well. I was wearing a skirt and remember how cold the wet grass stuck to my legs. It was dark but there was just enough light coming from the house to see what was going on. [Ana starts crying]

Therapist: I know it is scary but stay with it, it is just a memory, Jose is not here and he cannot hurt you anymore. What did you see in that moment?

Ana: I watched Jose reach behind his back, go under his shirt, and pull out his gun. I think I made an indescribable noise as I watched him point the gun at the back of Diana's head. I tried to get up to protect her but he yelled for me to stay where I was otherwise he would shoot her. I looked over at Javier and he had tears in his eyes but he did not cry.

Therapist: Do you remember how it felt to watch him threaten the life of your daughter?

Ana: I will never forget that feeling. I felt... terrified. I really believed he would shoot her. I looked around and tried to find something to attack him with. A rock, anything, but there was nothing I could see other than grass. It was the hardest thing I have ever had to do, to watch him point a gun at my daughter and know that there was nothing I could do to stop him.

Therapist: Jose had a gun pointed at your daughter you were scared as you feared for her life, did you have any other feelings you can remember in that moment?

Ana: I was so angry, I wanted to throw myself on him and rip his eyes out. But I was afraid, not afraid for my life but of what he would do to them if I did anything. I prayed that he would stop. I even asked him to kill me and let her go but he ignored me. He just seemed to be stuck in that position, holding the gun to the back of Dianita's head. He didn't move or say anything for a while. The moment seemed to go on forever.

Therapist: You wanted to do something to help her but were afraid that if you acted things could get worse because he was the one with the gun and that made you feel angry. Where in your body did you feel that anger?

Ana: Everywhere, I felt so hot. Like I had lava in my veins, my blood felt like it was boiling inside me. I wanted to choke him but I knew better than to move. I had never felt so much hate towards one person in my life. I dug my nails into my hands as hard as I would have liked to choke him. I didn't feel any pain then but later I noticed I had cut my palms with my nails.

Therapist: What happened next?

Ana: All of a sudden he looked directly at Javier and asked him what he was going to do about it, telling him that if he was such a man he would protect his sister. Javier didn't answer him so Jose moved away from Dianita and hit Javier with the bottom of the gun on his head as he said "eso es lo que pensaba" (that's what I thought). He told Javier he could not do anything to us because we all belong to him, he was the head of the house hold, he was the king. [Ana exhaled loudly]

Therapist: I noticed you were just holding your breath, where you holding your breath that night as well?

Ana: I think so, while I watched him point the gun at Dianita I felt like I couldn't breathe.

Therapist: What else do you remember feeling?

Ana: like I couldn't move, like time stopped moving. I didn't feel the wind anymore, I didn't hear the wind hitting the leaves and branches on the trees anymore. All I could do was watch to see what Jose did next, waiting for the worst I held my breath. When he moved the gun away from her head I moved towards her and grabbed her so hard that we collapsed to floor hugging. I was so relieved for a moment until I watched him hit Javier with his gun and saw blood coming down the middle of his forehead.

Therapist: What happened then?

I heard what Jose said to Javier but his voice sounded so distant I remember just watching the blood come down Javier's forehead. Because it was so dark I couldn't really see the blood until the light from the moon hit it and made it look like a shiny liquid on his forehead. [Ana touched her forehead]. After he hit Javier I thought it was over but it wasn't. Jose was so unpredictable that night.

Therapist: What did Jose do next?

Ana: I was still on the ground holding Dianita. He grabbed me by my shirt and put me back into kneeling position then he... he pointed the gun at my head and told me it was all my fault for being a whore and not teaching them to respect him, then he squeezed the trigger [Ana said very rapidly].

Therapist: How terrifying. He grabbed you by your shirt, made you kneel, and pointed the gun at you, is that correct?

Ana: Yes

Therapist: Where was he standing? Where in your body was he pointing the gun?

Ana: He was standing in front of me, he was so close I could have punched him but I didn't. He was holding the gun to the front of my head.

Therapist: Do you remember what the gun felt like against your skin.

Ana: It felt, it felt... cold and heavy. Jose was pressing it hard against my skin.

Therapist: Can you feel the gun against your skin right now as you did then?

Ana: Yes, right here [pointing to the middle of her forehead] I feel pressure right here.

Therapist: Help me see that moment. What did you think about?

Ana: [Shaking her head rapidly] I don't want to, I don't want to.

Therapist: It's ok Ana. I'm here with you, we will go very slowly but I need you to tell me everything you remember about that moment.

Ana: [Closed her eyes, and put her hands over her ears] If I think about it I can still hear them.

Therapist: Who did you hear Ana?

Ana: I hear my kids, crying and yelling.

