

# Lucy Guerrero Garcia

## El Salvador



**Interviewer:** What is your country of origin and what does it mean to you?

**Lucy:** I was born in El Salvador. El Salvador is a very small country in the center of America. It is a beautiful country and the people in El Salvador have great values and are very strong. They are warriors. We've been through civil wars and earthquakes and we have a lot of bad karma there. And it means 'hope' to me.

**Interviewer:** When did you come to the United States?

**Lucy:** I came to the United States about 26 years ago. A long time ago.

**Interviewer:** Who helped you to come to the United States?

**Lucy:** Well, my father, they are citizens of the United States. They were living in California but I was growing up in El Salvador with my grandparents. So I had the right to live here or to live there. My family in El Salvador is from Greek, Italian, and Spanish descendants.

**Interviewer:** What object tells the story of your life?

**Lucy:** Well, you know, I don't know if I really have one object I have 1,000s maybe. But, something that I always love when I am traveling the world is when I see the blue and white flag from El Salvador. I love and I recognize that and I feel like I belong to it.

**Interviewer:** Would you mind telling me the differences between your country and the U.S.?

**Lucy:** One big difference that I noticed when I came to the United States is here, the kids when they are 16 or 18, they just are very independent and they left the house. El Salvador is totally different. The kids in El Salvador grow up in the home. If they are not married they still can live in the house and we protect the kids and we take care of the kids. It doesn't matter if they are how old I am. If you are not married, you still live in the house. I think it's changing a little bit but this is some of the big things that I noticed with difference. That's the one that most. But I think that has a really good things too because you became independent very earlier so you can fly by yourself. It's a really good thing.

**Interviewer:** What is the story behind your name?

**Lucy:** I have no clue what is the story behind my name but my last name means 'warrior' or *Guerreros*. Traditionally, my family has a lot of politicians and now politicians are always trying to protect the most vulnerable people and always trying to help everybody, trying to serve wherever we are. This is what we do.

**Interviewer:** Do you know the meaning of your name?

**Lucy:** My name is like sunshine. It means 'light' in the Spanish. Maybe I am always in the dark, I don't know [laughs].

**Interviewer:** How do you keep up your family tradition of serving people?

**Lucy:** Yeah, this is a really good question. My family tradition has always been helping everybody. And right now I work as a community health worker with the Salt Lake County. But I realize that I've been doing this my whole life without getting paid. The good thing is, I'm getting paid now.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me what your work entails and includes?

**Lucy:** It is a lot. Let me give you a few examples of my work. Like today, I was visiting one of the senior centers and I was talking to them and listening to their stories. There is so much to hear from them, and to help them, and connecting them to the programs and the resources that we have the Salt Lake County is something that I love. Because some people don't even know that we have resources here. They just don't know that they exist. And it's really good. Like, if I can tell you some experience that I have as a single mother, raising my three children here in Salt Lake City. I never heard about any program at all. I have never used any help, because I didn't know that the help existed. And one of the things that I remember too is that when you come to the United States, you sign an affidavit of support that said that if you ask for any help, then you have to get pay or you can lose your citizenship. And even if I was a lawyer in El Salvador, I was thinking, 'No, no, I'm not going to ask for any help.' But yeah, I didn't know about this program. So I am so happy connecting people to all the resources and the programs that we have here at the Salt Lake County. We have so many programs. Even if your car is broke, we can help you with that. There is help to fix your car, even to go into a clinic, to do so many things, to pantry food, if you have an elderly person in your house we can even send the Meals on Wheels. There is so many programs that we have. I am proud to live in this area because we have so much diversity and we are thriving here. Look at what happening right now and this project, *Faces of Salt Lake County*, is a proof that we have someone listening to us.

**Interviewer:** What is your favorite holiday?

**Lucy:** You are talking to the wrong person, I don't have a favorite holiday, I love all the holidays. I celebrate the Ramadan with my Palestinian friends. I celebrate the Jews, I celebrate the Catholics, I celebrate Christians, I celebrate the Chinese, all different holidays. I don't think I have a preference- If there's a party and food, I will be there!

