

## **Interview with Marisela, El Barranco, Guatemala**

**March 2017**

### **Can you tell me your name, where you're from, and how old you are?**

*My name is Marisela but I go by Mari. I've always been known as Mari. I'm 27 years old and this year I'll turn 28. Right now, I'm studying to be a professor of social sciences because I like to work with society, supporting education because nowadays there are teachers that have this opportunity to work but there are a lot of teachers that don't give it much importance, and so I want to be the difference. I want to be the difference in my family, in my community, to be able to help other people. There are kids who chase after their dreams, and as a teacher my wish is to work with those children. To help, to encourage, to give much information - everything I've acquired throughout my own education. I am from the community of El Barranco. I was born here and I still live here.*

### **Where do you work?**

*Right now I'm working at an Internet center and at the same time I'm help with some accounting, as well. I process requests for investment plans, proofs of income, recommendations. When people need help who don't know how to write and it's difficult for them to fill out a request for a foundation or an institution, then I fix everything up for them and help people that way.*

### **Can you tell me a bit about your family? Do you have siblings? Are they older or younger?**

#### **What do your parents do?**

*My family - I have a mom who is an excellent mother and gives us an amazing example of how to keep moving forward and fight for us. My dad is a day laborer. He does a lot of different jobs, working in the fields - a bit of everything. He works to earn our income for the family. My mom is a stay-at-home mom. But apart from that, she also sells products. Cosmetics. That has helped us with what she sells making an extra earning. Even though it earns less, it's still an income. As far as my family, I have two brothers. One brother graduated in physical education. Right now, he's working in a Mayan college. But he's only giving one course and is making a bit less. He wants to keep studying in university but right now there aren't enough resources so he hasn't been able to study up until now. I have another brother who is in high school now and he's studying in a cooperative institute. This year he'll finish the eleventh grade. And I have a little sister who is in sixth grade. So my family is made up of six people. We're a very close family, we love each other a lot, and we help each other a lot. Because being united makes you stronger. If there isn't love, if there isn't understanding, a lot of times a family will fall apart. But in our case, our family is very united, and we help each other in different ways to be able to keep going. And to be good people in our communities.*

### **What is school like for you? Have you always liked to to learn?**

*For me, school is a second learning opportunity, when you prepare yourself to be a person of profession, of knowledge, and of training more than anything. Through this, they teach us things that we never knew. School helps us to know how the world is structured, how our communities are structured, our municipalities, what problems they have. School teaches us a lot of things like how the state functions, why there is so much unemployment, why there aren't as many opportunities for both sexes. Because nowadays if a teacher finished their education, they don't have the opportunity to leave and find a job. It's very complicated, but really education and school are very important in the life of each human being because through this, at the very least I have seen that it has strengthened me with knowledge. I've learned a lot of things that help me as well to defend myself in different areas, because we know very well that today there are a lot of things we have to face, like social problems. Or for example, the state of health. If someone can't speak with the doctors, they don't get treatment*

*like they need because when someone can speak and express themselves, others understand them and give them what they have. So education for me is the fundamental base in life. Without education, a person is no one because through this, a person can make an income. In the first place, when someone is studying they say that if you are studying, then you have opportunities. If there isn't education, there are no opportunities. There are a lot of people that don't have this opportunity. They'd like to keep going but unfortunately limited resources limits us from moving forward. But I believe, for me, it is the fundamental base and it is the best inheritance we have been given.*

### **Did your parents have the opportunity to study?**

*In my mother's case, she only finished the sixth grad. She was already married when she finished sixth grade. My father gave her that opportunity to keep studying and she graduated from sixth grade. My father only finished second grade. Right now in my family, my siblings are studying, as well. I'm the first daughter in the family. We've fought and we've come to be able to study even though we had very little, but we have excelled in this because we can see that education is very important and we realize that there are more opportunities for work. If they ask you, you don't have any experience? Then this omits the opportunity that you have. I am very thankful for my parents, as well, who are giving me this opportunity to move forward, because not all parents think that way. But in the case of parents, they fight for us to be able to keep studying and to become better people than them because now we have this advancement.*

### **How did you decide what you were going to study in university?**

*Ever since I left high school, I had this longing to keep going, but with the resources I had, I couldn't do it. I've always had this mind to go back one day, of I have to go, I have to go. That is the goal I have. I decided on the career of professorship because that is what I took away from being an intercultural bilingual teacher. I graduated from a Mayan college and I wanted to give that, to become a professor more specialized, so I had this hope to keep going and be someone great and help other people.*

