



Giving Up is not an Option

By Lourdes Peralta

Owner of Sarai Variety Flower Shop

My mother told me the day I was born, it was a hot day in November. I'm one of six brothers and sisters, and family is the most beautiful thing God has given me. My mother was a Saint and suffered a lot with an alcoholic husband. We had a lot of needs and my mom used to work long hours cooking for others to support the family. She was always willing to help others with a smile. Regardless of the problems and the living circumstances, she always kept giving and working hard for all of us. But that was not enough...

When I turned 11 years old, I decided to look for a job to help with the house expenses and support my family. I found a job as a secretary at a window factory. I was so short, that I needed to place pillows on my seat to be able to reach the desk. I went to school during the day and worked a few hours after, but we needed more money, so I changed my schedule to go to school at night. I learned to do EVERYTHING!!! Attend clients, manufacture the windows, run the factory. I did it all. Since money was still not enough, I asked my grandmother if she could take my older sister and a friend to take my little sister, who took her in exchange of work cleaning her house. And just like that, I was working full time at the factory. During this time my father was still drinking and nowhere to be found. He received a visa and left to the United States where he met the wrong crowd and continued drinking.

I kept working and going to school. My studies were very important. The owner grew fond of me and helped me with everything. One day he came to the house and observed the conditions we lived in. Mind you, it was a rainy day, and there was not a dry space in the house. He then decided to send someone to put a new roof. Jealousy grew with workers and his wife. By then I was 16 years old. That made my work difficult, but I was not able to leave the job, since I needed it.

One day a boy came to my hometown and visited my house. We fell in love and even got engaged. A few months later, I got pregnant and he wanted me to abort the baby. He didn't want the responsibility. I told him that if I can support my family on my own, I can take care of my baby. After he reconsidered, we decided to move in together, but that didn't last long. I decided to leave my job, even though I needed it. However, since God is great, through a friend, I was able to find another job making more money, in a block factory.

It was going great. I was even able to open a business for my mom. I looked for vegetables and other things to sell at the store. With the money we made, we started fixing the house. Everything was great, until the problems with my son's father began. He decided to ask for a visa to the US behind my back. He even wanted to take my son with him. So, I decided to ask for a visa before him. And I got it!!!

My arrival to the US was not easy, since I had to leave my one-year old son, my mother and my sister behind. Found a job as a babysitter, but I felt bad because I was not able to help my father to get out of his alcoholism. I spent the next 14 years working to obtain my residency.

While I worked and tried to help my father, I met a man who earned my love. He was good with my parents and he even took my dad to live with him. That was a relief. To see him happy, made me happy. But that moment didn't last long. My dad died shortly after. Again, I was alone with many financial responsibilities to keep supporting my family here and in the Dominican Republic.

My boss at the time bought a flower shop and asked me to help her take care of her children and work at the flower shop. There I learned a lot about flowers and how much I loved working with them. Was there for 8 years. One day the boss woke up in a bad mood and decided to fire me. Remember, everything happens for a reason, and I was able to find another job through a friend.

I continued to work on getting my residency. You can't believe the emotions the moment I received it the mail. I cried of joy. I was now able to go home and visit my family and see my son. After getting my residency, I traveled to Dominican Republic twice before I received the worst call in my life. They found my mother unconscious in the new apartment I found for her. My mom had passed away. The pain I felt was indescribable. I was relieved I was able to see her and say my goodbyes.

The business I had bought from my last boss was going great. Then... not so great. The neighbors saw how well I was doing and decided to start selling flowers in their bodegas. That hurt my business. I was not able to compete with them since they were able to sell the flowers at a cheaper price. This set back did not allow me cover for my own expenses, in my apartment or the business. I spent a lot of time in court explaining the situation. One day, my account overdraft for \$30 and I had a stroke that kept me in ICU for 2 weeks. And because everything happens for a reason, after 20 years I got pregnant, but I had a miscarriage for all the stress I was in. I was devastated. Once again tragedy was in me.

Despite the tragedy, we decided to go away for a vacation and since God is always in control, I become pregnant again. The pregnancy was not easy since I was in my mid 40's. The doctors told me the baby was going to be born with Down Syndrome. With my faith, I decided to keep the pregnancy and have my baby.

On April 12, 2011 my Sarai was born. With her the energy and strength to continue my fight and work hard to have my own flower shop, pay my debts and increase my credit score. After working 2 ½ hours away from home always taking the train commute with Sarai, I decided to make the leap and move to Reading. But with conditions, to get married and open my own flower shop and he agreed!

I move to Reading ready to work and make my dreams come true, but still found people who are negative and set you back. They did everything, so I wouldn't open my flower shop. That did not stop me. After many attempts and six months paying rent without being able to open my store, I finally open for business at my flower and decorative shop. I worked from two places, until I was able to buy my own building.

Today I'm the proud Hispanic small business owner of Sarai Variety Flower Shop with my family and being part of the community of Reading.

Remember, everything is possible. With God's strength and guidance, we can accomplish everything we set our minds to. The limitations are mind tricks. The time of God is perfect.

Thank you!