



Video Story Transcript

Undocumented Journey

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEkWLSNz9WY>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Marsha Wong.

In 1972, I was in the Peace Corps, assigned to the island of Jamaica. I lived in a town discovered by Christopher Columbus and he named the town Discovery Bay. I lived on the top of a cliff, overlooking the Caribbean, in a tiny prefab, concrete house. Most of my neighbors were Jamaican families. The couple that lived right next door to me was named Seymour and Yvonne. Yvonne and I were both 23, but that's pretty much where the similarities ended. Yvonne had had a totally different life than I do. She had dropped out of high school when she was 15, when she gave birth to her first child. And now she had three children with a fourth one on its way. But nevertheless, we quickly became friends.

Yvonne and I would spend most of our time, not all of our time but most of our time, out in the yard by the concrete trough where we would wash our clothes. Now I wasn't quite used to washing my clothes in water that wasn't hot. So, Yvonne, kind of, schooled me in the proper method of washing clothes. And during that time, we would talk about our family and our lives. And Yvonne would tell me about how she regretted not going to high school and hopes and dreams that she had for her family. And she asked me, what was the best thing that she could do for her children? See, she believed that the United States was the answer to everything. The United States was far superior to living a life in a third world country. So, when she asked me what was the best thing she could do for her children, I told her. Since, especially, I was a teacher, the best thing that she could do for her children was to get them an education. And she thought about that as she was pounding her clothes into the concrete trough and trying to wash 'em.

And she said to me, "You know, I have always regretted my decision not to go back to school. But tell me, where is the best place I could get this education for my children?" Well, I had taught in East Orange, New Jersey, which is a town right next to Newark, New Jersey and very, very close to Montclair which was an affluent community. So, I told her being 23, that the best place in the entire United States to get an education was Montclair, New Jersey.

And she told me, "Me goin' to go there one day, you know. Me goin' to go there."

Well, eventually, I married a Jamaican and I moved to Kingston. And in time, we would go up to the north coast and we would visit Yvonne and her family because we had become friends. And during that time, we would reminisce and we would talk about... in fact, she even came to my wedding. But in time, my husband and I had decided to move up to New York, where he was going to do another degree at Columbia. So, over the course of several years, I hadn't seen Yvonne, but every time we had gone back to Jamaica to visit relatives, I would call her. In fact, there were times, not only would I call her, but we would drive up to the north coast to Discovery Bay. And I would go into the community and found out her family was still living there but that she and I, our paths never seemed to cross. So, it had been 14 years till I saw her again. And while I was up on the north coast, I called her, late one evening... really, late. And I said, "Yvonne is this you?"

And she said, "Oh, my gosh, Marsha, me can't believe it's you!" And we proceeded to talk about everything that had happened in the last 14 years.

And she said, "Me got a story to tell ya. Ya won't believe this story." And she proceeded to tell it to me. Apparently, she and Seymour had discussed, over the years, of how they can get their children this incredible opportunity to go to Montclair, New Jersey.

And Seymour and her, she said, "Seymour and me discussed, man. We over it and over it and we thought and we thought and we thought. Until one day, I said, 'Seymour, my children must have this opportunity, you know.' And he said to me, 'Yvonne, there is no way, no way we're going to do it.' But you know what? I come up with a plan and I said, 'Seymour I can go to the United States. Me can go and work as a domestic illegally, you know, but me can do it.'"

And so that was the plan. See, everybody that everyone knew when she got to the United States was illegal. The organization, believe it or not, was an organization that only hired illegal aliens, illegal immigrants. Her friends were all illegal. And she said to me, "You know, in time me get Seymour and him tell me all the time, 'Yvonne, me can't stand it you are away from me.'"

And I said, "Seymour, you don't remember what Marsha Wong told us?"

And him said, "Marsha Wong! Mystic of Marsha Wong!" But in time Seymour brought all five of his children up one at a time. All five of them, you know."

