



AURY & FABRICIANO

“ This isn't an experiment to see if it might work; it truly works.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.

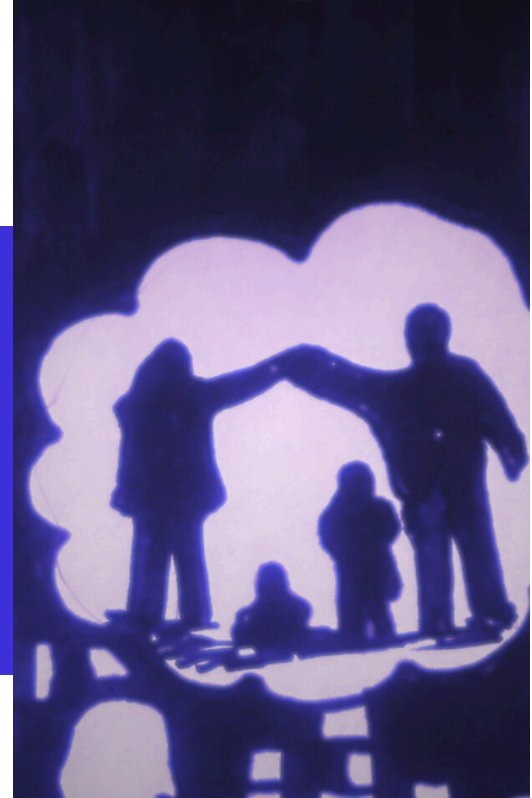
ARRIVAL

My husband [Fabriciano] was shot in Venezuela because of our religion, and we had to flee. In Ecuador, he had a terrible accident, falling from a four-meter ladder and breaking his arm in two places. We faced many challenges, including my inability to work because I had to take care of our young daughter and manage our household needs.

[Fabriciano] was always working, always worried about problems, about what we were going to eat, how we were going to provide for the children, their schooling. Everything was a constant worry; I [Aury] couldn't even sleep. I practically had insomnia because I couldn't sleep, always worried about life, about the children, making sure nothing happened, constantly anxious.

Despite these difficulties, we held on to the hope of coming here. Many people doubted us, asking how we could travel without passports, without money, with three children.

When you arrive here, you come with so many hard experiences that you've lived through before, and they weigh you down. You arrive wounded, filled with problems and anxieties.



Hosted by:

**LAFAYETTE
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in Spanish by:

BLAISE PASCAL

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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I [Aury] will never forget the moment we arrived on November 22nd, 2020. Everything was very different for me, and it was all new and unfamiliar, like experiencing something for the first time. I constantly felt a sense of loss, thinking I had lost everything I had worked for over the years, practically since I was a child. I worked from a very young age, and I had this mentality that I had lost everything. But that day, when we arrived here, it felt like a miracle from God. It was as if everything I had lost was restored to me.

When we arrived here, those first days were like a dream for us, a dream come true. It was a time of peace, tranquility, without worries, sharing stories with family, being with our family. Those were the first days. We had never experienced such warmth and hospitality. We began to build trust, and we are able to start a life where we built a positive coexistence with the students.

The first days were very cold. Very cold. I [Fabriciano] wasn't used to that kind of extreme weather, with ice and all. But honestly, my experience was a peaceful one. I breathed peace. I felt peace.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

The girls at the university welcomed us with open arms, showing a special warmth, especially since we had been practically alone, just the five of us, without any trustworthy person or family.

Meeting them, they immediately became part of our family. From that moment on, we never felt fear again. The fear disappeared, and we started to trust and love these people who became our family and helped us in every aspect. It was a very safe place, a place where you could breathe peace. There were no strange noises, just the sounds of birds and small animals. *For us, it was the perfect place, full of peace and security. It felt incredible to be there.*

When I [Fabriciano] saw an American football game for the first time. There were a lot of people, but everything was well organized. *People were coming and going happily, and it was so significant to me to see so many people gathered without any problems.*

We gradually started attending church, walking through the streets, and my children spent a lot of time on the football field. We walked three, four, five blocks, and we began to see that it was a very safe area. Very, very safe. Unlike our past experiences, which were marked by insecurity, being in such a secure place felt reassuring.