Therapist: In that moment you heard Diana and Javier scream and cry because they were afraid. What else do you remember?

Ana: *I looked at my children but I couldn't bear to see the fear on their faces. I looked in their eyes and told them everything was going to be alright.*

Therapist: You looked at them in their eyes and told them everything was going to be ok to calm them down.

Ana: *Yes, but I didn't believe that. I thought- al fin llego el momento (the moment has finally come).*

Therapist: Did you think you would die at this moment?

Ana: *Yes, I always thought one day he would kill me. And after seeing what he was capable of maybe there was a part of me that wanted it.*

Therapist: We will come back to that in a moment. But first let's go back to that moment when you thought "the moment has finally come."

Ana: *I knew he was going to pull the trigger so I closed my eyes. I could still hear them crying and then I heard a click.*

Therapist: You heard a click?

Ana: *Yes but nothing happened. The gun was empty.*

Ana: *I was afraid to open my eyes I was confused. I kept my eyes closed for a while until my children hugged me. I pulled them close to me and kissed them over and over again, they were both crying quietly. I thanked God for letting us live another night and couldn't wait to get them in the house away from Jose.*

Therapist: Where was Jose?

Ana: For a moment I forgot he was there, I was just happy to have my kids alive and to be alive. I looked around for Jose and found him leaning against a tree a distance away. He was laughing hysterically; he looked like a crazy person. When he realized we were staring at him he yelled for us to go back in the house. He stayed outside by the tree drinking from his bottle of Guaro. I held them close to me and ran back to the house as quickly as I could because I didn't want him to change his mind.

Therapist: Do you remember what you felt that night after it happened? After he held a gun to Diana's head, after he hit Javier with the gun, and after he put the gun to your head and pretended he was going to kill you?

Ana: It was confusing. Who does something like that? Put their family through so much pain and fear.

Therapist: What about today, what do you think about what he did and what you went through?

Ana: He think he is truly crazy. He knew the gun was empty, he knew exactly what he was doing he wanted to terrorize us, to make us even more afraid of him. It makes me angry.

Therapist: Angry?

Ana: Yes angry. He was mad at me for leaving him and having a child with someone else but why did he have to involve them. They didn't do anything to him. They didn't deserve it. Dianita didn't deserve it, she was just a kid [Ana spoke to tears in her eyes].

Therapist: No one deserves what he did to you and your children. Do you remember what it was like when you walked back in the house, how did you feel then?

Ana: I was tired. I felt like... sin animo (without spirit).

Therapist: Tell me more about that, what do you mean "sin animo"?

Ana: Well we were all dirty, my legs were covered in grass, Javier had dried blood on his face, and Diana's hair was all tangled but I didn't care. I didn't make them clean up. We all got into Javier's bed and held each other. We didn't talk about what happened, I just wanted that nightmare to be over. Eventually they fell asleep but I didn't sleep that night, I just kept waiting for Jose to come back in the house but he never did. And the next day he just pretended nothing had happened like he always did.

Therapist: You and your children went through a horrific ordeal and it sounds like you were all both physically and emotionally drained.

Ana: Yes, but there was also something born inside me. I'm not sure if it was that night or in the following days but I decided I was not going to stay and let myself or my kids be his victims. I promised myself that was the last time I would let him hurt my kids. I didn't know how or when but I knew we had to leave him. Unlike the last time I left him, things were more complicated now. Jose did not spend much time away from home, there were entire weeks where he would stay home drinking rather than going to work. I also knew he would look for me and would not give up until he found me. I thought about how to escape and where we would go all the time and that helped me tolerate Jose's face.

Therapist: It sounds like what you went through as terrible as it was, it also sparked a desire to leave and seek a safe life for all 3 of you.

Ana: Si (yes)

Therapist: Ana If you don't mind I would like to go back to something you said earlier. You mentioned that when Jose put the gun to your head there was a part of you that wanted to die, tell me more about that?

Ana: Not because of everything he put ME through but because I didn't want to live a life of watching him hurt my kids. I didn't want to feel like that again?

Therapist: What didn't you want to feel what again?

Ana: That feeling, the feeling of not being able to protect Diana and Javier. Of having to watch and not being able to do anything as he hurt them.

Therapist: you didn't want to feel helpless?

Ana: Exactly

Therapist: Have you ever felt like that again? Have you ever felt like you didn't want to live?

Ana: No not at all. I promised them that night that I would protect them no matter what. They need me and I will never give up. Everything I have done since and will continue to do is so that I can ensure they will be safe.