*The intercultural part is about respecting all of the cultures that surround us and the coexistence with other cultures. For example, here in Sololá there are nineteen municipalities, nineteen different cultures, traditions, clothing, and we speak three languages - Kaqchikel, K'iche', and Tz'utujil in Sololá. So this career is aimed at intercultural topics, wanting everyone to be one and to respect the cultures of other people. So that was my diversificado career that I graduated with that my parents were able to give me. Now in university, I've finished three years with the profession of social sciences. To be able to talk about stories, to talk about how the productivity is within the community. Teaching children about politics and the history of our country. I love this. It is very important because talking about society and the world and to know other countries is all very interesting and for this reason it caught my attention to keep studying in this career. Also to encourage other people, and to have a connection with the people. I like to work with the people. I like, I love this most of all, helping other people. So that is why I'm interested in this career in university.*

### **Can you tell me about the community of El Barranco? What types of jobs do people have here? What are the families like? What is life like here?**

*In this community of El Barranco, it's called that because almost all of it is ravine. From here to here, all of it is ravine. The jobs most people have is working in agriculture. In this month of March is harvest time. The majority of the people work in this, harvesting and then producing in the months of December and January. The other job that many women here do is weaving. Weaving our traditional clothing. They are also stay-at-home moms and work as artisans. Women also have that link of artisan work so they are able to do a lot of things in the family. So each family has different jobs that they do. In our case, we work here doing weaving and raising animals. Others, there are people that have gone to other places to find work, like making tortillas. There are young people who have gone to Guatemala City to work in stores and need to work there to generate an income. The community*

is also formed with a town mayor who can give us information about what problems there are and what projects the community is working on. So they give information on a community level. So this community is made up of a lot of different things. In this area, there are more students and more children that are studying today, who are already beginning their careers, and some that have graduated. In years past, this wasn't the case. A girl would finish sixth grade and she didn't go on to high school. She stayed home and started doing weavings, working as an artisan, or doing other things to make a living. The decision was made for them and they also got married because there was no other way to move forward in life. Now we can see that the majority of students are going to school because they have sponsors that are helping the different families. The majority of students here have sponsorships. And this motivates them because they have this reminder to keep pushing forward because failing a class, or failing a grade when someone has confidence in you, is helping you and you fail those classes, for me I would feel like a fraud. I'm not giving 100% to keep going because it is a help very, very valuable. I've seen that one has to fight for what you want because someone is supporting you. It just depends on oneself and what you were born with inside of you that you want to achieve. So our community is structured in that way and thankfully we also have a preschool here. This is a success for us because a lot of people my age never had the chance to go to school from such a young age, to be taught things and explore their curiosities. But today kids that are three years old are different, they aren't like the ones before. So that is how our family, our community, our town is structured.

### **And the majority of families here are indigenous, right?**

Yes, they are indigenous. The majority of our towns around here are indigenous communities and we belong to an ethnic group called Kaqchikel. Our identity is our traditional clothing and that is how we are identified. We are a people that speak the language of Kaqchikel in this area. Today there are a lot of students that know how to read and write and listen because it is very different to write it than to speak it, and that is also very important. I also can speak, understand, and write in Kaqchikel. We have this language still and we hope that it doesn't disappear because today kids are learning Spanish. It is excellent, as well, but it is important to know both languages.

### **What are your most vivid memories from childhood?**

Oh, many things. What I did when I was a child was that I had the opportunity to study music. The majority of my childhood, I was there all the time. At ten years old I started singing in a choir. I decided to be a teacher, but when I was younger I liked music and playing the marimba, I loved to play the marimba. I was with that group for almost eight or ten years, playing the marimba. That was part of my childhood because every Saturday...from Monday to Friday I was in school and on Saturdays I went to learn about music, and about dance. That has helped me, as well, and about two years ago I had the opportunity to go to a class in Los Encuentros about music and dance and I loved it. Because I already knew that feeling of learning how to play the marimba, to play the flute, to sing. That was part of my childhood that I liked a lot and I still remember. I also used to love to work here at home. My parents before used to grow broccoli. So I always helped them, to cut it with my siblings, to spend time with my family. So my childhood was very nice because I always remember things from when I was small about what I did and these memories are always with me because I value them and won't forget. Another thing I miss from my childhood is doing laundry in the river. Before we didn't have running water so we carried our clothes and washed them in the river. And that is an energy that one also carries. When we got to the river we'd talk about our worldview. About how all the beings that live on earth have life. And you make this connection and when you get back home, you carry all that energy. So we went to the river with my mother to wash and to bring water a lot when we didn't have any at the house. So it was a beautiful childhood because as a child you do everything and what you learn along the way fills you up with knowledge that you keep.

