

MARISA GALARZA

How would you describe your educational experiences?

I had the good fortune to attend secondary school in Mexico. I had family members who worked at the school and people who knew my family so it was not that difficult to navigate myself in the school setting. The next institution I went to was the preparatory. It took me a little more time to get used to the setting because my uncle was the principal and in the beginning it was hard to make friends because classmates might think that I was going to run and tell the principal everything that happens with the students inside and outside the classroom. My classmates used to play really hard jokes on me just because I was the principal's niece, but after a time I was able to demonstrate to them that it did not mean anything and I was just like any other student. Since my mom passed away a little after I started the preparatory academy (I was 15 years old at the time) I had a difficult time in school. I remember running out of the classroom, going to the bathroom, and sitting down on the floor crying for my mom. My uncle was a huge influence in my life. He encouraged me to graduate.

What are a few examples of how you have persevered throughout your life?

I have persevered ever since I arrived at this country. I came to the United States of America when I was 16 years old. At the time my goal was to learn English despite being so young and having no friends my age. I remember in the beginning when I first started attending school for English as a Second Language (ESL) I found myself sleeping in my classes. I would not understand a word of what the teacher was saying and I would become overwhelmed and fall asleep. Still I continued and persevered in hopes that one day I would speak fluent English and be able to have friends my age and have fun just like a regular young person. I worked really hard and there were nights I would stay up doing homework, listening to everything in English, determined to achieve my goal by

being strict with myself. I wanted to fit in the world where I was living in the United States of America.

While studying English I also took courses for my General Education Degree (GED) at another school, which I completed in eight months. By the age of 19 years old I had my GED and was speaking fluent English. This experience taught me to maintain hope by aspiring to become better and helping others to become happy as well always looking ahead. One thing that keeps me on track is my faith. I believe I have the potential to achieve all my goals and dreams. Each day I want to always exert effort and excel in all aspects of my life. I believe hope plays an important role because it is the engine that ignites all the possibilities of our own inner potential in order to accomplish all we want to achieve in life.

What types of support have helped you pursue your dream of becoming a teacher?

My family is very strict in all aspects of living whether dealing with education, work, or social life. They always expect excellence, which can be stressful, but I know all they want is the best for me. They want me to be successful and become someone who can accomplish goals. I am very thankful to have my brothers and sisters to support me because even though I did not have my mom and dad during my teenage years my brothers and sisters were my moms and fathers who were always looking after me and being protective.

My brothers and sisters have been such a great influence in pursuing my education by looking at how much they strive to become better no matter how old they are. My sister is a perfect example. She has a family, four children, works two jobs, and attends the university to become a teacher. I remember there were nights that I would see her stay up late in order to finish her homework. She worked hard to accomplish her

dreams and never gave up even though there were times that she felt like that was it. But she never retreated. I thought, if I am single with no major responsibilities, what is stopping me from achieving? Watching my sister graduate from GYO inspired me not to be defeated by my immediate circumstances in life. Everything is possible when we put our mind into it. It is just a matter of persevering and taking action.

How has participating in GYO teacher community helped you understand what it means to contribute to a professional family?

Participating in GYO teacher community has helped me understand how important it is to support each other and help each other as a professional family. I believe that in order to cultivate community it starts within us first then it will be reflected outside. Everything starts with being respectful to one another and having the compassion to understand each individual. We must listen to our peers and students by always being there for them no matter what happens. I have also learned the importance of how much our community is in need of people like us who understand the backgrounds and local cultures and languages spoken of students. As a Mexican immigrant who came to the United States of America with no knowledge of speaking the English language I have learned through GYO the importance of our voices being heard for social justice and equality for every single individual.

How do you keep your dream of becoming a teacher alive?

My goals and dreams are to keep living my life full of hope, energy, optimism, joy, peace, happiness, harmony and tranquility no matter what happens. I will achieve my dream of becoming a bilingual teacher by persevering with a tenacious attitude, always staying true to myself, and being grounded with deep roots in my faith. I want to help students achieve their dreams as well as show them that if I did it they can do it, too.