Our neighbor, named Nancy – an American woman – she was always attentive, greeting us warmly. Another lady across the street would also greet us with affection. When we walked down the sidewalk, people would greet us with kindness. *They knew that refugees were living in that house, people who came with problems and difficulties from their previous lives. And when they saw us, they greeted us with warmth and affection.*



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

The university organized an event to help refugees with clothes, kitchen utensils, and things for the kids. We didn't have anything at that moment; we didn't have much time and hardly any kitchen utensils. That was something very special for me because, as I [Fabriciano] said, we didn't have clothes or anything like that when we arrived. They gave us the opportunity to choose what we needed, and the items weren't damaged or old. That struck me because I thought, in other places, they would give you things that were already worn out. But here, the items still had tags from being bought recently. It was incredible.

For me [Aury], the most important resource was housing—ten months without paying rent, without paying utilities, without paying for water, and without paying for internet. That was the opportunity of a lifetime for us because we could start working and focus on other needs. The support we received with food and all the information about the benefits we could access in the United States as refugees was invaluable. The assistance from the county, the donations—all of it.

We arrived and found furniture that was even better than what I had lost. We found a table full of food. We were very hungry, and seeing that, it felt like our souls returned to our bodies.

One aspect that stood out to me [Fabriciano] was the cultural orientation we received. They explained what we can and cannot do in the United States, which had a significant positive impact on me. Now, having been here for some time, I have witnessed the positive results in my work, my family, and my personal life.

I [Aury] remember one of the girls, her name is Samantha, she took us to the first church we visited here in Easton. She guided us to the church, explaining even how to walk, how to wait for the light to change so we could cross. I remember the little white man, meaning we couldn't. She explained everything to us with such love, respect, trust, and affection, like family.

When we ran out of food, [a professor] was always attentive to us. Every time we needed to go to campus or when we were running low on something, he would call and check in on us, asking if we needed anything, if we needed supplies, if we needed anything at all.

We used the library, which, by the way, I [Fabriciano] frequented a lot. We always visited this place. They gave us books.

What I [Aury] appreciated the most, what was most valuable to me, was all the help that Lafayette [College] provided to my children. My children hadn't experienced that kind of peace, tranquility, harmony, and unconditional love in a long time. For me, that was the most precious thing because the students at the university were always attentive to my children's needs, ensuring they got into school and had everything they needed.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

We took the kids, and we went to the pool with a student who was in the recreation department; her name was Mackenzie. She always took us to eat, took the kids to eat. She also took us to a park. Yes, Mackenzie took us to the park with the kids so they wouldn't be stuck at home, and we went to the park.

There's a park right on campus, and near that park, there's also a soccer field. I [Aury] remember that day was very nice because the kids played a lot at the park. Mackenzie always took us out for recreation and brought lots of toys for the kids. My daughter would go crazy over the dolls she gave her, and the boys loved the toys too. She brought balls and other things to play with.



Image of one of Aury and Fabriciano's children grocery shopping.

They were always attentive to giving them English classes so they could understand. The girls had their educational plan in the afternoons, and the kids would often be nearly asleep in the afternoons because they woke up so early. But when the girls called them, they had to get up and attend the classes. This helped them a lot because, as an adult, it's harder for your brain to absorb information, but since they are young, their brains are more flexible and less occupied, like sponges that absorb everything quickly. The girls made it fun for them, speaking to them in English, and they absorbed all that teaching, education, and help.