**Interviewer:** How different are holidays celebrated here and in El Salvador?

**Lucy:** Almost the same gathering. We gather at the table for Christmas dinners here, and the same thing in El Salvador for Christmas time. We celebrate with the family, try to get together big table so we can have a lot of family. We have different traditions from the Catholic church. We have another traditions by *Semana Santa*. *Semana Santa* is the Holy Week during Easter times. We celebrate differently, it's very strong. Like it's not like here, where it's kind of light, there it's a very religious people. They have processions and then a lot of masses everywhere.

But it's not just for Catholics, it's just people that like the traditions still. Like I am not Catholic, but I love the traditions still.

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes for your community?

**Lucy:** That is a really good question. I'm trying and I've been fighting, and I've been trying to protect and try to help to improve the human conditions, not just in the United States but also when I was working in El Salvador and other countries too. We have so many issues, and trying to improve the human conditions of every single human on the earth is not easy. Some people don't want to be helped. They don't want it, they say, 'They don't need help.' And some people they do need help but sometimes the government won't allow us to go and help.

**Interviewer:** How does it make you feel being able to help your community?

**Lucy:** I love that question because it makes me so happy. I love that question because this is what I am. I am so happy when I am helping others it's really good to be able to have that feeling that you help somebody to improve their life. It is an amazing feeling that make you grow, and when you have the integrity, the passion towards to help. You young generation, you are the future of our country. You all are the future. So one day you're going to be in the government, you're going to be the mayor, you're going to be the governor, you are going to be the president. And you are our future and our hope and you are MY hope. You are the hope for the people in my age. And your question, it's very important because when you're helping others, it's so, so wonderful. It's very rewarding. That made me happy to be helping others. I have so much passion to help.

**Interviewer:** What was your childhood like growing up in El Salvador?

**Lucy:** I don't share so many personal things but let me share with you something very personal. When I was a child, I was like five years old, my grandpa, he didn't go to the university, but my grandpa is the one who I learned a lot from. We were a very poor family, We didn't have that much money. Well, my father's side was very rich, but my mother's side, they were professional but we were maybe middle-income family or maybe less than middle-income, but I didn't have that many toys. So I wanted to have toys and play with what other kids had. We didn't have a television or anything. So what happened is that I was crying because I wanted to have something that my cousin had, and was playing with. And my grandpa said to me, 'Sit right there.' So I sit, and he said, 'I wanted to tell you something about Shakespeare.' And I said, 'Shakespeare? I don't know anything about Shakespeare,' I was like five years old when that happened. But I remember this very clearly. He said, 'Do you know what Shakespeare said? I am always happy. Because I don't expect anything from anyone because expecting hurts, hurts so much. So don't expect that he's going to give you the toy because he won't give you that toy, you won't be able to play with that toy.' So I learned when I was a child that I have to fight for what I wanted. But at the same time, I need to understand that was not my toy, it was his. And then I didn't have the money to buy one toy, my grandpa didn't have the money. So I just have to be patient and one day I will have something. I need to work for what I want. That helped me to

grow and to be very independent. In my whole life, I have always been helping instead of getting help. But I need help from you guys now that I am old.

**Interviewer:** When in life have you felt most alone and most connected?

**Lucy:** I have never feel alone. Never feel alone and connected, always connected. Always very connected. Something that I can describe myself as is I can get along with all the cultures and different religions. I respect and love everybody the way they are. That helped me a lot to be connected. Because you're very disconnected if you don't if you don't have the tolerance, the passion, the love, the compassion.