Therapist: Sometimes when someone has been through a lot they can feel overwhelmed, helpless, and even have thoughts about wanting to end their life, or wishing that they were dead. If these thoughts ever come back it is important that you talk to someone about them. Here in the US there are hotlines you can call and talk to someone confidentially, or you can call 911 or go to your local emergency room.

Ana: I would never do that to my kids. Besides no matter how mad at God I may have gotten I know that doing that is a sin and that it is not my right to decide when I or anyone else lives or dies.

Therapist: I believe you Ana, I know how important Diana and Javier are to you, as well as, how important your faith is to you--these are the things that keep you alive and fighting for a better future. But I believe there is nothing wrong with having information at your disposal and being prepared. If it's ok with you I will give you some phone numbers before you leave.

Ana: Bueno (ok)

Therapist: Ana, today you discussed in depth one of the most traumatic things that have happened to you. How are you feeling right now?

Ana: I don't know. I feel tired, like we have been in here for hours. I am tired of talking. I just want to... eat! I'm hungry. I also want to go home and video chat with Diana and Javier and tell them how much I love them.

Therapist: It is not unusual for the body to feel tired and depleted after such an intense session due to the adrenaline and all the physical and emotional memories we examined. It is important that you take care of yourself. That mean making sure you eat and get some rest. Like we've talked about before, it is not uncommon for difficult feelings to come up after our meetings but remember these are temporary and will pass with time.

Session 7 Ana: I just couldn't take it anymore. I didn't sleep much. When Jose wasn't home I didn't sleep well because I was worried about when he would get home and what mood he was going to be in; any little noise would wake me. When he was home, it was even worse because I had to stay up to make sure nothing happened to my kids. I knew we had to go but first I had to figure out where. No matter where I went in El Salvador, there was a risk he would find me. One day I decided to leave El Salvador. Two of my brothers, Hector and German, had left El Salvador many years before to work in America. They had paid a coyote (smuggler) to help them cross the border and had been living and working in New Jersey since. From what I had heard it is a really big country where people could get lost, that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to get lost so he would never find me.

Therapist: What happened after you decided to leave?

Ana: After I made the decision, I couldn't just go. I had to wait for the right moment, I had to it right because I knew I would only have one chance.

Therapist: What was that period of waiting like for you?

Ana: After I knew I would leave things got better and worse at the same time. Better because my faith came back, I finally had something to look forward to; I saw light down my path. But at the same time worse because every day my hate for Jose grew stronger until I couldn't even tolerate the sound of him breathing.

Therapist: Walk me through how you prepared?

Ana: When I had the chance to call Rosario I asked her to contact the coyote and told her I would call her with more details when I was able to get away from Jose. I spent the next couple of months putting aside some of the money Jose gave me for food and a couple of times I even took money from his wallet when he was passed out drunk. He never noticed because he always assumed he had spent it while drunk.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: As much as I wanted to go. I was scared. Scared of what would happen if Jose found out about my plan before I was able to get away. I was afraid he would kill us. I still am, I think if he found me now after all these years he would kill me. But if I stayed he would kill me for sure and possibly my children. I couldn't risk their lives.

Therapist: Tell me about the day you left?

Ana: Jose was passed out on the couch snoring loudly. He was a heavy sleeper when drunk and since he had gotten home late I knew he wasn't going to move from that couch for many hours. I woke up the children and told them we were going on a trip, I also told them we were going to play a game and whoever was the quietest would win a price. I think Javier knew what was

happening but he went along with the game for his sister. We left the house around 7:00am, it was a Wednesday and I would normally take Javier to school at that time so if Jose woke up he wouldn't notice anything was going on at least for a little while. But I worried because the first bus left at 9:00am and sometimes it ran late.

Therapist: what was that wait like for you?

Ana: As I waited at the bus station time moved so slowly. I remember sitting on a bench watching the seconds go by on the old clock they had. It seemed like we waited an eternity. I prayed the entire time, prayed that Jose would not wake up and notice we were gone. Dios me escucho (God listened).

Therapist: Where did you go?

Ana: We took the bus to San Salvador but I knew I couldn't stay there. Everyone knew each other in that town and I was sure someone was going to tell Jose we took the bus to San Salvador when he went looking for us. So I went back to Tia Mela's house. Jose never knew that is where I hid when I first left him so I was pretty sure he would not find us there. I was finally able to calm down when we got on the second bus. No one knew us in San Salvador and the bus station was bigger and busier it was unlikely that Jose would find out where we went from there.

Therapist: What happened then?

Ana: The next couple of months are a blur, they went by fast as I was trying to arrange how to leave the country and what would happen to my children. One of the hardest decisions I had to make was when I decided to leave them behind. It was the last thing I wanted to do but I knew that kind of trip would not be easy for them, and to be honest I also could not afford to bring them at that time. My plan was to come first and then send for them, like so many of our friends

and neighbors had done. Tia Mela was too old to take care of them so I had to find other arrangements for them. Thankfully Cecilia my sister-in law offered to help me.

