Maria's Tragedy and Triumph

My family consisted of my husband, five children, ages 12, 7, 6, 4 and 2 and myself. We now have one additional child who is my half-sister and the newborn boy of my oldest daughter who is now 16. Let me tell you my story!

We lived in a trailer park with ten other families who also lived in trailers. Our trailer was 15 feet long and 8 feet wide. It had one bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchenette and a little living room that we converted into a bedroom at night. All five of my children slept in the bedroom. They would sleep scrunched up and crossways in a full size bed. There was no room for tossing and turning or rolling over! The bed took up the entire bedroom. **Sometimes I would check in on the kids and find the smallest ones on top of the older ones. It reminded me of a litter of puppies…but the kids were happy and we were together!**

Life was tough, but we were together. Sometimes we had no money for the kid's shoes or jackets. We often didn't have enough money for food. We would go to the Food Pantry at the local churches and also the Food Bank.

This was all we could afford. My husband worked 2 to 4 days a week as a tractor driver. Work and income was inconsistent due to the weather. Seeing that there wasn't enough money for rent, food and utilities, etc. I had to go look for work. I found a job prepping food in a *"lonchera."* It's like a taco truck! I would make the salsa, cut the vegetables, prepare and cook the meat and take orders from the customers. We would travel to the fields and the field workers would buy their snacks and lunch from us. We would travel up and down the valley during the day, five days a week. At night, when there were events such as dances, we would wait outside the hall for customers to come by to and from the event. A typical day would start at 6 am. and finish at 1 am. the next morning. These circumstances made it very difficult to be a mom and wife. There was no time for chores, homework or even spending time with my family. My husband and I began to argue over my absence. He even offered to find additional work. He began to go through piles of garbage looking for scrap metal. Eventually, the word got out that if you needed your yard or garage cleaned out, my husband was the man to call. We as a family began to go to all the jobs that were on the weekends or in the evenings. **The whole family worked. We were now able to afford shoes, clothing and even once and awhile, go get Happy Meals at McDonalds!**

My little sister, age 9, and my brother, 18, lived with my father in one of the nearby trailers. We saw them every single day. One day, Dad didn't come over. We didn't know where he was. The sheriff called me and left a message that he needed me to call him back. **When I called the number he left, the outgoing message stated it was the Coroner's office that I was calling.** Who could it be about?... my Dad, my sister or even my brother? The sheriff returned my call, got my address and came to our trailer. I remember when he came into our trailer he almost hit his head on our ceiling. **He showed us my Dad's driver's license and explained that a drunk driver in a head-on collision had killed him.** My sister and brother were also in the car. They had been airlifted to a trauma center with dislocations, skull fractures and broken ribs. Life changed in a split second.

What was going to happen to them? Where were they going to live? Who could care for them? The mother of my half-sister had committed suicide when she was only three. **My brother, who was born blind was also autistic.** He was also a self-biter. He was placed in a group home and is receiving wonderful care.

So began the yearlong process of adopting my sister. It was an adjustment for her and my family. We also had to go through the grieving process together. **The main goal was to keep the family together.**
The resources from the Family Resource Center of Salinas City Elementary School District made a huge difference in this journey. The Housing Resource Center and the Food Bank helped tremendously. Hospice provided counseling as well**. But if it weren't for our faith in God, we wouldn't have overcome this tragedy. Our prayers were answered.**