Since my children were born, their education has been my primary concern and dream—to see them succeed in their studies. I [Aury] am the happiest now because, thanks to all the help, benefits, and care from the students, my oldest son Fabrizio, who turned fifteen last year, is graduating from high school at fifteen . . . Fabrizio broke all kinds of records. Imagine, in just one year, he surpassed all expectations. For me, it's excellent. He has been the student of the month several times in the whole area. It's been truly wonderful for me. I believe that if it weren't for this opportunity, he might not have been able to achieve it.

Chico, a young man from Africa. There was a moment when he became like a mentor. He would come to the house and take my children to play football on campus. It became a routine. Whenever Chico arrived, it meant it was time to play football. He became a part of my children's lives. They had their own language, so to speak.

[The students] helped us move everything from the old house [on campus] with great care. They arranged transportation to bring everything here. Many of the students used their own vehicles to transport things carefully, ensuring nothing was broken. They even organized cleaning the old house. They helped clean the entire house, organize the kitchen, and put everything in its place again. Their care and dedication were total, which was impactful for me.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

When we arrived on campus, it was during a snowy period, which we were not used to. It was challenging for us because we came from a tropical climate with constant heat, around 35 degrees Celsius. It was a bit difficult, but at the same time, we were eager to explore.

This city is a bit complicated because it's not easy to rent here. When we applied for this house [after transitioning from free campus housing], they required three years of bank statements in the United States. They asked for a lot of documents that we couldn't provide because we had only been in the United States for a few months and had only six months of bank statements. It seemed impossible for us to rent this house because other applicants had better credentials, with ten years in the United States.

That's why I [Aury] say everything here has been a miracle.

I [Aury] remember sending a message through the application process to the owners of this house, explaining that we came recommended by the university. We mentioned that we were an honorable family from Lafayette College. I believe that made an impact because we were accepted and qualified to rent this house.

Our goal was to stay here because moving would mean learning a new system, new streets, and a new place all over again. Staying here was a huge opportunity for us because we were already familiar with the area, we knew the streets, and we were settled. It was wonderful and very important for us.

When we left the refuge [the campus], it was time for us to spread our wings and fly on our own. *We learned a lot; the students taught us, helped us, informed us, and provided us with all the tools we needed. They equipped us with the knowledge to navigate this country.* It's been a challenge, truly, to separate ourselves from them. It's like when a child is weaning off their mother's breast; now we have to learn to walk on our own and navigate by ourselves.



Image of Aury and her children.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

Refugee Action [Lafayette College's ECAR Program] taught us how to integrate into the community. These lessons helped us outside of Refugee Action, and now we enjoy the respect of several families and friends in this community.

We've learned to see ourselves as servers of the community, which has earned us great respect where we live. We hold prayer meetings here, and people from different countries come — Ecuadorians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Colombians, Guatemalans, and Americans. This has integrated us into the community in a way that allows us to serve and connect with others.

We met many brothers and people who helped us in the beginning, offering their vehicles when we needed them. When we walked to church, whether it was sunny, raining, or snowing, many offered to drive us, picking us up from home and bringing us back. Now that we have a vehicle, we do the same for others. This mutual support has created harmony in the community.

Even though we are no longer in the shelter [on campus house], they still keep in touch with us. They call us, send us messages, and keep us informed about all the activities and opportunities available. They are always attentive to our needs, always asking if we need anything and offering their help. They are always there for us.

When I [Aury] was researching about resettlement, I found something that really struck me: it said that out of a million people, only one gets resettled. It's like a miracle, like a small remnant that God saves. But there are still so many thousands of people who need this.

That's why I [Aury] say it's so important to expand, to involve other universities, and create more opportunities. Ensuring that others also participate in this beautiful work would help us reach more people and save more lives.

This isn't an experiment to see if it might work; it truly works. *It gives us evidence that organizations like these can transform lives of families, change perspectives, and create transformation. We are living testimony of how this program worked, how we had to leave one country for another, fleeing persecution and leaving everything behind.*

Our story is real; it's not a fairy tale.

Image of one of Aury, Fabriciano, and family with Lafayette student volunteers.