Therapist: Tell me what you remember from the day you left El Salvador?

Ana: I remember the day I left like it was yesterday, when I close my eyes I can still remember the last time I saw Javier and Diana; she was wearing a pink dress I had sown for her. They cried as they hugged me, and I tried very hard to keep a smile on my face. I reassured them that I would send for them soon as I could and spoke excitedly about their new life living with Cecilia and their cousins. But deep down it hurt so much to say goodbye to them; I had never been apart from them before and now I didn't know how long it would be before I would see them again.

Therapist: I imagine saying goodbye must have been one of the hardest things you've had to do.

Ana: It was but it was necessary.

Therapist: How did you feel about the trip that you were about to embark on?

Ana: I was scared and excited at the same time. It was like my life was starting over. But I had no idea what to expect. I knew it was going to be a long and rough trip but I had no idea how hard it really would be.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: There were 10 of us who left together from El Salvador. I didn't know anyone I was traveling with. We picked up more people along the way in Guatemala and Mexico; at one point there were 22 of us traveling together. At first everyone stayed with their people; you know from the same area or country. It was hard to trust anyone. You quickly learned to watch your things very carefully. We slept holding on to our bags tightly to make sure no one stole our things, especially the coyotes. I saw them go into people's bags and take stuff, mostly food, water, etc. when they thought no one was looking.

Therapist: How long was the trip?

Ana: I'm not sure, weeks. We spent a lot of time traveling in trucks and most of the time there were too many of us cramped in each truck with little room to move around.

Therapist: Tell me all that you remember about it.

Ana: One of the most difficult parts for me was when we crossed from Guatemala to Mexico through the Suchiate river. We crossed in the middle of the night on a small boat, well more like large rubber tires with strips of wood on top held together by rope. It had rained for a few days before our crossing and the water was rough. I don't know how to swim and I had never been on a boat before. The boat or whatever it was moved around so much I was afraid I was going to fall off, if I had I am sure I would have drowned. I sat on the wood strips with my legs towards my chest and with my hands to my side holding the wood so tightly I got a few splinters.

Therapist: What else do you remember about that night?

Ana: I was cold. Water constantly splashed on me and my clothes were completely wet. It wasn't really cold but the night breeze made my wet clothes stick to me. Plus I think the fact that I was so scared made me shiver and feel cold. I remember the water.

Therapist: What do you remember about the water?

Ana: The water was so loud. It sounded angry. After we crossed we stayed in a house near the water. It was hard for me to sleep that night because when I closed my eyes all I could hear was the river.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: We spent the majority of the journey in Mexico, a lot of that time was spent waiting to move. In Mexico we usually traveled at night. They said Mexico was stricter, they don't really like Central Americans passing through; they told us if they found us they would send us back.

Most days we were given 1 meal, and if you had money you could buy additional food. Medicine was hard to come by and expensive, if you got sick you could not continue to the next stop. They didn't want anyone slowing us down; they left behind some elderly people, as well as, a pregnant woman from Guatemala. We spent so many hours on the road with nothing to do except talk to each other. That's how we got to know each other. Everyone had a story, a reason to leave their country, but everyone was leaving loved ones behind in search of something better. Some people would talk about their dreams, fantasies of what their lives would be like in the US, others only talked about what they were leaving behind whether it was their mother, or their wife, or a new baby. I didn't really talk much, but when I did it was always about my children.

Therapist: Was there anyone you bonded with?

Ana: I grew to like a few of them, especially Manuel. Manuel was a 57-year-old man from El Salvador; he reminded me of my father or at least what I imagined he would have been like if he were still alive. By the time we got to Tijuana there were only 15 of us. We stayed in an old and decrepit home for almost a week because "la migra" had been conducting a lot of raids and the coyotes did not think it was a good time to cross the desert. There was even talk of abandoning the trip all together which worried me, I was so close I could not imagine turning around and going back home. Finally, the night we had all been waiting for finally came; they woke us up in the middle of the night and hurried us back into the truck. We were dropped off at the desert each with 2 large bottles of water, some snacks, and 2 leaders who would help us cross. I don't like to think about the crossing.

Therapist: I know this is hard but you are doing great. Tell me about what it was like when you first got to the desert.

Ana: I remember being surprised. They warn you about how hot it gets but no one told me how cold it would be at night. The first night we walked for about 2 hours and then we were told to find a place to rest until dawn. I remember hearing noises I had never heard before, I guess they were the night noises of the desert. I was too excited and could not fall asleep that night, something I really regretted the next day.