**Interviewer:** What does the 'American Dream' mean to you?

**Lucy:** Well, I never thought that there is an 'American Dream,' really. I was born in America in the center. Maybe you mean the United States- My dream from the United States. Because the thing is that I want you to know, I don't know what they teach you at the school, but America is from the Patagonia, Argentina until Canada- that is the whole America thing. We are not America here, we have the United States. We call Americans ourselves but please when you travel outside you should never say, 'I am an American,' because you're not, you are a United States citizen, you come from the United States. When one day I was in London, and it was some people come in behind me, and the British who was signing the passport say, 'Where you're coming from, ma'am.' And I said, 'I'm coming from the United States.' The people who came behind me, they're were in the same airplane. They said, 'We're coming from America,' and he was very upset. He was very upset. So don't say your America, say the United States. You can call yourself an American, but when you are outside the United States, you say, 'I am coming from the United States,' because America is from Argentina to Canada, so it's big.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned before that you are a single mom raising your kids. How was the experience raising your children all by yourself?

**Lucy:** I don't advise this to anyone. It is not a great job because I was trying to give to my three kids quality time. Quality time is what I gave because didn't have a lot of time. But, the experience that I had is a very hard experience because you have to be working and going to the school. I was going to the University and going to the school and it wasn't easy. But, I was able to do it- So anybody can do it!

**Interviewer:** You are so strong and you didn't give up. How did you do that?

**Lucy:** I just kept at it. I am very spiritual too, so I feel that that keeps me going, my relationship with my Creator. It doesn't matter what is your idea that you have but if you believe that there is someone there who take care of you, that will help you a lot.

**Interviewer:** Was it hard raising your kids by yourself?

**Lucy:** Very hard, but they were very good kids, too. And they still are very good kids. They are really good citizens.

**Interviewer:** Did you have them by the time you immigrated here or was that after?

**Lucy:** Yeah, I have already my kids. I was in the last year of my Law School when they approved my citizenship. It was a long process, it was like 12 years of waiting. When my father turned the papers, we had to wait 20 years. And then I decided at that time that I didn't want to come and live here because I was already working and successful right there. And my kids were growing, it was a very good life. But at the same time, I was thinking that they will have a better future here.

**Interviewer:** Is that why you decided to come?

**Lucy:** It's one of the reasons, yes.

**Interviewer:** How old are your kids right now?

**Lucy:** Oh, very very old. Imagine that I was 19 years old when I had my first baby and he is 40 now- 41 almost.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned earlier how independent kids in the United States are, were your kids like that?

**Lucy:** I told them, 'No way, you cannot leave the house.' [laughter] I was just one of the fighting mothers that wanted to keep our tradition. But the last one didn't listen to me and left when he was like 18 or 19. But, he is very successful- the last one- so I can tell you it's a good thing.

**Interviewer:** If you had the choice to go back to El Salvador, would you?

**Lucy:** I always go back- Twice a year.

**Interviewer:** Would you go back to live there, to move?

**Lucy:** I think so. It's a beautiful country. It's like Hawaii. I don't know if you have been to Hawaii, but El Salvador is a beautiful place. We have all kinds of mountains, lakes, rivers. It's a beautiful place and the people is the best. I don't know about moving, because I have my grandbabies here now. And family is the most important thing in my life. Family values is the most important thing. But I have houses there still. I try to go at least once a year. But I go to other places too. Yeah, I like to travel a lot.

**Interviewer:** What do you like to do when you go back?

**Lucy:** Well, the first thing that I do is I will go and eat all the food I can have. *Pupusa's* and all the traditional food from El Salvador. When you come from other countries you always miss the food, it's the first thing you miss. And then I go and visit the people.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any advice for this group?

**Lucy:** I do. The first thing that I will tell you is never give up. And if someone says to you, 'You can't do that,' because that happened to me, but I was always doing it. I just was just doing it. I



said, 'I have to do it. I have to do it and I have to do it.' And you never give up, you always dream, and dream big, dream to touch the sky. So you can be at the top of the mountain in the air on the earth. And remember, the United States is a country of immigrants. No one was born here except the native people who used to live here. We all are from other countries. So this is our land that God gave us to live at this time. So we need to be the doing the best we can. Never give up. Keep dreaming and keep studying, keep focused. And remember one thing, you are unique and you are irreplaceable!