### **What has been the most difficult experience you've had to overcome in your life?**

*The most difficult? The most difficult was when I started studying. That is where I saw a lot of times when we didn't eat anything because my dad worked as well, but he didn't make very much. I had to pay a quetzal to go to Sololá to study because back then, there weren't any schools in the area for high school. So I had to go down to Sololá and it was a difficult expense. A lot of times there wasn't any money, and I wondered should I keep going, should I not keep going. So for the transportation, for the cost of everything, that was the most difficult economic situation. Personally, I didn't have that happiness of having everything, but rather limited things. My father didn't have the money to buy clothing, my mom also fought for me to continue, because I was her first daughter. But even though I kept studying, my other siblings needed to, as well. So that was the most difficult thing for me, about ten years ago when I was fifteen, and I began to sell cosmetic products, creams, perfumes. From that, I was earning something for my transportation, for my supplies. So I started working as well with people, for example with food as well. When I was ten or fifteen I left home to look for another income. I was studying, but also working.*

*I said I was going to help my family and since I was young I started working. I think that it's given me a good lesson because when you don't work, you feel like you aren't doing anything. So when I started working, it inspired me that I have to work and today if I'm not working, I feel like, what do I do? These things that happened were difficult, but they were learning experiences in life, as well. My mom is a witness to the times when we couldn't make ends meet and I left to go find a job, to wash potatoes in the river to earn a bit of money. So it was a nice childhood and difficult as well, but we are still pushing forward.*

### **What do you think are the biggest obstacles for indigenous women in Guatemala?**

*The biggest obstacles in Guatemala for the indigenous communities, for the women, are rights. Because many times they don't respect our rights as women and there is a lot of discrimination for being a woman and for being indigenous. Many times they see us as Mayan women who aren't capable of doing productive things. Many times we are refused for opportunities to work in a company - not many people give this opportunity to indigenous women. Because we wear traje, so that prevents a lot of things and we would have to change. We have to change into pants, or dress how the business wants us to. So that is one obstacle we have, because they don't accept us as we are. Also many times in education, women are discriminated against. For example in a private college, many times they'll say, "But she is indigenous, or she is an indigenous woman." And many times they discriminate because of this. We have few opportunities and we hope that in the coming years this changes, that the opportunities change for us as women. Because the government has practically rejected us as poor indigenous people. Nowadays we are concentrated, though, in Los Encuentros because of the indigenous mayor in Sololá. We have an indigenous mayor that was in favor of passing the 203 law in favor of the towns, and the rights of indigenous communities. So this is very successful for the indigenous communities because they can make decisions, too, and be involved in politics, socially, because there are a lot of rights in the peace accords that haven't been fulfilled. In the peace accords, every woman has rights. Thankfully, the peace accords were signed, and for that reason we indigenous women are able to study. Because before it was signed, only men had access to study, and to contribute, as well. But the peace accords were signed and this opened up the territory. But we are hit once again with this situation of a lack of opportunities. Discrimination against indigenous women still exists.*

### **What do you hope will change in Guatemala with your generation?**

*Oh, many things. We have to have the opportunity to work for everyone. That we all have the same right. To have this opportunity and to have good schools, because there are schools but we don't have computer centers. We don't have laboratories, so the government here in Guatemala needs to give this light of hope that they see the value of education, of health, of work, because they are things, for example, in health, today in hospitals, there are no medications. Speaking of reality, there isn't any. There they give you a list of medications and you've got to go buy them at the pharmacy. In the constitution we've got the right to health, but we don't have the right to medication, if we analyze it that way. So that is what the hospitals lack, and there aren't any scientific devices.*

*There is no coverage in this situation. So that is the situation that we want in Guatemala, in the case of Sololá, is that we find a light of hope that there will be technology and equipment that can greatly help for example, vision, common illnesses, for pediatrics. There are many things that we would like to change in our generation. For example, right now the children who are four years old, what future will they have? We don't know. What future will I have in ten years? So we should see that the government has to look forward to the future of indigenous communities and that we have the same rights, just as much for the Garifunas, Xinca, ladinas, and mestizos. That we all have the same right without discrimination against anyone. So that we have access to what we want. We lack the support of the government to boost us or to offer more support for education centers, for hospitals, for community hospitals. Here we have a convergence center, but there is no progress. So we want to make better developments in our country.*

### **How do you think people in your generation can achieve those dreams?**

*We have to make the changes. We have to think of what we can do. In my case, I was thinking that if I have an education, I can look to the future to see how I can encourage and help other people. To have a different vision so that those who come after me have that access. These changes that I mentioned, we can make them through education and forming ourselves more and having the capacity to make the changes in our communities, beginning with our own communities and later, socially. That is what my vision is, to help other people.*

### **What does this scholarship mean to you?**

*This scholarship for me is a great fortune. Because I am fulfilling my dreams. In December, I will leave a person with another title and with more knowledge. All of the months that they are paying for my school is a very big help. For me it is something very important and I value it so much because without them, I don't know where I would be right now. Thanks to them, I'm now in my last year studying to be a Social Sciences professor. I'm going to give my very best to be a great student and to have this capacity to help. I feel like these are the fundamental pillars in life. Because they have helped me the last three years and right now they are helping so much. Without their help, I think I wouldn't have reached this last year where I am right now.*

### **How do you imagine your future in ten years?**

*My future is to have a nice house, to have a good job, to have a family and children. That is my vision, to help other people. To collaborate in my community. To help in whatever area. In whichever moment I can help with my knowledge, in whichever job I have, I am here for anything that is needed. That is what I want in my future.*