Therapist: Tell me about your first day crossing the desert.

Ana: When the sun came up the temperature quickly changed; we walked under the sun all day stopping every couple of hours to rest and drink water. They warned us to conserve our water because we still had a long way to go. You don't know what is like until you are there, you have no idea how much you are going to lose.

Therapist: Help me understand. Tell me what is like for you.

Ana: It is hard to walk because the sand makes you feel like you are sinking with every step you take. The sun is on top of you the whole time and it is just so hot there is no refuge from that. But the worse part was the sand. The wind would pick up the sand and smack you in your face with it. It would get on everything, I had sand everywhere! Actually, the worst part was that no matter how much we walked it looked like we weren't going anywhere, everything looked the same out there. Just sand, and sun, and more sand and more sun.

Therapist: It sounds like the conditions out in the desert were difficult. Was there anything else that you remember about your crossing that was difficult, maybe something you lost out there?

Ana: [Quietly looked at the floor and then covered her face with her hands]

Therapist: Take your time.

Ana: Remember Manuel, the man I told you reminded me of my father. He was with me when we got to the desert. He was so afraid of running out of water that he went a long time without

drinking, I don't really know how long maybe the whole time were in the desert. I didn't notice until it was too late.

Therapist: What happened to Manuel?

Ana: He got really sick.

Therapist: Do you remember what condition he was in? What did he look like?

Ana: he could barely keep up with the group, he fell down multiple times. We all took turns helping him walk until we got to our resting place for the night. We tried to help him drink water but he had trouble swallowing and would spit it out.

He looked so different that day, he looked old and tired. His skin looked hard like leather

Therapist: Go on

Ana: That night the leaders told us he was too sick to continue and that it would be better for the group if we left him there; we had left people behind before but this was different, we were in the middle of the desert. They assured me they would go back for him but we all knew that wasn't true. Manuel would not make it one more day out there and they would never go back for him.

Therapist: What was it like for you to leave Manuel behind?

Ana: He knew he was dying. When I said goodbye to him he squeezed my hand and kissed me on my forehead. His lips felt hard and dry against my sweat covered forehead. He told me to keep walking and not look back; I did as he asked and did not look back as I walked away with the rest of the group. Tears covered my face and I couldn't help but think about his family. Would his wife and kids ever find out what happened to him?

Therapist: What a terrible hard choice to make. What are you feeling right now as you talk about it?

Ana: [Ana had difficulty getting words out] bad, it feels bad.

Therapist: I know it feels bad to talk about it but help me understand what you are feeling a little better.

Ana: I hate that I left him.

Therapist: You feel guilty?

Ana: Yes, How could I have done that? He was so kind to me.

Therapist: Are you feeling guilty now, like you felt that day?

Ana: I have always felt guilty about it. From the moment I walked away all I thought about was Manuel. I wanted to go back for him but I didn't; I knew I would never survive out there on my own so I kept walking. [Ana starts crying loudly].

Therapist: You were afraid that going back for him meant dying?

Ana: I was afraid of dying. I chose to save myself but that meant letting him die alone in the desert.

Therapist: You feel guilty for choosing to give yourself the best chance at surviving. You were faced with two very difficult choices, one of which almost certainly meant putting your life at risk with very little likelihood that it would have actually saved Manuel's life. I have a sense that Manuel understood this and did not fault you for leaving.

Ana: I think he understood and wanted me to leave. But would his family understand that?

Therapist: His family?

Ana: I have thought about trying to find them to tell them what happened and give them some peace. But how could I do that? What am I supposed to tell them, Manuel was very kind to me and I left him to die in the desert?

Therapist: We will come back to this a little later if that's ok with you?

Ana: Ok

Therapist: What happened after you left Manuel?

Ana: We kept walking. We walked and walked. I remember how happy I was when the Coyotes told us we there and instructed us to hide behind some dry bushes until midnight. They said three cars would come for us, they would signal us by flashing their lights. Then they left.

Therapist: Go on

Ana: At around 10pm we heard cars coming, we all looked at each other in confusion hoping they were simply early. But it wasn't them, the cars got closer and closer and their lights never flickered. Finally, a bunch of men in dark uniforms got out of the cars and started walking around. No one moved at first but then someone yelled la migra (ICE) and everyone started running in different directions.

Therapist: Do you remember what you did in that moment?

Ana: I froze, I couldn't move at first, I just watched how these men grabbed people and threw them on the ground and I realized there was nowhere to run. I didn't even bother trying. Since I wasn't trying to run they didn't throw me on the ground but I was arrested that night and taken to a detention center in Arizona.

