

# A Refugee's Story

Four pairs of young eyes stared at their mother. Noelia fixed her own gaze on them; she felt the weight of their need and their blind confidence that she would protect them and provide for them.

Since rebels killed her husband a couple years before, Noelia had been forced to forge her own path, forfeit her own dreams, and do whatever was necessary to ensure



their survival. Jules, her youngest at almost one year, was a daily reminder of how much it cost just to put food on the table.

She loved her baby boy, but he would never have been born were it not for the uniformed men on the way to the food centre. Every week, she had to pass through their checkpoint and “pay the price” just so she could keep the cassava and a few vegetables on the table. She was not the only one, but she found no comfort in the company of other people’s misery.

Seated in the front of an 18-wheeler, Noelia and her children pretended to be the family of the trucker who supplemented his meager salary by smuggling passengers across borders. After years of assault and near starvation, Noelia felt a glimmer of hope as they neared the gates of the refugee camp. She was about to join thousands upon thousands of others walking, day after day, in her shoes.

Noelia had no idea that a seven-year wait yawned ahead before she would find real safety for herself and the little ones. Even proving that she merited refugee status to the embassy official required that she strip down (in front of her children) to show the scars of her abuse. The humiliation never seemed to end but finally, after five years in a Ugandan refugee camp, Noelia was sponsored to come to Canada.

Noelia left her brood of four behind in the care of the camp community, naively believing that they would follow shortly after her. If she had known that it would take two more years for her children to join her, she never would have left without them.

Wading through dozens of forms, fighting to get her family back, and tackling a new language added stress and anxiety to her mind, already battered by the baggage of past brutality.



Now, the five of them were together in Canada, dependant on Ontario Works, living out of two bedrooms, and adapting to a new language and life. The ghosts of dead relatives and a lost son would always haunt Noelia, but new friends and support systems fanned the fading glimmer of hope into a flame that the future would be brighter.

*\*This story is typical, but not the true story of a specific person. The details have been gathered from the stories of many refugees from many places.*