"Well, I live in, out rent, a small, apartment; two rooms and a small, little, little kitchen. And in the kitchen, we have a hot plate and on the hot plate we cooked meals. Well, every morning me wake up, me get the children, we come on the bus, and we go to Montclair, New Jersey because all five of them are in this school in Montclair."

"Believe it or not, I had gotten my mommy and my daddy. They came up illegally, of course. Me got my brother and my sister and their families. I got all of them up in Montclair. Except for Seymour because he has to stay back and work in Jamaica. But while we're riding on a bus one time, the truant officers saw us. And the truant officer said, 'What are you doing man?'"

"And I said to him, 'Me taking my five children to school in Montclair.' "

"He said, 'You can't do that. You can't do that. If you want to go to school here, you must live here. You don't live here. So, if you do live here, you can go to school here.'

"Me have no choice. Me have no choice. Imma call Seymour. I say, 'Seymour, I must move into Montclair.' "

"And he said, "Please Yvonne, come home to me.' "

"And she said, 'You know, Seymour, I can't come home. I told you before, Marsha Wong told us the best place to go for an education is Montclair and that's what we have to do.' "

"So, I rent one room, really and truly, I rent one room. I have a big bed and I have all five children lay horizontally on the bed to go to sleep. Now, I don't sleep at night because I work at night. But all of five children, they wear ragged jeans to school. You know, it's expensive in Montclair. They wear the ragged jeans, they wear sneakers. I can't afford the brands that are in Montclair. I can't. But all five of my children, they know that the best thing that's going to happen them, is they're going to get an education in Montclair, New Jersey. Well, believe it or not. Seymour said, 'Please,' him call the time. 'Please, Yvonne, you must come home darling.'"

"And I say, 'Seymour, Me can't come. This is what we're getting. All the children are going to go to school. Me want you. I've been away from you all these years. My children don't have their daddy. Everybody is suffering. But we're going to have something in the end. It would be foolish if I didn't follow this through.'"

"Well in time, Marsha, you know what happened?"

I said, "What?"

She said, "In time, my oldest graduated from high school and then, Andrea, my second daughter my second daughter. She win a scholarship to Harvard University. Harvard man! You know, she can't accept this scholarship if she is illegal. And I'm thinking what am I going to do? I tell everybody that she win a scholarship. I mean what am I going to do?"

"Well, I tell you at that particular time, President Clinton had an amnesty program. And if you had paid all of your taxes, which I did, or you didn't do anything wrong, and you did everything on the list, man, everything, you could get a green card. So, I told my whole family. I told my family, I told my friends, and I told Seymore. 'I've got to go down to the immigration. Nima... Newark Immigration and Naturalization Service.'"

"And he said, 'Don't go, Yvonne. You can't go! You can't go! Him to deport you. You can't trust the government.' "

"And I said, 'I have no choice. I have no choice, man. What is my choice? My child worked so hard to get into Harvard. So hard.'"

"So I kiss mommy and daddy. I kiss my children. I kiss my brother and his family. I kiss my sister. I kiss all of my friends. And I say goodbye because I don't know if they're going to deport me. Is this a trick? I go down to the Newark Immigration and Naturalization Service. I'm right there and I'm so frightened. Imagine the trepidation I have, Marsha. With so much trepidation, I go in there and I take a deep breath. And you know what? I pass! I get to everything, right? Man, I got everything right. And I get a green card and Andrea can go to Harvard. And she did and all my family, all my family, man, gets a green card.'"

Well, just at that moment you could hear somebody coming in through the door and it must have been Seymour. And Seymour said it was really late at night. He said, "Who ya talkin' on the phone wit?"

"Me tell him, 'Guess, Seymour, guess who's on the phone?'"

He said, "Yvonne, I'm too tired to guess."

"Guess, man. Guess, who's on the phone.

"I don't know."

"Guess."

He said, "I don't know. Marsha Wong?"

"Yes, man. Marsha Wong."

Now regardless of what you think of whether Yvonne did the right thing by entering this country illegally and she did. I know that words are so powerful and it could set someone on a trajectory that can transform their lives. And given what is happening in our country at this particular time with illegal immigration, tell me what you think?