Therapist: Tell me about your time in the detention center.

Ana: It was like being in jail, we were treated like criminals. They yelled at us a lot. I was scared, I had no idea what to expect; I didn't know how long I would be there or what would happen to me. Finally, 3 days after being there I was given the chance to make a phone call. I called my brother and told him what happened. He was concerned about me but there wasn't much he could do, he told me New Jersey was very far away from Arizona and reminded me that he was undocumented and would be deported as well if they found out where he lived.

Therapist: How did you feel after speaking to your brother?

Ana: I thought I would feel better after speaking to him but I didn't, I felt worse, I felt completely alone. And I was also scared, I didn't want anyone to find my brothers because of me.

Therapist: What happened after that?

Ana: From speaking to some of the other women there I quickly realized that almost everyone gets deported back to their country but it wasn't something that happened quickly. Some of the women there had been there for months. I was afraid that was going to happen to me but then I met Olga, a woman from Honduras. She told me she was applying for asylum and encouraged me to do the same. She explained that because of my experience with my husband and his ties to the national police in El Salvador I may qualify for asylum.

Therapist: Do you remember what you thought about that then?

Ana: I didn't really understand what that even meant but I was willing to try anything. I didn't want to be sent back and have Jose find me again. At my hearing I told the judge I would like to be considered for asylum; I was told I needed to file an application and needed to get a lawyer. Everything moved much faster after that and I was eventually released to the care of my cousin in New Jersey. I was at the detention center for almost three months.

Therapist: How did you feel about being released?

Ana: I was happy and grateful. I owe my new life here to Olga. I was also so excited to speak to my children, I didn't talk to them the whole time I was in the detention center.

Therapist: I think this is a good place to stop for today but before we do I want to go back to Manuel. How do you feel right now about having shared that with me?

Ana: Like I told you earlier I feel bad, I probably will always feel guilty about it. I think part of it is that he reminded me of my father, he was like the father I wished I had. It just isn't fair that he had to die like that.

Therapist: Sometimes when someone reminds us of someone from our past

Ana: I wish there was more that I could have done. I wish that I could have spared his family the pain I have carried with me.

Therapist: You mentioned that part of what you feel guilty about is what his family would think if you reached out to them.

Ana: I worry they would blame me for leaving him, but even worse that they would hate me for waiting so long to tell them what happened?

Therapist: What do you mean?

Ana: I know what that pain is like, to have your father disappear and never find out what really happened to him.

Therapist: If someone could tell you would you still want to know what happened to him?

Ana: Of course.

Therapist: You know you can always try to find them and tell them. It doesn't have to be today or tomorrow but whenever you are ready. I believe that just like you, they would also like to know what happened with him regardless of how long it has been.

Ana: Maybe one day I will have the courage to.

Session 8

Therapist: Tell me about your life after being released from the detention center.

Ana: I was released from the detention center in Arizona and traveled directly to New Jersey. I arrived in Newark Airport around 9pm. I was picked up from the airport by my cousin who drove me to my brothers' apartment.

Therapist: Tell me how you adjusted to living in NJ?

Ana: My brothers and I live in a basement apartment in Union City and at first it was a big change that took some time to get used; even after all this time I don't think I'm fully accustomed to all the noise and all the people. At first I was overwhelmed by how much my life changed in one day. When I was in the detention center I felt like I was in jail. I was there for about 3 months and before that I had been traveling through Central America for about 3 weeks so it had been a long time since I had slept in a place where I felt safe. It was nice to be free but it was also weird.

Therapist: Tell me more about that, what was weird?

Ana: For almost four months I had followed routines set by other people; I had been told when and where to sleep, when and what to eat every day and all of a sudden that changed. I know it sounds strange, but being released from the detention center as good as it was, also made me feel more nervous and worried. I was finally in the United States, an unknown place for me; I didn't know many people and did not speak the language. Getting to this country was my goal for so long, but I never really thought about what it would be like to be here. I was finally about to stop worrying about hiding, or about surviving and making it to the next day. I started worrying about what the rest of my life would look like. I worried about getting a job and saving up so I could bring my kids here. I worried about my case and how to find a lawyer

Therapist: How did you start sorting those things out?

Ana: Thankfully my brothers helped me get a job at a nearby restaurant. I started working there as a waitress a week after I arrived in Union City. I also joined a Christian church that is only a couple of blocks from our apartment. The majority of people I know I have met either at work or through the church. Eventually as I got to know people and they found out I had some experience sewing they started asking me to do alterations for them. When I'm not at the restaurant, I am

home sitting in front of the sewing machine. Doing alterations has really helped me out financially, it also helps me forget.

Therapist: Forget?

