



UFM

UNIVERSIDAD FRANCISCO MARROQUÍN

ita

Impulso al Talento Académico

P R O F I L E

# Elizángela's Story

## *How Do You Face Personal and Natural Disasters?*



Elizángela was born in a small town in the eastern reaches of Guatemala, where the economy revolves around large companies that produce and export fruit from Guatemala and nearby Honduras. Elizángela's parents met while working for the United Fruit Company; her father was a quality control supervisor and her mother taught at the school for employee children.

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*"When I turned twelve, I had a very difficult year. My grandfather died and a few months later, my parents divorced. The next year, Hurricane Mitch hit and my mother lost her job."*

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The hurricane destroyed 90 percent of the region's banana crop and the United Fruit Company downsized a number of departments in an effort to recover from this financial blow. Elizángela, her mother, and her adopted brother pulled up stakes and relocated to a nearby port city, where her mother looked for work. Following several months of unemployment and a year of sporadic freelance jobs, her mother found a full-time position as a teacher. Elizángela attended a public school for a year and then transferred to a private school that was partially subsidized by the government; this lowered the cost enough for her mother to afford the tuition.

In Guatemala City, children from middle and upper-middle class families study in expensive institutions with a curriculum similar to private schools in the United States. Elsewhere in Guatemala, both private and public schools are designed to provide a technical, skill-based education; students choose from such areas as secretarial skills, hairdressing, and accounting. Elizángela elected to concentrate on management, which she felt would bring her closer to her goal of studying business and economics at a university.

### **Applying for the ITA Scholarship**

Elizángela graduated high school at the top of her class; along with her academic awards, she also received information on scholarships and universities. She applied for the ITA scholarship as well as another national scholarship offered by the Juan Bautista Gutiérrez Foundation. After making it to the final round for the other scholarship, Elizángela was rejected; the selection committee explained that they had decided to provide support for students pursuing careers in science and engineering.

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*“For students who are passionate about business and economics, the ITA scholarship is unique in Guatemala.”*

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After three bus trips into the capital city for exams and long days of interviews, Elizángela was one of nine students who were awarded the ITA scholarship that year.

### **Studying at UFM**

Upon arriving at UFM, Elizángela discovered a wide gulf between the education of her wealthy classmates from Guatemala City and the one she had received. Most UFM students spoke two or more languages and had no trouble reading the many textbooks printed English. Elizángela had only the most basic grasp of the language and it took her much longer to make her way through the course material. She also noticed a difference in her level of math.

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*“I had always been a top student until I arrived at UFM. Here, for the first time I found myself struggling and behind the other students in some classes.”*

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She took advantage of the tutorials UFM offers all students and before long she found her footing and made her way back to the top of her class. In 2007, she was one of only two Guatemalan students selected by the US Embassy to attend a summer leadership conference in the United States. Like many other ITAs, Elizángela would ultimately graduate cum laude.

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*“ITA students are driven by an intellectual curiosity, by a desire to do more. Once you see that the faculty of UFM will reciprocate this drive, there is no limit to what ITAs can do.”*

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Elizángela also participated in Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), an organization that brings together top CEOs with university students to implement sustainable business projects in local communities. She cites a microcredit project for indigenous women in Guatemala as an example of a successful enterprise that she worked on.

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*“In many indigenous communities, men don’t let women handle money. Through our SIFE endeavor, these women were able to get access to funds to start a business.”*

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### **Postgraduation Career**

After working for a number of Guatemalan firms as a financial analyst, Elizángela accepted a position as the corporate product manager for one of the largest telecommunications companies in Central America. She is proud that her role in this powerful company allowed her to facilitate a pilot project spearheaded by another ITA alumna, who works for Grameen Bank.



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*“We shared telecommunications information and strategies with Grameen Bank that would serve as a platform for them to begin their development initiative in Guatemala.”*

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Recently, Elizángela teamed up with a group of former ITA students to provide merit-based scholarships at the high school level. She has seen firsthand how children are inspired just by knowing that there are opportunities out there. Since she graduated, a number of students from Elizángela’s community have asked her for help with their university applications. One of her former neighbors even went on to study at UFM with an ITA scholarship.

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*“For children from my neighborhood, just knowing someone who studied at a university with a scholarship has made them say, ‘Why not me?’”*

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