Ana: When I am sewing, I concentrate in that piece of fabric or clothing and nothing else. I focus on it and I can stop thinking about the past; sewing distracts me.

Therapist: I see, it serves as a distraction.

Ana: I know many friendly people but I wouldn't say any of them are my close friends. It's hard to make friends, people always want to know where you are from and about your life before coming here; I don't feel comfortable talking about that stuff. The only exception is Olga; I trust her because she has helped me so much. I have kept in touch with Olga since we met at the detention center. She lives in New York with her sister and a cousin. She helped me find a lawyer who helped me with my asylum case for free.

Therapist: Tell me about your asylum process.

Ana: It's all a blur. So many things about that process were hard, for example not knowing what the outcome would be, but what was the most difficult thing was having to relive and retell my story to different people multiple times.

Therapist: Tell me more about that

Ana: I hated it. Each time I had to talk about what Jose did to me, I felt like whatever progress I had made in forgetting my past just evaporated. When I first got here I was doing ok, I kept busy and focused on saving money to send back home to my kids. I just wanted to forget about my life in El Salvador so badly. Plus I had never really talk about it with anyone, no one knew the extent of how bad it had been, not even my sister Rosario.

Therapist: What was that like for you, telling people what happened to you?

Ana: I didn't want to do it. I knew I had to otherwise I wasn't going to be able to stay here but it was hard. When I started talking about it I began to feel trapped in my own body because I could not control myself. I couldn't control the shaking, the sweating, the nightmares, and the constant fear. I hate Jose for that, he took a very valuable thing away from me; he took away my peace.

Therapist: Do you remember the first time you had to talk about your story?

Ana: Yes

Therapist: Tell me about that, who did you talk to, what was that like for you?

Ana: The first time I really had to talk about it was for an intake for the lawyer. I remember she had a list of questions she went through and I had to answer whether or not I had ever been through it and if the answer was yes I had to explain it. I tried to tell that lady as much as I could, but it was hard. I cried most of that meeting and I think she felt bad because there were certain things she didn't force me to talk about. She was nice but I was so embarrassed, I kept wondering what she thought of me the whole time I was with her; I couldn't even look at her face. But the hardest thing was working with the social worker who helped write the affidavit for my case. I couldn't do it all at once. We met like 3 times; it was probably the hardest month for me.

Therapist: Go on.

Ana: I had nightmares almost every night. The last day we met was the worst.

Therapist: Tell me about the day when you when you finished your affidavit.

Ana: I did not show up to the previous appointment, I just couldn't leave the house I was too shaky, my heart was beating too fast and I was having a hard time breathing. So for the last appointment I asked Olga to go with me. Knowing someone was going to come with me pushed me to leave my house. I had a headache the whole day. I remember it was a sunny day, the sun

was so bright which made it hard to keep my eyes open because the light made the headache worse. When she read the affidavit out loud I could see it all like a movie playing in my head. It didn't feel real. It was like it had all happened to someone else. I was in a fog when I left the office, I am not sure how I got home. Olga later told me she took me home and that I didn't talk the whole way home; she was worried about me but couldn't stay with me. That day I felt like everything around me was happening in slow motion, the volume of things was low, like the volume of people's voices was low, like they were very far away and I could barely hear them. I think I tried to cook that day but I don't know what happened. I guess I put a pot of water to boil and I must have forgotten about it. Maybe I fell asleep. I don't really remember. But my brother came home later and told me the stove was on and the pot had burned. I remember the pot was black. I remember looking at the pot and thinking I was just like that pot, damaged and useless. I went to bed early that day but I couldn't sleep. It took me a few days to shake that fog, but eventually it got better. Until I had to go to court.

Therapist: Tell me about what the court process was like for you.

Ana: The court process took a long time and it was terrifying. I was scared that they would ask me to retell my whole story in court, the last hearing was the most stressful one.

Therapist: Walk me through that day.

Ana: I was a mess. I couldn't sleep for days before that. All I did was pace around all night. I didn't want to go but I also wanted to get it over with. It was June 24. I remember no one could come with me to court that day, my brothers had to work and Olga had to watch her nieces who were on vacation from school.

Therapist: How did you feel leading up to it?

Ana: I was so afraid that they would deny my request and that I would have to go back home. I didn't really have a plan in case that happened but I just knew I could never go back to El Salvador. I remember my lawyer telling me even if things didn't go well she wasn't giving up and would find another way. But I felt like that was it, it felt like judgment day, I was either going to be saved or not.

Therapist: What was it like going in front of the judge?

Ana: I kept trying to remember everything my lawyer had told me beforehand. She told me the most important thing was for me to stay in the room and not disconnect. She gave me a tip, she told me that if I felt like it was too painful and wanted to run away I should dig my nails into my palm. She told me to answer all questions in as much detail as I could remember. I was so scared to tell a man what happened to me, I was afraid he wouldn't believe me, or worse I was afraid he was going to side with Jose. Jose often told me it was my fault he got angry, what if the judge agreed with him and thought it was all my fault? That day I remember waiting in that cold hallway for hours before it was my turn. I met the interpreter a few minutes before I had to go in; she was an older lady, she was serious and professional but I could tell she was nice and she wanted to help me. The actual process was not as bad as I imagined, the judge did not ask as much as I thought. The worst part was all the waiting, specially having to wait for a decision. When he read the decision I didn't understand what was happening. I understood some English but he spoke rapidly and used words I had never heard before, however, I remember seeing the smile come across my lawyer's face and she reached over and squeezed my hand, that's when I knew my life was about to change. I was granted asylum after two long years of waiting. It has been about one year since that happened but it still feels like yesterday sometimes.

Therapist: What has your life been like since that day?

Ana: Things have moved even slower since that happened but I can't complain. I feel relieved because I can work here legally now and I have petition to bring my children. I wish they were here with me already but my lawyer tells me I should get approval any day now and they will be able to come soon. I cannot wait to see them again.

Therapist: What has it been like for you to be away from your children all this time?

Ana: I miss them so much; there isn't a moment that I don't think about them. Every birthday and holiday that passes and they are not with me I wonder if I did the right thing in leaving them. I have to remind myself that our separation is temporary. Aside from missing them it has also been difficult to worry about them and not be able to be there if or when something happens. For example, last August Dianita broke her arm while playing with some friends in the playground. It was so hard to hear about it but not be there to comfort her, to help her get dressed and help her do all the things she needed help with while she was in that cast. I have also grown increasingly worried about Javier. He is a boy and he is getting older. Gangs in El Salvador are very active and are part of everyday life. I talk to him, warn him about them all the time. I know he is not interested, he is into sports and really enjoys playing soccer, but I also know that sometimes that doesn't really matter. If they want you to join, it doesn't matter whether you want to or not, they will threaten your family until you give in.

Therapist: It must be very scary to worry about their safety.

Ana: I pray every day to keep safe just for a couple of months more. My lawyer tells me I should get approval to bring them soon, maybe just a few more months. She has been an angel sent from above. She has been with me every step of the way; I owe her my life.

Therapist: It sounds like you are very fond and grateful to your attorney for helping you through this.

Ana: Of course, not only did she help me get asylum and is helping me reunite with my children, but she has helped me in so many other ways also. She began telling me about therapy and counseling from the beginning but I didn't think I needed it, I'm not crazy, if anyone is crazy it is Jose. But I guess she finally convinced me.

Therapist: How did she convince you?

Ana: It was something she said to me that made me think about it differently. She told me that I have done everything in my power to protect them and give them a better life but she told me that they also deserve a mother who is happy and able to enjoy life with them and not just someone who is in the background watching life go by. Being away from Javier and Diana all this time has been difficult. I call them and see them through video almost every day. I have watched them grow through a screen which makes me very sad. I feel like my life, well not mine but our life has been on pause for the past 3 years. I cannot wait until the day my children can come and join me. I want to hold them and tell them in person how much I love them. I want to be a better person for them. I don't want Jose to take anything else away from us. That is why I am here, to take control back, to write my own story and pave my own path.

Therapist: That is exactly the goal of this process. It sounds like the immigration process and being presented with all of your trauma was very overwhelming, how was this therapy process any different or similar from that experience?

Ana: This was definitely harder; you didn't let me get away with glossing over things or run away when I didn't want to talk about something. But it was also easier in a way. Before I didn't know what was happening to me or why these things like the nightmares were happening. In this therapy you explained everything and helped me understand that I was not going crazy. I'm not going to lie, it is still difficult to talk about what I have been through, but in the last few months I

have realized that as bad as some parts of my life have been there have some good parts as well, mainly my children, and those are the parts I want to focus on.

Therapist: You have been strong and courageous throughout this therapy. I want to thank you for trusting me and the process even when it got hard. Together we have been able to complete your autobiographical narrative up to this point but remember that this is a work in progress and that you will continue to add to that narrative as you go through life.

Ana: I guess I am still living and writing the story of my life and maybe the next half will be better, happier.

Therapist: Are you ready to go over your entire narrative one final time?

Ana: Ok.

Therapist: After we go over it today I will ask you to sign it and date it. This copy is for you to keep, along with a picture of the lifeline we created back the beginning of this process. After that we will review your progress and your thoughts on the treatment.